

# From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



## THE FIERY FURNACE

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayeishev 5782

This week's Parsha contains a heroic lesson for all eternity that has very practical implications for our children. Based on the incident where Tamar was willing to be put to death by fire rather than embarrass her father-in-law Yehuda, the Gemara (Brachos 43b) tells us "It is preferable (more pleasant, more acceptable) for a person to jump into a fiery furnace than to publicly humiliate another person." Rav Yehuda Leib Chasman zt"l, Mashgiach of the Chevron Yeshiva, asks; why does the Gemara use the word "Noach" pleasant, acceptable, rather than the word Chayav – which would mean a person is obligated to possibly give up his life rather than embarrass another. He explains, it teaches that it is the preferred path, just as a person confronted with two fires blocking his way, one large and one small, will choose the small fire. So too, a person should see the physical fire of a furnace as smaller than the 'fire' of embarrassing another human being.

What a lofty concept! Embarrassing another person is not only, not 'cool' (pun intended) – it is one of the worst things a person can do! A person with the right perspective, like Tamar, will feel that he'd be better off jumping into a burning oven in order to not embarrass someone. The fire that one will endure in the World of Truth and Eternal Justice is infinitely 'hotter' than the heat of fire on this earth. This is not forcing oneself to sublimate his feelings and desires to fulfill Hashem's will – this is a realization that bringing the pain of humiliation to his fellow is like starting a forest fire – it is overwhelmingly destructive.

A difficult challenge that faces children in a school setting is controlling their reaction to 'annoying' behavior on the part of others.

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Those who do the annoying, children who lack the savvy to 'find favor' in the eyes of their peers, are in turn, the most likely ones to face teasing and unkind words. Perhaps these children can't read facial signals and body language, don't respect others' private space, don't realize their comments come across as bragging or overly self-centered etc. These children may have a problem that requires adult support, whether parental or professional. But while these children may not be able to help themselves, the others, the majority, need to learn that their reactions to these behaviors are completely their own responsibility. No amount of 'annoying' justifies reactive words or actions designed to embarrass.

Children can be trained to use "I-messages" when confronted with an unpleasant situation caused by a peer; "I feel sad when you say those words", "I feel annoyed when you do that" or "I feel myself getting upset when you make noises." By having a tool kit of useful, neutral phrases, children can avoid saying or doing anything that is hurtful or potentially embarrassing.

Our children can understand the lesson above. Shaming another person must be avoided like desecrating Shabbos, non-kosher food and Loshon Hora. Great praise needs to be lavished upon a child who controls himself and avoids embarrassing another. Put downs, teasing and name-calling are not merely childish naughtiness that can be ignored. If left unchecked, these behaviors will form the foundations of life-long Midos that can have earth-shatteringly negative consequences for your child and the relationships he or she will need to build in his or her life. "It is preferable to jump into a fiery furnace than to publicly humiliate another person." Talk to your children about these words of Chazal, and keep talking about it again and again. If it's important to you, it will become important to them.

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avoided like desecrating Shabbos,  
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Best wishes for a pleasant Shabbos and illuminating Chanukah!

Rabbi Kalman Baumann

