



BALANCED DISCIPLINE

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Ki Sisa Parashas Parah 5781

All parents spend great amounts of time and effort disciplining their children. Some discipline on instinct, some only when they're annoyed, some base it on what they experienced growing up, some ask their whatsapp friends for advice and some read and listen to the words of the experts. What truly is the key to effective discipline? How do we get our children to correct their mistakes and act properly? How do we get them to follow instructions?

While the answer to these questions is as vast as the sea, we can gain a vitally important insight from our greatest teacher of all time, *Moshe Rabbeinu*. In studying the tragic and devastating incident of the *Eigel HaZahav*, the *Golden Calf*, described in great detail in this week's *Parsha*, we can benefit greatly by analyzing *Moshe's* actions and reactions in response to *Klal Yisrael's* wrongdoing.

The Torah describes an interchange between *Moshe* and his chief disciple, *Yehoshua*. As *Moshe* descended from *Har Sinai* after 40 days and nights, *Yehoshua* was the first to greet him. *Yehoshua* described to *Moshe* (*Shemos 17-18*) that there were sounds of war emanating from the camp of *Bnei Yisrael*. *Moshe* corrected him and said the sounds were different sounds, but not those of war. The *Ramban* explains that; *Moshe* knew exactly what the sounds were, but due to his deep humility, he didn't tell *Yehoshua* precisely what sounds he was hearing, because he did not want to be disparaging of the *Bnei Yisrael*. Therefore, *Moshe* said the sounds were those of frivolity and laughter.

This is very hard to understand. At the same time that he didn't speak poorly of the Jews, *Moshe* was exacting a strong punishment on the perpetrators and all of *Klal Yisrael*. He smashed the *Luchos* (Tablets). He burned the *Eigel*. He had the 3,000 guilty ones executed. His strong leadership restored sanity to *Klal Yisrael* and rescued them from *Hashem's* wrath. All those dramatic and harsh actions were justified, but to let *Yehoshua* know about it was not justified?

We see the incredible exactitude and balance in *Moshe's* actions. The Jews needed to be disciplined. They needed to be punished severely. They needed to be rebuked and strongly redirected. However, even in such a moment of distress, drama and emotion, *Moshe* did not feel he had license to lash out at the Jews with no limit. He was upset, *Klal Yisrael* had put themselves in great danger through their wrongdoing, but there are still limits on what *Moshe* can say or do. Speaking disparagingly of *Klal Yisrael* at that moment was beyond what was called for. Therefore, *Moshe* did all of what he needed to do to discipline the Jews, however there was no justification to speak ill of them.

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What inner characteristic did *Moshe* possess that enabled him to be so balanced, so precise, so in control of himself at this moment of anger, turmoil and disappointment? The *Ramban* tells us - it was *Moshe Rabbeinu's* humility. A humble person doesn't focus on his own needs or feelings, he focuses on the needs and feelings of others. This wasn't about *Moshe's* frustration that the *Luchos* needed to be destroyed, that his leadership was tarnished, that he spent 40 days in Heaven for naught. *Moshe* was fully focused outwardly – what does *Klal Yisrael* need to clean up the mess they created, how can we chart a path forward and put this incident behind us. When one is truly focused on

the needs of others, he can maintain the objectivity and balance to do exactly what is needed.


The application to the parent's role as disciplinarian should be obvious. When our child messes up, hurts a sibling, breaks something of value through carelessness, ignores our instructions, breaks safety rules and endangers himself and others, how should we react? Lash out in anger? Think about how our child is embarrassing us and get really mad at him? Do nothing and sweetly say 'that wasn't so nice'? Run to a parenting book for a quick-fix?

The answer is that the question is missing the point. How we react in such a situation is rarely if ever a conscious decision. Rather, our reaction is an outgrowth of our inner core. If we can internalize the value of focusing on our children's needs and diverting our attention away from our personal needs and emotions at those crucial moments, we are most of the way there in becoming effective parents and disciplinarians. As *Rabbi Noach Orlowek Shlita*, puts it: "I can think about how you feel, or I can think about how I feel, but I can't do both at the same time."

Once we are able to develop some humility, and focus on the children's needs, we will find the techniques and methods to best guide and discipline our children. When we think about them and not about ourselves we will be able to stay calm and think clearly; "what does my child need at this moment that will best ensure he learns the right way to behave in the future."

Raising children brings with it a fair share of disappointment and frustration. Those feelings need to find expression. That's what a spouse and friends are for. Children need your humble, loving and firm guiding hand. It's not as hard as you think.

Have a wonderful *Shabbos*,


Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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