PARENTING and the blessing of Shabbat, by Coty Bitton

We, parents, know very well what is the appropriate groundwork for a positive and loving relationship with our children. Personal attention. Listen to what they have to say. Being present. Showing them that they are our most important interest. We should give our children what they need so much: our undivided attention But how difficult is apply this idea! How often we go to sleep knowing that we behaved during the day in ways that, far from bringing us closer to our children, created distance between us…

Why is it so challenging?

Our hectic schedules make this mission very difficult. Even when spending time with our children, it is almost impossible to disconnect from our worries and connect with them calmly, and fully, conveying to them “Here I am. I am all yours”. Instead, our children often perceive us distracted. We can give them anything except what they need the most: our time.

There is more: In this ambitious and industrious generation our children’s schedule is also very busy. Homework, tutoring, karate lessons, soccer games, birthday parties. They have to squeeze so many activities in so little time!

Our role as parents is getting increasingly challenging: there is no time to nurture a good relationship with our children. We operate as if our only job would be to get the child dressed, fed and out of the door on time for their next activity…. and we know very well what the solution is: slowing down, treasuring the moments that we have with our children, and enjoy… and let them enjoy the closeness of a happy, relaxed parent.

Easier said than done. We try, and sometimes we even succeed. But our brains are still wired to the many obligations that we have. Our lives are too complicated and we found ourselves always running against the clock.

But HaShem really loves us. He is our heavenly Father. He loves us at least as much as we love our children. He gave us the Tora and the Mitsvot which beyond a system of laws for our behavior are also blessings for our lives.Think about the gift

of Shabbat.
Our sages described the Shabbat as the “present That Hashem gave us from His treasures”. There are many details involved in the observance of Shabbat. One of them is that we create a special “space” of rest. A Shabbat Mode (it reminds me of the “Airplane Mode” not incoming business, nor outgoing business). On Shabbat to slow down is not a choice. To be present for our kids is Shabbat’s “modus operandi”. The gift of Shabbat is today more necessary than ever. We walk with our children to the synagogue with our ears free from headphones. We are not allowed to take care of our daily business. We must sit and relax as if all our bills have been paid, the work has been done and the house improvements have been taken care of. We have no occupations and no preoccupations. We are worries-free.
That is the best space for a bonding time with our children.
In the Shabbat table, our family’s altar, we communicate, we share our respective weeks, we sing together, and more than anything else, we have time to listen to each other! All this takes place in a peaceful and pleasant atmosphere, where no TV, iPhones, or X-Box are allowed.
This is one of HaShem’s greatest gifts.Today, more necessary than ever.

PARENTING: Time to say goodbye

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It was said of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai that no one ever preceded him in a greeting, even a stranger in the marketplace.

It is common sense and *derekh eretz* (politeness) that people would greet each other when they meet, after being away from one another, or when they depart from each other. That is what we do with our coworkers and friends□ even though we see them everyday.

When we leave home we should always say goodbye to the other members of our family, including very young children. This is beyond a matter of basic respect. For infants and little kids, knowing that mom and dad are home, unless they said "goodbye", builds trust and reinforce their self esteem. Mom and dad are here unless they let me know that they are leaving. No fear of abandonment.

In the case of older children, if we don't let them know when we are leaving the house, they might be finding themselves talking to a person that was there, but who has just disappeared. Moreover, if we behave in this way, our children will learn to follow. Perhaps then when our children get independent and drive, they would think that they can just leave without giving notice, especially when they are at the age where they don't need to ask permission to go to certain places. We must teach them that they need to let us know they are leaving the house and when are they coming back. All this will happen if they learn to say "goodbye".

Similarly, when we come home to our family, we should let our loved ones know that we are back. And It goes both ways. Those who are at home should acknowledge the presence of the person who just arrived saying: "Hi! Hello! How are you? or How was your day!" This is especially important when parents arrive. Jewish children are commanded to respect their parents. They should stop their activities and come and greet the parent that just arrived. When the kids are young, each parent models this behavior when the other parent arrives. Mom or dad should say: "Everybody come here! Look who has just arrived! Let's all give dad (or mom) a big hug!!"

In our modern society, where children are connected basically to electronic devices, these gestures of love and respect are more important than eve.

Regaining awareness of what it means to be a family might begin by knowing and showing that it matters a lot if you are home or if you are absent. Don't abstain from saying "Have a great day! I love you! I missed you!".

We should learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai to be always the first to greet others. **Showing those we love that their presence does make a difference.**

By Rabbanit Coty Bitton

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