

Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Chayei Sarah- Parenting Consciously and Thoughtfully

I have been thinking about starting a weekly post called “Parenting from the Parsha” for a while. Not because I am expert on parenting in any way- far from it. I am still a relatively young parent, and have no specific training in parenting more than reading a few parenting books and seforim on chinuch over the years.

At the same time, parenting in general has been a major part of my personal identity since I became a father, and as a Rabbi and educator I have always been interested in, and fascinated by, the many lessons that the Torah and Judaism have regarding how to be a better parent. I also feel, as will be discussed below, that most parents don’t put enough time, thought, and focus on the art of parenting, and the myriad of issues/questions that can come up daily as a parent.

So ultimately, the goal of these posts is not for me to teach others how to be a better parent, but to encourage us all to think about how we parent, and how we can improve as parents. I will share an idea based on each week’s parsha that connects to an aspect of parenting and then add my own personal thoughts and experiences, in addition to anything that I have learned over the years on these issues. I encourage others to join the conversation by sharing any reflections, thoughts, questions, and feedback!

This week I wanted to discuss a more introductory type idea that is based off of this week’s parsha, Parshat Chayei Sarah.

In this week’s parsha, the Torah introduces the story of Avraham finding a wife for Yitzchak with the following passuk- "ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם בכל" “And Avraham was old, his days were coming, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything [bakol]”. The commentaries try to understand what the Torah is trying to tell us with this seemingly superfluous passuk. Rashi there famously points out that the Hebrew word בכל is the same gematria (numerical value) as the Hebrew word בן, “son”- and based on that he suggest that the Torah is reiterating that Hashem had finally blessed Avraham with a son who would continue his legacy, and therefore it was time to find him a wife to marry. Hence this passuk is in fact a very fitting introduction to the story that follows.

Now Rashi’s comment seems to make a lot of sense- based on the context. However, his comment does raise another important question- namely, why doesn’t the Torah simply state explicitly that Hashem blessed Avraham with a son? Why make the point in a roundabout way, using the word בכל and then through the gematria?

Perhaps we can suggest that the Torah here is making reference to a very important aspect of parenthood, and to the fundamental way that parents feel towards their children. Why does the Torah use the word בכל , “with everything”, to refer to Avraham’s son? *Because from the perspective of Avraham, his son Yitzchak was everything to him.* Yitzchak represented his future, his legacy, all his dreams and hopes.

I believe that if any of us were asked how we look at our children, we would answer that our children “are our everything”- our children are THE most important thing in the world to us, we would do

anything for them, etc. There is this incredible bond and love that we have towards our kids that transcends everything. It is a feeling that is indescribable, yet ever present.

At the same time, we need to ask ourselves a very important question. How much preparation/thought do we put into our role as parents? Of course, we buy all the baby books, and we make plans from a financial and practical perspective to make sure to take care of our children. But being a parent is so much more than that- the educational, cognitive, and emotional role that parents play in the lives of their children is understandably vast. The way that we interact with our kids on a daily basis sets the tone for how they grow up and who they will be. That is a tremendous responsibility, and a tremendous opportunity.

And yet on some level, when it comes to this we often “wing it”, figuring things out as we go along. However, given the love that we have for our kids and the impact we have in their lives, perhaps we should put more thought into our parenting- that we take a step back and recognize the responsibility and opportunity. What are our goals as parents, and how can we achieve them? How can we become better parents, be there more for our children physically and emotionally? How can we prepare ourselves for the daily challenges that we face each day in our parenting? For each of us, this reflection and consideration might look a little different, but it should take place nonetheless. For some, it might involve reading a book on parenting or a sefer on chinuch. For others, it might mean taking a parenting class. And yet for others, it might simply mean taking more time to consider decisions or actions in our parenting than we typically would have. Yet it is that thoughtfulness and awareness that can make all the difference.

As we see from this week’s parsha, our children are everything to us- and we would do anything we could for them. Who they are and who they can become, is too important for us to simply “wing it” and assume that we will figure it out. We need to do our best to parent thoughtfully.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbos! I look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback and to continuing this ever important conversation!