



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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The month of Elul in Israel has become synonymous with education. Throughout the country, schools, *yeshivot*, and *midrashot* have all started up during this month, starting the school-year cycle all over again after a long summer break. In fact, my family hit a major milestone with our oldest grandson starting first grade just a week ago, which made us so proud.

Over the years, people have asked me for my thoughts on how much of the responsibility of *chinuch* goes to the parents, and how much is upon the schools, the youth groups, and so on. I always respond that in an ideal world, over 90% *should be* on the parents and the family as a whole. It should only be a bit more that goes to the educational system in which the parents choose to send their child. It is clear to me that our children really get their love for Torah and Yiddishkeit, their desire to work hard, their desire to excel in life, and so on, only when they see their family - their parents, their grandparents, their aunts, uncles, and siblings - behaving in a way that demonstrates those values.

When a child sees his parents wake up every morning early to go to work, happy about what they do, and they see them come home in the evening and take care of them in such a loving and cooperative way, in doing homework with them, in making supper, and maintaining a functioning house, then that child grows up in an environment where they're able to see and appreciate these good values. When they see their father or mother

going to *shiurim*, picking up a book of Torah ideas instead of a newspaper on Shabbat, when they do *chessed* in the community, and are kind to others in the street, these are moments that that children pick up on as the determining moments that shape them.

This past Shabbat we celebrated the last bar mitzvah in our family. We have, *baruch Hashem*, seven sons and two daughters, and this was the bar mitzvah of our youngest son, Mordechai Tzemach. Now, after seven bar mitzvahs (and one bat mitzvah), I am able to reflect on what this celebration really means and what makes this so significant for them. One part is the *nachat* we have as parents that our children are continuing in our way. When we see that the *chinuch* moments we have imparted find their mark in our children and in our grandchildren and nieces and nephews, that is such a source of pride for us.

Another part is appreciating those who we have appointed to help guide the next generation with us. Our first three bar mitzvah boys learned with such a phenomenal parsha reading teacher, Rabbi Dan Kochav, and the rest with a close neighborhood friend. That they put their heart and soul into our children and really prepared them in such a beautiful way, we have to give so much thanks for that.

I saw throughout the year how much time Mordechai Tzemach put into getting the reading of the parsha just right. I would say he must have read the parsha with the trop over a hundred times in order to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. And the practice paid off. *Baruch*

Hashem, he read beautifully on Shabbat. But for Mordechai, this went beyond a mere performance. Not only did he read the parsha at the early Shabbat minyan which we regularly attend, at 6:45am, but we have a neighbor who is handicapped, so he went afterward to the neighbor's minyan to read again, in order to ensure that he had somebody reading for him this Shabbat. This is how we knew that the values of his family and his community have been imparted so well to him, that he has such an amazing sensitivity to those who he can help.

He said something over Shabbat that was so powerful to me, and it was about a cake. I am lucky enough to be married to a very talented and artistic woman, who discovered she has the ability to make amazing-looking cakes with fondant. For every bar mitzvah, she has created these beautiful decorated cakes fitting the theme of the parsha. For one of our sons, whose bar mitzvah parsha was Va'etchanan, she depicted Moshe Rabbeinu begging to go into the Land of Israel. For another, for Parshat Bamidbar, she presented the twelve tribes on a cake. For Mordechai, in honor of Parshat Ki Teitzei, as the parsha with the most mitzvot in the Torah, my wife made the most incredible cake with tremendous detail in which she was able to show 25 different mitzvot from the parsha on the cake!

On Shabbat, after the presentation of the cake, Mordechai said, “*Abba*, you know I have read the parsha so many times, maybe over a hundred times. But it was only when I looked at that cake that it was all brought together.” He told me that he saw the amount of time for weeks that his mother took off work in order to prepare for the bar mitzvah, including endless hours into preparing the cake. When

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring
Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman