



## FAMILY IS NUMBER ONE!

Dear Parents,

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayishlach 5781*

People are frequently asking what characteristic can make the difference between functional, successful, happy families and those that fall short in one or more of those areas. Some point to large families as a source of dysfunction and unhappiness – we all know numerous examples where that is not the reality. Others will lay blame for failed families on both parents working full-time out of the house. That may explain some cases, but it is simply not true in others. Single-parent homes get more than their share of blame – but again, many healthy, happy children have emerged from that challenging circumstance. Is there, then something we can point to that will be a reliable predictor of success or failure?

I believe the answer lies in an insight of *Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch* (32:8) on this week's *Parsha*. In connection with the impending encounter between *Yaakov* and *Esav*, *Rav Hirsch* points out that one of the numerous differences in world view between *Yaakov* and *Esav* concerns what is the core role that a person is to play in his lifetime - is it his or her family role or his or her public role. *Esav*, who approached surrounded by his legions of soldiers, represents the glitter and greatness of political power. His life, ambitions and focus are in the public realm. Family, if any, is a means and a platform upon which to build the public persona. *Yaakov* on the other hand, approaching with his loving family surrounding him, represents the happiness and fulfillment of family life. Social, political power and organization have importance only as a means to ensuring the fulfillment of life as a human, which is lived primarily within the family unit.

We have found our predictor in a straightforward, direct and simple fashion. What differentiates between families has almost nothing to do with the various external trappings. Money, family size, available time and intelligence are all either assets or liabilities, but they are one of many means to an end. What matters most is whether the family follows an *Esav* or *Yaakov* approach. Is family merely a means to an end, and does it receive little focus because it's not part of a person's core existence? If focus is lacking, every member of the family will come to realize there's something missing in this family; the family and its values can't be that important. The road to dysfunction and failure is short and almost inevitable. This *Esav*-type approach may produce people who appear to be successful in the public realm, but family life will be disastrous.

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On the other hand, if everything revolves around the family, and job and public persona are a means to providing a healthy, wholesome and sustainable environment for family, then children become the focus and their needs and their issues form the central agenda for the parents. Challenges that may come from a depressed economic situation, limitations of space or time are hurdles to be overcome, not obstacles to success. By focusing on the children and each other, parents notice problems before they become unmanageable, know just how to bring a smile to each little one's lips, look for and find little things to bring joy to their children and spend time and effort thinking about, analyzing and seeking advice as to how best help their children. They sit at their *Shabbos* table engaging and enjoying their children, so it becomes the high point of their week.

**“Be a focused parent, and your children will thrive...”**

This is the way of *Yaakov*, this is the heritage of the Jewish People, and this is our key to a wholesome, happy family. Be a focused parent, and your children will thrive on the attention, care, insight and love that will constantly come their way. This is not only to bring you *Nachas* – this is the ultimate fulfillment of your existence on this earth. And as in all areas of life, pray for help and guidance from the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, our Father in Heaven who attends to our needs and showers us with love.

Best wishes for a family-focused *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann