



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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Summertime Parenting: A Toolbox for Life with Rabbanit Esther Levanon

A couple of weeks ago, I had the privilege of spending Shabbat in Alon Moreh at my son's yeshiva. On Shabbat afternoon, Rabbanit Esther Levanon, wife of the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Elyakim Levanon, gave a talk to the mothers of the yeshiva boys titled “**A Toolbox for Life.**”

She shared a series of simple life rules—nothing revolutionary, nothing we haven't heard before. But hearing them from a woman who has lived through decades of life experience, who spoke with such sincerity and simplicity from the heart, made all the difference. Her words resonated deeply and she spoke with strength and conviction, as if to say: *This is what I've learned, and I want to pass it on.*

As I reflect on her words, I realize that even though the talk wasn't specifically about parenting (though she gives plenty of parenting talks too), it was exactly what I needed to hear as a mother heading into summer vacation—a time that's always a challenge for me. Juggling a full-time job while managing a house full of kids is no small task. Rabbanit Levanon's insights offered me a sense of perspective, and a bit of peace.

Here are a few of the tools she shared:

RULE #1 – BE FULLY PRESENT IN WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING

She shared that many women come to her for advice feeling torn—like they're never fully present anywhere. At work, they feel guilty for not being with their children; at home, their minds are still at work. Her advice: *Be where you are.* When you're at work, focus on work. When you're at home, focus on family. Don't try to be perfect, just be present.

This message spoke to me on so many levels. I constantly feel that pull between different responsibilities, especially during the summer, and her reminder to live each moment with intention was both grounding and empowering.

RULE #2 – OUR HOMES ARE MEANT TO SERVE US, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND

Rabbanit Levanon told a beautiful story about her grandfather who was escaping with the Mir Yeshiva during the war. The Yeshiva students came upon a house with a mezuzah and hoped to stay the night. Their boots were caked in mud, and when the woman of the house opened the door to a living room covered in wall-to-wall carpet (a luxury at the time), they hesitated. But she insisted: “*Our home is meant to serve us. We are not meant to serve our home.*”

That story has been passed down in her family for generations—and now to us.

During the summer, my house often feels like a disaster zone. With so many people home for so many hours, keeping things tidy can feel impossible. But this story reminded me that while it's good to strive for order and to involve the kids in helping, it's also okay if the house looks lived-in. That's *what* it's meant to do during the summer. No need to let the mess ruin the mood.

RULE #3 – DRAW THE TARGET AROUND THE DART

Rabbanit Levanon told of a story of a man who always hit the bullseye in darts. People were amazed—until he explained his trick: he'd throw the dart first, and then draw the target around wherever it landed.

Sometimes in life, we set goals and plans, and we aim high. And that's great. But sometimes, reality has other plans. She shared a story of a teacher who longed to teach eighth grade but was continually assigned to third. It made her miserable—until Rabbanit Levanon gently told her, *"It's time to draw the target around the dart."*

Often, I make big plans for the summer: meaningful outings, creative projects, family bonding, smiles all around. And while some of that may happen, some days don't go that way. And that's okay. Sometimes we need to take a fresh look at our reality and reshape our goals accordingly.

RULE #4 – LIVE IN THE PRESENT, NOT IN THE FUTURE

Over the years, Rabbanit Levanon has met countless young women who live in a constant state of *"when."* *When* I finish school... *when* I get married... *when* life calms down—*then* I'll be happy.

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It hit me that I've been living the summer version of that mindset: *Okay, we survived week one... just eight more to go. Halfway there... almost done.* Survival mode. But what if, instead, I could find a way to embrace the summer—with all its mess and chaos—and actually live it? Not just mark the days off, but make the days count.

B'ezrat Hashem, may we all take these tools and internalize them—not just for the summer, but for life. May we find ways to live more fully, more presently, and more compassionately, with ourselves and with those around us. ■

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