



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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Mitzvot as Bridges: Teaching Our Children to Connect with Hashem

This week, our family is celebrating a very special milestone — our son Netanel's Bar Mitzvah. As anyone who has planned a Bar Mitzvah knows, the months leading up to it are filled with excitement and activity — arranging the celebration, preparing for guests, practicing the leining, and managing countless details. In the midst of it all, it's easy to lose sight of what this moment truly represents: *Kabbalat Ol Mitzvot* — accepting the responsibility of mitzvot and the privilege of living a life filled with meaning and purpose.

In honor of Netanel's Bar Mitzvah, I'd like to share a few insights from the OU Israel Women's Division Bat Mitzvah Program, which runs in both Yerushalayim and Beit Shemesh. About 110 mothers and daughters are currently taking part in this six-part journey, exploring what it means to live a life of mitzvot, connection, and responsibility.

In our recent session on *Kabbalat Ol Mitzvot*, participants heard the inspiring story of a young *ba'alat teshuva* who chose to begin keeping mitzvot at age twelve and visited a bakery to perform *Hafrashat Challah* (one of the mitzvot a girl can only do upon becoming Bat Mitzvah). The mothers and daughters also spent time learning through the sources and

discussing the purpose of Mitzvot.

The conversation about the meaning of Mitzvot is one that belongs in every Jewish home, so I wanted to share some of these ideas for you to bring to your Shabbos table or to discuss with your children whenever the opportunity arises.

We often think of the word *mitzvah* as coming from the root צוֹוּ — a command. But some point out another root within the word: צוֹוָה, meaning connection. As Rabbi Natan of Breslov writes in *Likutei Halachot*, "The word *mitzvah* means connection, from the root *tzavta* and *chibur*, for through every mitzvah a person connects and attaches himself to Hashem."

This teaches us that mitzvot are not only obligations — they are opportunities for closeness. This applies both to mitzvot we enjoy and to those we find difficult.

In *Pirkei Avot* we learn:

רבי חנניה בן עקשיא אומר: רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל, לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות.

Hashem desired to bring merit to the Jewish people and therefore gave them many mitzvot. The simple understanding is that Hashem gave us numerous mitzvot to provide us with many opportunities to earn reward.

The **Rambam**, in his commentary on this Mishnah, explains that because there are so

many mitzvot, it is impossible for a person to go through life without fulfilling at least one of them perfectly. Through that one mitzvah done with complete sincerity and devotion, a person merits *Olam Haba*.

This is a beautiful idea to discuss around the Shabbos table. Ask your children (and yourselves) - if you could choose one mitzvah to be your “special mitzvah,” the one you would strive to perfect and make your own, which would it be? Every person should aim to make at least one mitzvah “their mitzvah” — the mitzvah through which they express their unique love and devotion to Hashem.

At the same time, it's equally important to talk with our children about the mitzvot that are difficult. Every person has certain mitzvot that feel especially challenging, and those struggles themselves hold tremendous spiritual potential. Rather than skipping or resenting them, we can use them as opportunities to deepen our connection with HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

As *Pirkei Avot* (5:23) teaches: *בן הא אוּמֵר לְפָום צָעֵר אָגָרָא* — “The greater the effort, the greater the reward.” Why should the harder mitzvot bring greater reward? Because the struggle itself reveals our love. We can illustrate this idea to our children in the following story -

Chana loved her mother very much. Her mother was always doing so much for her – making delicious dinners, buying her new clothes, and

spending quality time with her. One day, Chana's mother asked her to clean her room. Chana really didn't understand why her mother wanted her to do that. She liked living in a messy room so why should she clean it? And besides, it was super messy and would take hours to clean and she really didn't feel like it. But she thought for a moment and decided to do it anyway — as a way to show her mother how much she loved her.

You can discuss with your children that just like Chana shows her love for her mother by doing the thing that is the most difficult for her, when we choose to do Mitzvot that are very hard for us, these are the most special Mitzvot. These are the mitzvot that we don't do just because they're fun or we connect to them. These are the mitzvot that we do simply because Hashem said to do them, and we love Hashem and want to do what He asked of us.

By discussing this concept with our children when they have difficulty getting up for shul or waiting between meat and milk, these moments can become lessons in turning struggle into connection.

In conclusion, one of our greatest privileges as parents is helping our children see mitzvot not as burdens but as bridges, as opportunities to connect to Hashem. May we all continue to grow in our *simchah shel mitzvah* (joy in serving Hashem) and may our children embrace their mitzvot with pride, purpose, and love. ■

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