



Parental Authority



Freedom to Choose

Belonging



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Trust yourself

It happened some years ago. My elder daughter's birthday was coming up, and she knew precisely what she wanted for a present.

"I want a Game Boy," she said.

"A Game what?" I asked.

A brief investigation made it clear: A Game Boy was a small hand-held computer game that turns a child into a creature focused entirely on producing a relentless stream of beeps and beeps.

"So what about my present?" asked my daughter the next day.

"Listen," I said, somewhat anxiously. "I checked around a bit and discussed this with your Dad. The truth is that we don't think it's for you. You are a smart, soft-spoken girl who likes to read and jump rope. Why do you need a game like that?"

"It seems to me," I went on, trying unsuccessfully to project maternal authority, "you should try to think of something else. The stores are full of nice games that you'd be interested in."

"No, I don't want anything else," she retorted. "Only a Game Boy."

For the next week, all I heard was the insistent chant 'Buy me a Game Boy,' backed up by every possible argument: "If you buy me a Game Boy, I'll be quiet and won't bother you anymore; it's always so boring around here; if you don't buy me one, I'll go somewhere else to play; I'll get one with my own money." And, of course, the old argument that effectively dissolves almost any solid parental ruling: "Everyone has one, and you're the only mother who always says no..." To make a long story short, it was an exhausting week.

While this saga was playing out, I sat myself down to think. On the one hand, her arguments were making me apprehensive and uneasy. I won't deny I was even a bit scared. What if I didn't give her what she wanted? Would she stray off the 'right path?' Perhaps. I began to think that I was exaggerating. Maybe I was too hard on her.

On the other hand, nothing in this game encouraged benevolence or tolerance, which were paramount to me. In addition to all that, it cost a pretty penny. Altogether, I preferred to see my daughter with a book or a jump rope. But more than anything, I was confident that this game did not belong in my home.

I was now determined and reached an unequivocal conclusion: No way! I didn't have to be afraid or hesitant. Neither did I feel that I had to apologize to anyone or sink into self-doubt that I was being rigid or too strict. I didn't want this in my home, and that was that. I would happily buy her any other game she wanted.

The next day, without hearing my decision, she approached me and said: "Mom, I know what I want for my birthday! A Hanukkah menorah."

"A menorah?" I said, thrilled. "Of course. I'd be happy to get you one." That same day, we ran over to the store nearest us. We would have bought her any menorah she wanted. She chose a lovely one, and the Game Boy saga was over as if it had vanished into thin air. We left the store in high spirits.

*(The Game Boy episode is only cited to illustrate the importance of confidence in parental authority, not to portray the pros and cons of Game Boy.)

Confidence in our authority

We hear a lot about parental authority.

However, it's confidence in parental authority that we need to emphasize. How does belief in our authority (or lack thereof) affect the family dynamic? Why have we lost this essential confidence in our day and age? And most importantly, how can we regain it?

"And the Lord answered Moses, 'Single out Joshua son of Nune, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him'" (Numbers 27:18).

This verse from the Bible, which uses the Hebrew verb 'lismokh' (translated here: "to lay hands upon"), can help us understand the meaning of authority.

In this verse, Moses lays his hand on Joshua to empower him as the next leader of Israel. The word 'smikhut' means 'ordination' - delegating authority or appointing someone to be the authority figure in one's stead.

To return to parental authority, let's remember who authorized us to be parents. Who appointed us to this significant task? The obvious answer that we tend not to be sufficiently aware of in everyday life is God. As the Talmud tells us: "There are three partners in the creation of a person: the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother."

Let's stop to contemplate what this three-way partnership means.

Partnership

What kind of person do we look for when we look for a business partner? Presumably, someone of good character, hardworking, trustworthy, as close as possible to perfect. After all, we entrust this person with our name, money, and reputation. Choosing a partner is done carefully and cautiously to ensure that the partner carries out his role in the company in the best possible way.

The same is true for the partnership we speak of here.

God, the Supreme Ordainer, has chosen us as His partners and entrusted us with His most precious possessions - His children. He has authorized us to fill this role and trusts us to carry out our duties properly. We have the abilities, as well as a heart and a brain, to do the job well, and we deserve this trust. And if God has decided that we are up to the task, it means we are.

Think about it: If every cat and sheep knows how to raise their offspring, why shouldn't we? Parenting is an essential skill that is natural and intuitive. We are born with it. It is not something we have to learn. We don't need guidance and instructions. If

God granted us the physical ability to bring children into the world, he must have also given us the mental and emotional abilities to raise them properly.

As a parenting counselor, I have become intimately acquainted with hundreds of mothers. Sadly, finding a mother who is entirely confident in her role as a leader and in her ability to teach and guide is infrequent. Most mothers feel that they are not good enough. This is true even of older, experienced mothers, who are also afflicted with guilt and uncertainty; they often ask me if I think they acted wisely or are "doing it right."

If parenting is a natural skill and divinely ordained, how have we reached the point of becoming so unsure of ourselves?

Our grandmothers

A generation or two ago, the situation was completely different. Parents followed their hearts and trusted their natural intuition. They didn't second guess themselves, constantly wondering if they were right or wrong.

Our grandmothers, who came from Morocco, Yemen, or Europe, were not wracked by guilt. They didn't ponder whether moving or relocating would intimidate the children; they didn't constantly ask themselves if they were giving their kids enough 'quality time.' They didn't go to workshops or read child-rearing manuals. They didn't seek advice or agonize over what to do. They simply raised their children without worrying about them becoming traumatized or deprived.

Our grandmothers didn't drive the children to extracurricular activities or feel obliged to entertain them. They were occupied either in the kitchen or at the clothesline. While the children played jump rope or games with sticks, they were plucking chicken feathers, dragging heavy baskets from the market, mending clothes, or knitting sweaters. They raised the children with hard work and devotion, sans extensive and expensive outings, activities, therapies.

Helicopter parents

Unlike our grandmothers, who weren't preoccupied with "child development" because they were busy with life, home, and livelihood duties, we are over our heads in the pursuit of raising the ideal, happy, successful child.

We attend parenting workshops and read countless books on child-rearing. We are involved in their school activities, do their homework with (or for) them, are aware of their test schedule better than them, and open our wallets freely for private tutors. We decorate their rooms, purchase cell phones on demand, and supply them with games galore. We sit and play with them, spend hours at the playground, and buy massive quantities of clothing and accessories. We pay a fortune on extracurricular activities and chauffeur them back and forth. We organize fancy birthday parties, take them on trips and vacations, and readily supply constant entertainment and activities.

We invest not only in their material well-being but also in their emotional and personal development. We are super-tolerant parents who sit with our children for hours on end. We listen

to them, validate, and respect them. We give them their 'space' and are prepared to accept their moods and whims. We send them for emotional or psychological therapies and strive to fulfill their wishes. When, since Adam and Eve, have there ever been such attentive parents who do so much and give so much to their children? How did it come to be that we are so inundated with parental guilt?

A load of guilt

If we think about it, we see that no matter what we do with or for our children, somehow, it never seems enough. It is frightening to discover that we can invest so much yet still carry a heavy load of guilt over our parenting skills every day.

In the morning, we can't forgive ourselves for rushing to get to work on time. It seems to us that we need to be patient and spend more time preparing special lunches. We beat ourselves up for not helping the child prepare for his test or forgetting to sign the teacher's note. We feel we haven't said goodbye lovingly enough.

At noon, we feel guilty again because the children have to heat the food themselves or because we worry that the food isn't nutritious or varied enough. If the child complains, we will quickly offer alternatives and try to "do better" next time.

In the afternoon, we feel bad that we're exhausted and didn't work with them on their activity books or take them to the park. And in the evening, we feel guilty again because we were too worn out and tired to read them a story...

And what happens at night when the kids go to sleep? Do our feelings of guilt go to bed with them? On the contrary, we feel