



HOW TO STOP A FIGHT

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Mikeitz 5781

Resolving conflicts between siblings, classmates and playmates seems to occupy a significant portion of adults' and children's day. Powerful emotional forces are frequently at play and parents and educators are constantly looking for ways to defuse strong feelings and de-escalate points of contention that seem to overwhelm the children and make finding a solution a near impossible task for them. If there was one approach that held the key to lowering temperatures and enabling the combatants to reframe their view of the situation, it would be a very sought after one.

In one of the interchanges between *Yosef* and his brothers in this week's *Parsha*, (*Bereishis 42:19-24*) we can gain an insight into such a powerful conflict-defusing tool. The viceroy *Yosef* speaks roughly to the brothers and informs them that he will take one of them as a hostage, while the others should go to *Canaan* and then return to *Mitzrayim* with the younger brother, *Binyamin*. If they fail to do so, they can expect to die.

This obviously caused the brothers great pain. Their whole world was being thrown into turmoil and they were now in great danger. They spoke among themselves and reflected upon what was happening to them, assuming *Yosef* could not understand what they were saying. They spoke of feelings of regret for at least some of what they had done to their brother *Yosef*. Then the Torah tells us (*pasuk 24*) that *Yosef* was moved to tears.

Rashi on the *pasuk* explains the reason for *Yosef's* tears: "Because he heard them expressing regret for their actions." The *Sifsei Chachomim* explains *Rashi* as follows - *Rashi* finds it difficult to understand *Yosef's* tears, because one would have thought that *Yosef* would become even angrier, not compassionate, upon hearing the brothers themselves admitting how they hurt *Yosef* many years earlier. Therefore, *Rashi* finds it necessary to explain that it was upon hearing the brothers' remorse and regret over their actions against him, that his emotions changed completely. He was cruel and harsh one minute, seemingly calm and composed despite the anguish and suffering that would now ensue for the brothers and their families, and then he was overcome with emotion and moved to tears the next moment (*Gur Aryeh*).

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A sincerely expressed feeling of remorse for one's actions has this incredible impact. A person cannot maintain his anger, hurt and rage at another, when he is the recipient of a sincere, heartfelt apology. When he perceives that the perpetrator truly feels bad for what he did to him, the victim's attitude of resentment cannot stand. The greatest force that can end conflict, is an apology.

When trying to analyze what about an apology is so powerful, it should be clear that its power derives solely from the sincerity with which it is given. It is not an incantation or magic formula. There is no value in forcing a child to mumble some words that an adult insists upon. A sincere apology consists of five parts:

- 1) An expressed awareness of what you said or did to hurt the other person
- 2) Expressing an awareness of what emotion your words or actions caused in the other person (e.g. anger, hurt, embarrassment, sadness etc.)
- 3) Truly feeling bad that you did or said such a hurtful thing.
- 4) At this point, a verbal expression of being sorry for that word or action is meaningful
- 5) A promise to try with all sincerity, to never repeat the action or those words in the future.

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When dealing with children in conflict, it is most worthwhile to engage in helping children gain proficiency in the art of a true apology. It is a process that will take time. What should motivate us, beyond salvaging our own sanity, whether at home or in the classroom, is the awareness that this ability to admit mistakes and correct any damage caused by it, is a formula for success and happiness in life. True winners have the self-confidence to admit mistakes, and the strong inner core to make amends when they cause pain to others. Understanding how powerful a force it is, should help us to help our children achieve this great *Middah* and set them on a path of peace, tranquility and satisfaction in life.

Best wishes for a peaceful *Shabbos*,

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