



IT'S NOT FAIR!

Dear Parents,

Contemporary perspectives and attitudes of the outside society have a way of infiltrating into our own value system in subtle and unnoticed ways. Unwittingly, we may actually evaluate and judge circumstances and situations based upon secular values, even giving rise to questions in *Emunah*, belief in *Hashem*, and the values and ethics that are presented in the Torah. When Commandments and Torah outlooks come into question, all aspects of our being, including guidelines in child-rearing are impacted.

One example is the notion of equality. This seemingly elevated, morally correct and healthy principle has been drilled into us from an early age. Discrimination based upon race, religion, creed, national or ethnic origin disqualifies a person or institution from many programs and support of the American government. More recently, the secular notion of equality has extended into absurd areas, including denying nature and biology in the pursuit of 'equality.' In a society based upon rights rather than responsibilities this warped thinking leads to the 'logical' conclusion that everyone is entitled to do and be whatever they want.

We read in this week's *Parsha* of the various physical blemishes that disqualify a *Kohein* from partaking of different parts of *Korbanos* (sacrifices), *Teruma*, and service in the *Beis Hamikdash*. By way of explaining the reason behind this disqualification, the *Seforno* (*Vayikra 21:18*) compares a physically deformed or blemished *Kohein* entering the confines of the *Beis Hamikdash* to do the service, to one coming in to see a king while dressed in sackcloth. (A reference to *Mordechai in Megillas Esther*) It is disrespectful to the dignity of a monarch to have a bedraggled-looking individual in his presence. So too, says the *Seforno*, it is a slight to the honor of *Hashem* to have a deformed *Kohein* present in His sanctuary.

The comparison is puzzling. A person chooses what to wear. He chooses whether to wear sackcloth and thereby lose the privilege of entering the king's presence, or to don dignified clothing instead, and thereby regain the right to visit the king. A person with a physical deformity or blemish, on the other hand, has no such choice. His physical appearance, whether caused by a defect from birth, illness or injury was a matter of G-d's choosing, over which the person has no control. Why should such an individual be doubly penalized – by suffering from the deformity and now also being disqualified from a spiritual opportunity. It just seems so unfair!

This attitude is precisely the point. It seems unfair to those of us who have grown up with a belief system that all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights (at least in this country.) This may be a beautiful concept and has elevated the quality of life for hundreds of millions of Americans over the years, but it is a belief that is not completely in line with the Torah. The Torah teaches us that there are distinctions between people. *Leviim* are not *Cohanim*, *Yisraelim* are not *Leviim*. Rather than life's goal being to strive towards everyone being the same, we are each tasked by *Hashem* to fulfill the role each of us is uniquely suited for. The skills, talents, strengths, intelligences and circumstances of birth, health and environment create a unique challenge for every individual created in *Hashem's* image. We need to make the most with what we've been endowed and not to view our struggles as an accident or unfair situation. Just the opposite, they were tailor made for our mission.

This is extremely pertinent to our children. We must give them the message that fair means everyone gets what they need. Fair does not mean everyone gets the same. We don't all have to wear glasses for it to be fair. Challenges in self-esteem often arise when children start comparing or hear their parents making comparisons. "Why can't we go to Orlando like them?" "Why is our car the dumpiest car on the carpool line?" "They are so much richer than...," "she is smarter than her sister", "he is taller than his cousin," "why can't you be like so and so...," etc. Believing that one's lack of talents and attributes comparable to others is inherently unfair, is a guarantee for unhappiness. The focus on external comparisons, rather than internal growth, gives rise to innumerable problems. Children need to hear how much so and so achieved due to consistent hard work. They need to hear how that person accomplished so much by overcoming disadvantages to become a successful adult.

Focusing on the internal work that each person is challenged and obligated to do, is also a key to learning to deal with disappointment. Being denied the lead role in the class play can be devastating when the reaction is to take it personally and feel that 'someone took my place' or 'someone is out to get me.' The notion that something will be significantly lacking in my life if I am not chosen to go on this trip makes the rejection a catastrophe, rather than a small bump along the way. The perceived need to be equal to others is the very misperception upon which setbacks and disadvantages are magnified.

Part and parcel of our growth as individuals, spouses and parents is to strengthen our vision and understanding that life's goal is to harness our unique set of strengths and circumstances in order to serve *Hashem* in the best way we can. Helping our children celebrate their accomplishments that are the result of effort and perseverance, (even if others' successes appear to be more impressive,) will ensure that your child will have a healthy self-esteem and 'can-do' attitude that will enable him to overcome adversity, setback and disappointment. It will ensure a satisfied and wholesome life, dedicated to accomplishing their own mission.

Best wishes for a healthy and fulfilling Shabbos.

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

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