



OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE HANGS IN THE "BALANCE"

Erev Shabbos Parashas Haazinu 5781

Dear Parents,

Striking the right balance in parenting is perhaps one of the greatest challenges in raising children successfully. Granting independence as a child grows requires a comparable measure of charging with responsibility. Protecting children when they are young, needs to be countered by letting them fall and even fail.

A fascinating lesson in achieving this balance is presented in this week's *Parasha* by *HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch* *zt'l* in his Commentary on *Chumash*. The *Pasuk* reads: (*Devarim 32:11*) *As an eagle wakes up his nest, hovering over its young, spreading out its wings (and) takes them, carrying them upwards on its wings*. Paraphrasing *Rav Hirsch's* description of what the *Pasuk* is referring to: The eagle does not pick up its sleeping babies and carry them asleep or in a passive condition. When the eagle wants to transport its young it first stirs up the nest to wake them, then rather than picking them up, it spreads its wings above them, so that the young eagles need to courageously fly on their own to the top side of the mother's wings. Then, they freely, consciously and bravely soar into the heights on the mother's wings, without her holding on to them – bearing them aloft, raising them, but not tying them down.

Rav Hirsch continues the metaphor that the young eagle has left the warm, secure confines of the nest, and ventured far from home. And where has he gone? To the unique place occupied by its parent – isolated from the comfortable, materially secure nest. The child follows in the path of its parent, even when it is a path separate and unique from much of the rest of the world.

A quick analysis of *Rav Hirsch's* words finds him referring to the spiritual journey of a growing, seeking Jewish person. On a more basic level – he gleans from this *Pasuk* basic ideas in effective parenting. The eagle does not carry the burden of transporting its young by himself. He wakes his young and holds out his wings as a challenge that is just at the level of difficulty that the baby eagle can reach, but only with effort and bravery. He then places the responsibility for hanging on to his wings on the youngster. He does the heavy lifting – but the child is made into a competent assistant.

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This balance is a primary goal in parenting. At the appropriate age and stage, a child needs to be given responsibility – not random independence, but a well thought through task. A four year old can't be expected to wash the laundry – but he can be trained to put his dirty clothes in a hamper. Perhaps a kindergartener is too young to make her bed, but placing the pillow in the right location and straightening a blanket is a reasonable and worthwhile expectation.

As children get older, parents need to balance privileges and responsibilities. Find areas where the child can be expected to help out. Don't do things for the children that they can do for themselves. Many of us rush in to solve the children's problems – we run the risk of creating people who not only don't know how to solve problems for themselves – they may believe that they are incapable of helping themselves – why else did mommy always swoop in and take care of things.

On the other hand, just as the eagle didn't force its young to fly to great heights on their own without helping them along, children need step-by-step guidance in learning how to do things. With patience and clarity, parents can greatly assist their child's development by breaking tasks and responsibilities and privileges into smaller parts, so the child can progress. Toddlers first stand, then toddle, then walk. They are successful because each stage is identified, clearly valued, encouraged and celebrated. The same holds true throughout the child's growth to adulthood.

Then, as *Rav Hirsch* points out, the child will find his place in the atmosphere and environment in which the parents themselves reside. In our case – it is a place that is far removed from the materialistic non-spiritual life that abounds in society around us. Our children will follow us, if we can nurture them with balance – inspiring self-confidence and true competence.

Finding and maintaining the balance, the golden middle road, is not always easy, but it is the true path to raising a successful, mature adult, faithfully following in the footsteps of his forebears.

Best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos. *Gmar Chasima Tova*

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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