



HOW TO GIFT A CHILD

Erev Shabbos Parashas Bo 5781

Dear Parents,

As *Bnei Yisroel* were poised to leave *Mitzrayim*, *Hashem* gave *Moshe Rabbeinu* an unusual instruction. He told him to please speak to the people and tell them to approach their Egyptian neighbors and request their gold and silver vessels (*Shemos 11:2*). The *Gemora* in *Brochos 9a*, which is also quoted by *Rashi*, explains that the reason why *Hashem* took pains to ensure *Klal Yisroel* took the riches of *Mitzrayim*, was so that the *Tzadik Avraham* would not have a complaint; that *Hashem* fulfilled His promise that the Jews would be enslaved for 400 years, but He did not fulfill His promise that they would emerge with great riches.

The *Kli Yakar* has a difficulty with this explanation. If *Hashem* made a promise, He would of course fulfill it. Why does the fact that *Avraham* would have a complaint make a difference? *Hashem* should be true to His word because everything He does is truthful. Based on a statement later in the above quoted *Gemora* in *Berachos*, it appears that the *Bnei Yisrael* were not even interested in the Egyptians' possessions, because they did not want to be burdened with the excess baggage on their travels to *Eretz Yisrael*.

By offering the opportunity to the *Bnei Yisrael* to help themselves to the Egyptians' riches *Hashem* was fulfilling His promise – He made the gold and silver available and then it was up to the Jews to take advantage of the situation, if they so choose. It would not be a breach of the promise if they chose not to take the gold. In terms of *Avraham Avinu*, however, the situation was very different, says the *Kli Yakar*. *Avraham* would not be aware that the *Bnei Yisroel* themselves were not interested. He only knew that the Jews were to be enslaved for hundreds of years, and justice demands that they be compensated. It is not fathomable to an *Avraham Avinu* that such a miscarriage of justice could occur. It was therefore specifically because of *Avraham*, that *Hashem* had to beg *Moshe* to get *Klal Yisrael* to agree to take the wealth of *Mitzrayim* with them.

The *Kli Yakar* then proceeds to ask the obvious question. *Hashem* has a myriad of ways to bestow riches upon *Klal Yisrael*. Why did it have to come specifically from the Egyptians? The answer is that *Hashem* needed to assuage that "Tzaddik" (*Avraham*). *Avraham* was a man of impeccable truth. It was unconscionable that his descendants would be forced into servitude and after it was all over, they would not receive compensation from those who enslaved them for all that work. That's lacking justice. The "great wealth" had to come about in a way that served justice.

This idea of receiving just compensation for work done, helps shed light on the opposite side of the coin – receiving compensation for no work done. That also is a lack of justice, and it also is not how the world works. People don't just have things coming to them without doing something to earn them. This fundamental reality of life should be among the important lessons we teach our children. Unfortunately, too often we do just the opposite.

With the best of intentions, parents give their children many things, usually because they feel gifts and things will make children happy. How the parents actually go about it, makes all the difference. Let's consider the following anecdote, as related by *Rav Yisrael Yaakovson*, the great Israeli *Mechanech*.

...the children feel like they are collecting a debt owed to them, rather than being recipients of a gift."

There was a certain father we shall call Reuven, who reveals that his brother, Shimon, an otherwise good and kind person, does not seem to relate appropriately to his children's requests. He stops and thinks about whether to accede to their requests, and even when he knows he will eventually say yes, he takes a very long time to respond affirmatively. He helps so many people, but when it comes to his own children, he seems to come up short. He should show the children his joy at being able to give them what they want. So says Reuven.

For example - Reuven relates that he and his brother once went on a trip with the children. The difference between them was obvious. He looked for ways to give his children things and expressed great *Simcha* at their enjoyment. His brother, Shimon, as usual, responded deliberately to requests and sometimes made the children wait, when they could have been enjoying themselves. At the end of the trip, Reuven decided he was going to enlighten his brother as to the error of his parenting ways. He turned to his own children and asked: "Did you enjoy? Was it fun?" In place of the enthusiastic response and big smiles he expected, his children unenthusiastically responded – "OK. Not bad."

He then turned to his nephews and nieces to get their feedback. They enthusiastically and smilingly said it was fantastic. Reuven was totally confused and bewildered. His brother Shimon then surprised them and said out loud: "Your children are right. This trip was pretty dull and meaningless. Why bother with all the effort? We should just stay home." What happened next was a shock. In a total reversal, Reuven's children now said emphatically that it really was a great trip, and they quickly enumerated all the details that were so exciting and enjoyable.

How do we understand this? *Rav Yaakovson* suggests that when a parent makes it clear to his children through his words, actions and feelings that it is the parents' obligation to make the child happy, this perception of the situation encourages the child to try to take maximum advantage. He might not show much appreciation, possibly not even acknowledge his enjoyment, because he (consciously or subconsciously) wants more or is pressuring the parent to provide more. Since it's the parent's 'obligation' to bring pleasure and enjoyment to the child, rather than focusing on what he has received, the child will focus on what he doesn't have yet, in order to get more and more.

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Quickly and automatically fulfilling children's wishes makes the children feel like they are collecting a debt owed to them, rather than being recipients of a gift. This gives rise to the "*Es Kummt Mir*" syndrome that says everything is coming to me. We need to understand this dynamic and work to align our responses to the children's wishes in accordance with the justice that *Avraham Avinu* taught us.

We give the children what they need and more, because we love them. We can fulfill their wishes, if we feel it is best for them. However, we need to remain the masters of the 'transaction'. Let's focus on our goal of raising happy, self-assured people, and avoid the lure of the quick fix of being a toy and goody dispenser to our children.

Best wishes for a happy and satisfying Shabbos. Enjoy your break!

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