

Torah Lessons for the Home

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| Pesach |

Making the Best of Change

Creatures of Habit

What's the first thing our kindergarten children learn about Pesach?

"Mah Nishtana": the great question - "Why is this night different from all other nights?". Actually some *meforshim* explain that the 'questions' are in reality not questions but four 'declarations' about the great differences of this night.

Pesach is very different, more than *sukkos* or other *yomim tovim*, and that affects us. Humans are creatures of habit. We all have tens of routines which we follow throughout the day and a break in routine throws us off track. I often hear parents talk about their kids "When she's off-schedule, forget about it! Impossible to deal with". But they fail to realize that they're exactly the same way. Even a scheduled break in routine is difficult for many people, but a spontaneous change is certainly not easy for most people.

Differences can be harmful or beneficial; it depends on how you take it. The miracles of

Pesach came about because our forefathers resisted change, שלא שינו את שמם, לשונם ולבושם, they did not yield to their environment and that is the merit which saved them. They were thrust into an atmosphere that was completely different but they did not get thrown off guard, they knew that they were the chosen sons of Yisroel and behaved as such.

Under normal circumstances the things they did wouldn't have been considered anything special, is there anything special about a nation keeping its national language and customs? They were considered worthy of redemption, however, because they approached *their situation* properly as an 'opportunity' rather than a 'pitfall'.

An Opportunity and a Challenge

A change in routine is an opportunity, it's a challenge for us. Will we get flustered and fail? Or will we be like the Bnei Yisroel and use it the right way? Pesach is a time when it's so easy to get thrown off-course, there are so many details to take care

of, so much to stress over. There is more together time and more stepping on each other's toes. In every home these days there are challenging situations, let's not resent them, let's see them as opportunities to grow.

Chaim* had been seeing me for some time, no matter what he did he couldn't seem to get through to his wife, Leah*. She brushed off compliments, criticized gifts as unnecessary spending, never took a break or was available to chat. Then a family simcha came up - a big break in routine, which could have been very stressful. There were a lot of extra expenditures, a lot of travelling with cranky kids etc.

Baruch Hashem, I was able to guide Chaim in seeing his situation as an opportunity for growth in Shalom Bayis. He now had an excuse to spend time with Leah. The Simcha also afforded him opportunities for gifts, compliments and appreciation. He was now able to achieve so many things that the typical routine did not allow for.

Pesach is the same thing. It's an opportunity to buy your spouse something special. It's an opportunity to praise your spouse for a job well done. It's an opportunity to take care of errands together in a calm happy way. *Mah Nishtana!* It is so different from all year, and therein lies an opportunity for renewed good relationships, for better interactions.

But not everyone recognizes or appreciates the opportunities of change. Ask any therapist or marriage counselor and you'll hear about the requests for multiple 'emergency appointments' on Chol Hamoed, from people seeking help. It is understandable that Pesach can be very stressful but we need to recognize that in the challenges lie great opportunities.

Chumros and Pressure

Now, I don't want you to think I'm naive; I know that Pesach can be very stressful. There are people who have extreme *chumros* on Pesach and sometimes these can be a source of undue pressure on the family. Some people experienced undue pressure from their parents growing up. They think that the only way not to put their children through the same thing is to break with tradition and just drop the whole thing.

I just heard from someone "My father would go wild if a drop of water came within ten feet of a crumb of Matzah. If that's '*gebrochts*' I don't need the whole *minhag*." It's wrong to think that it's either all or nothing, that you can either

be careful or happy. We have to stay focused and remember what's important. It's possible to teach children about *gebrochts* by complimenting them when they *are* careful. They'll catch on eventually. Taking people's feelings seriously is at least as important as a *chumrah*. It's sad to see people traumatized by this season, fathers don't often have the opportunity to sit and enjoy a meal with their children. Let's make the most of it now that the opportunity presents itself.

Being happy is something important and mandatory in its own right, certainly on Yom Tov, a time of Simcha. And yes, your smile *does* affect everyone around you as well. So let's beware of the challenge, the potential for pitfall and the potential for growth.

-Q&A-

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org

Question: How seriously should I take my child's opinion in shidduchim? My son is a sheltered *chassidishe* bachur and doesn't really know much about the real world. I've asked him what he's looking for and he shrugged and said "I don't know". Considering this, how much should he be involved in the decision making process? And what if he did have input; what does he really know?

Answer: Every child is different, every home is different and parents need to know their own child. There is no question that our system wherein parents make most of the decision in shidduchim is at least as successful as any other system for find-

ing one's mate. But there is no question that a child's opinion, as well as specifics that can affect him later on should definitely be taken into account.

Someone told me recently that a shidduch from a very prestigious family had been suggested for him. It sounded very appealing from many different angles but his parents heard that the girl was a bit overweight, so they asked their son if he would mind getting engaged to an overweight girl. The bachur was a talmid of Rav Rosenblum z"l, so he asked him what he should do. He was certain that his Rosh Yeshiva would tell him not to focus on the external and appearances are not so important etc. Instead Rav

Rosenblum told him: You're BH a healthy young man, and it may bother you. Why don't you find out where she works and go take a look at her and see if it would bother you. A simple solution! This may not be applicable for everyone, but it does give some insight into what should be taken into account.

As parents we surely know better than our children what is best for them in the long run, but we must make sure that a shidduch decision revolves more around what will make the child happy, than around what we'd want them to be happy with. It is our responsibility to keep that in mind while we're engaged in the holy task of getting our children married.