



Dear Parents,

When confronted with a difficult challenge, especially one that is not getting solved by the usual tried and true methods, most of us will just keep applying those trusty methods and try harder. A perfect example of this is a crawling baby who gets wedged under a piece of furniture. The solution, or next 'step' for the baby is to push harder. As a result, the baby gets more and more stuck under that furniture. No amount of exertion will solve its problem.

This is true in the spiritual realm as well. When considering what the young Avram ben Terach encountered in his disillusionment with his father's idols, one may conjecture that he was not the only one around with doubts concerning the power of lifeless idols. We may further conjecture that others confronted this challenge with a determination to build a bigger and better idol. Is it not logical that if the current models are not up to the job – build it better, bigger, stronger and more sophisticated?

It took an Avraham to delve deeper, and realize that what was needed wasn't bigger or even more powerful, rather the circumstances called for a complete shift towards a different direction. There's no idol that could ever do what people wanted and needed from a higher power. Avraham Avinu rose above the narrow-mindedness of his day, allowed his mind and heart to soar, and discovered the truth that remained hidden to all those stuck in the quagmire of conventional thinking.

Every great advance in science, medicine and technology has taken place because someone or some group set aside the accepted notions and current thinking, and hit upon a new approach, which no one ever thought of using before. In the area of problem solving, solutions are often thought of that come completely out of left field. One interesting example comes to mind – how do the authorities deal with the near calamity of a large truck that is pinned under an overpass because it was a few inches too high to fit? Shear off the top of the truck? Raise the ceiling of the overpass a few inches? Rather, they simply release most of the air in the truck's tires, thus lowering the height of the truck, enabling it to roll out!

Do we get stuck in our roles as parents? If we repeat instructions to our children 3 times without the desired results, do we repeat ourselves another 3 times and expect that will achieve our goal? If raising our voice doesn't get us compliance, do we think raising our voice even higher is the effective next step? When negative consequences don't have an impact on our child, are drastic and dire consequences the logical next step?

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We need to be innovative, creative and original in our parenting. That requires a lot of thought, analysis and introspection. Steven Covey of 7 Habits fame said in effect that if you are happy with the results you are getting, keep doing what you're doing. However, if you are not happy with the results, nothing will change until you modify your methods.

We have seen parents who are blessed with extremely challenging children – they've sought help from real experts, learned new approaches and have transformed themselves, their families and their children. We can all do the same – if our commitment is to help this child, give this child what he or she needs, rather than being committed to old approaches that are easy in the moment, come natural to us and are what everyone else does. We know the baby stuck under the furniture needs an adult to pick him up, turn him around and allow him to continue his explorations in a different direction.

We have such a knowledgeable, capable, aware generation of parents – use those talents in the pursuit of building a better, more capable, more self-confident child. Take a step back from the sometimes vexing and frustrating encounters with your children. Think deeply, research and analyze. Find patterns to misbehavior; where, time of day, what activity, what happened yesterday, what is coming tomorrow. Find and understand the child's context. Solutions will come. Idols may need to be smashed along the way, but in the process you'll discover your child's true abilities, and your strengths to bring them to fruition.

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Have a deep-thinking, innovative Shabbos,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann