

Children: Don't Trust Your Parents

During Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles), we invite the families of our synagogue to camp out in remembrance of the time when Israel lived in tabernacles in the wilderness. During the week-long celebration, we play games, do crafts and sing around the campfire. This is one of my favorite times of the year as a rabbi because we get to spend so much time together as a community and build positive relationships with one another. Spending nearly a week together day and night forges bonds between people that can and will last a lifetime.

As I participated in the activities going on, I tried to listen to the things being said by those around me. As a leader, I have learned that when people are spending time doing activities together they often have meaningful conversations. Of the many things that I heard, two stood out strongly in my mind.

The first I heard said many times while I was sitting around the campfire counting my blessings. As different parents were watching their children play, they said to one another statements such as, "I miss the days when they were little," or "I wish they didn't have to get older." The parents of older teens would say things like: "It won't be long until they are driving," or "I can't believe they will be going off to college soon."

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While these statements may seem substantially different, in reality, the parents were saying the same thing. The reason we don't like our children to get older, drive or go off to

college is because with each new stage of life, we as parents lose just a little bit of our control, and as parents, we like to be in control, or at least believe we are. I don't mean control in a bad way, but in a responsible way.

Think about it: When our children are babies in their bassinets, we always know where they are, what they are doing and what they are eating. We are in nearly complete control. As they grow older and move from bassinet to crib, crib to playpen, playpen to backyard, backyard to community park, with each step as parents we lose a little more control over our children. So we wish they were little and wouldn't be about to drive or move away to college. Not because we don't want them to grow up, but because as parents, we feel a deep responsibility for their safety and well-being, and the smaller their world, the easier it is for us to believe we are in control, and the safer we believe we can keep them.

The second statement I heard over and over said by parents was "I only looked away for a moment." I heard this when a child got too close to the campfire, when a small child found their way to the top of the 40-foot water slide and when some teens walked inside the synagogue building while the church that rents from us on Sunday morning was still having its service.

At this point, you may be wondering what all this has to do with children not trusting their parents. The truth is it has a lot to do with it. While it is true that we as parents we have a responsibility to protect our children and do our best to keep them from any and all harm, both physical and spiritual, it is also true (if we are going to be honest) that as parents, we are going to fail. We will not fail just once; we are going to fail over and over. Not because we want to fail, but because we are human beings. We want our children to stay small because we want to be able to limit the possible ways they can be hurt or hurt themselves, and we know we have the best possible chance of protecting them when they are by themselves, swaddled in their bassinets.

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The reason we want them to remain tiny and immobile is that once they begin to move, there will be times they get into dangerous situations. Not because we want them to, and not because we don't care or love them, but because "we only turned our eyes for a moment." While we love and desire to protect our children from all harm, we also have other responsibilities, and many times other children we are also trying to protect.

We establish boundaries and limitations for our children so we can try to keep them safe, as we rightfully should. While we should establish firm boundaries for our children and do all we can to protect them, if we really want our children to be safe and if we really want to protect them, we need to teach them they should not put their trust in us but rather in G-D. If they put their complete trust in us, and then we fail them (which we will), they will look elsewhere for something they can trust. Even worse, they may simply conclude that they should trust no one.

Imagine how much emotional and spiritual damage we could avoid if instead of trying to control every situation in our children's lives so we can make it easier for us to keep them safe, we taught our children that we love them deeply and would do everything we can to keep them safe from every hurt, but at times we will fail. Not only will we fail at times to keep them from being hurt, there are times when we will actually be the ones who cause their hurt.

While we truly do love them, and love never fails, we are also humans, and humans do fail. If our children are going to trust their parents, their trust should not be in their parents, but in their parents' trust in an unfailing G-D.

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