

From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayera 5780

We tell our children many things over the course of their childhood. Most of us share interesting, humorous and scary anecdotes from our lives, particularly our childhood. It is a major part of what creates that special parent-child bond that cannot be found in any other relationship. It is also the way in which we create, wittingly or not, our child's worldview, values and attitudes.

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Our unfathomably great ancestor, *Avraham Avinu*, taught and modeled many outstanding *midos* in the area of caring for others, which he demonstrated to an unimaginable degree. We analyze and try to emulate those attributes and behaviors that the Torah spells out in great detail. It is important to keep in mind there are other facets of *Avraham's* greatness as well. One of these is highlighted in this week's *Parasha*.

When *Hashem* is about to destroy *Sodom* for its wickedness, He `decides,' so to speak, to share that information with *Avraham*. One original insight explaining *Hashem's* reasoning is presented by *Rav Zalman Sorotzkin zt'l* in his commentary on *Chumash – Ozneim LaTorah*.

The *Pasuk (Bereishis 18:19)* says "For I have loved him (*Avraham*), because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of *Hashem*, doing charity and justice..." *Rav Sorotzkin* explains: It's not that *Hashem* informed *Avraham* about *Sodom* because he commands his children to follow in the ways of *Hashem*, but rather *Hashem* is informing *Avraham* about *Sodom* in order that his children follow in His ways. The purpose of *Hashem's* telling *Avraham*, *Rav Sorotzkin* explains, is so that *Avraham* will tell the children along with all his other teachings and guidance, the story of *Sodom* which will enable them to gain an even better understanding of how *Hashem* runs the world in accordance with charity and justice.

Hashem needed *Avraham* to know and understand the circumstances surrounding *Sodom's* destruction – so that his telling of the story to his descendants will impress upon them how *Hashem* runs the world - with charity and justice. Does *Hashem* really care about what stories we tell our children? Isn't our job to teach them right from wrong through *Halacha* and *Torah*?

It seems clear from the words of *Rav Sorotzkin* that *Hashem* cares deeply about what messages we give over to our children, and stories are an extremely important form of conveying these messages. The stories we tell our children may strike emotional and sentimental chords. They may be funny, endearing or even scary. They are never meaningless. They all convey a message and present a narrative that our children consciously or subconsciously take to heart. They may remain hidden deep inside their hearts and be all but forgotten. We need to realize they are never completely forgotten.

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A striking example from the world of *kiruv* is the story of R' Yossi Wallis, the subject of the books *Incredible & Incredible 2*. He was the child of Holocaust survivors, not observant and highly successful. He was once on a line waiting to purchase pork for his family's supper. As he stood impatiently on the line, a story from his childhood came into his consciousness. His mother's father had survived in concentration camps without ever eating non-kosher food. The day before the war ended, his Nazi tormentors decided to

torture him by threatening him with death if he did not eat some pork. He refused and was shot on the spot.

As R' Wallis recalled this family narrative, it suddenly dawned on him that his own grandfather sacrificed his life to avoid the same pork that he was waiting to feed his family with. Here was a family `story' that heretofore had no impact on him, until an unexpected trigger awakened that deep hidden memory within him. He stepped out of the line and from there he totally turned around his life and the lives of the tens of thousands who his organization *Arachim* influenced to become *Baalei Teshuva*.

We need to consciously share our stories, our narrative with our children. We go through great effort and make untold sacrifices to raise our children properly. We can connect deeply with our children and turn their hearts to their Creator through sharing what is in our hearts - the events, personalities and experiences that had a profound effect on our lives and helped mold us into who we are today. We must give thought to these tidbits and realize the power they contain. They may just be the most precious gifts we ever give our children.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Avraham Baumann

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