

From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



LIKE A CHILD IN THE CANDY STORE

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Tazria Parashas HaChodesh Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5782

One of the foundational attributes of the human being is free choice. We fulfill our mission in this world through the exercise of free choice. *Hashem* has created the world in a manner that keeps Himself hidden, thus allowing for enough doubt that a person who acts and thinks in the appropriate manner can be rewarded for choosing to conduct himself in that way, without being compelled to do so.

The ability to make choices should not be taken for granted. In fact, it is precisely this ability to exercise free will, that we are celebrating this *Shabbos*. We read in *Parashas Ha Chodesh* (*Shemos* 12:2) about the first *mitzvah Hashem* commanded *Klal Yisrael* as they were on the threshold of freedom from Egypt: This month shall be the first month for you. The *Seforno* on the *Pasuk* points out that from now on, the calculation of the months is up to you, *Klal Yisrael*. You are no longer slaves but now begins your existence as a people who have *Bechira*, free will.

This is hard to understand. We just said that free will is intrinsic to the human. What does the *Seforno* mean that now, with *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, begins the Jews' free will? Didn't they also have free will as slaves, even if it wasn't the same as when they are free? They could have defied their masters, even though the consequences would be painful. They were still choosing to obey.

Perhaps we can say that the absence of a level playing field is not really *Bechira*, free will. A person can choose to put himself into obvious danger, but that is not normal. A slave who is beaten down, whose self-esteem is so deflated, cannot truly choose because he is so far removed from an elevated life, that he lacks the awareness of what choices he really has. He can technically go through the motions of making choices, but it doesn't constitute free-will.

When it comes to training our children, our responsibility in helping them learn how to make good choices and properly exercise their free-will, is critical. Children need to be given the independence to make choices and learn from their mistakes. Through the consequences that

“...the absence of a level playing field is not really Bechira, free will.” occur as a result of their actions, they will gain an understanding that what they choose matters and has an impact. This can only happen when they are provided opportunities to act somewhat independently, to strengthen those good-choice muscles.

A question may be raised - are we indeed following this practice? For many years now, we have been emphasizing the message of what a parent needs to do to keep their children safe from the potential dangers of technology exposure. The onus was placed on the parent – do this to safeguard your child, know and monitor what the children are up to, limit the time, content and device, etc. What happened to nurturing the ability to make wise choices? Why are we not suggesting giving the children more latitude?

The answer is that a person, especially a child, who is faced with an overwhelming test – akin to placing a child in a candy store and telling him he cannot have any sweets, is not really being given a choice. The child cannot be expected to refrain from the candy, and therefore he cannot be blamed for failing. (See also, *Berachos* 32a, *Omar Rabi Chiya bar Aba...*) Similarly, the lure of the digital world, especially for a young child, is totally overwhelming. The child needs parental guidance, control and support. If *chas v'sholom* a young child has a severe allergy to chocolate, the parent scrupulously examines ingredients, environments and **“...the lure of the digital world, especially for a young child, is totally overwhelming.”** situations to ensure his child's safety. Why not give the child some independence? Only a fool would do that.

Our young children cannot be handed devices and simply be told to 'play responsibly'. They need guidance, they need help in leveling the playing field, so they can develop in a healthy manner, have their ability to properly choose be nurtured, and maintain their equilibrium to become truly free people who are distinguished by their ability to exercise free-will to its fullest.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos* and a meaningful month of true freedom!



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