

Parenting in the Parsha

פרשת קרח

Give 'em a Peace of Your Mind

וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב ויאמרו לא נעלה: המעט כי העליתנו מארץ זבת חלב ודבש להמיתנו במדבר כי-תשתרר עלינו גם-השתרר:

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come!

Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us?

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, סופה להתקיים. ושאינה לשם שמים, אין סופה להתקיים. איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, וז מחלוקת הלל ושמאי. ושאינה לשם שמים, וז מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

Every argument that is for (the sake of) heaven's name, it is destined to endure. But if it is not for (the sake of) heaven's name -- it is not destined to endure. What is (an example of an argument) for (the sake of) heaven's name? The argument of Hillel and Shammai. What is (an example of an argument) not for (the sake of) heaven's name? The argument of Korach and all of his congregation.

- Avos 5:17

Peace is not absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.

Ronald Reagan

You will fight with your children. That is not a threat, but a promise of what will come. There will be times that you will need to assert your parental authority over your child's will. He or she may become angry. Conflict will ensue. There will be times that your child or teen feels the need to assert his independence and the sparks will fly. Conflict between parents and children is a natural, healthy part of growing up. It's also an important teachable moment.

When we engage in conflict with our children, we aren't just fighting with them, we are teaching them how to fight. How we resolve our conflicts with our children will become the skills that they acquire in conflict resolution. If we attempt to resolve our conflicts by asserting our power over them, they will attempt to use their power to resolve the conflicts in their lives. If we yell and scream in anger, they will too, and if we storm off in a huff followed by the silent treatment, they will learn to do the same. Use your points of friction with your children as opportunities to teach conflict resolution.

Moshe and *Korach* are polar opposites when it comes to conflict and conflict resolution. Korach wants to fight. Moshe wants a peaceful solution. Moshe wants to discuss the issue at hand; Korach wants to fold in every slight and perceived wrong for all time. Moshe wants to attack the problem; Korach wants to attack Moshe. The divergence is driven home in the wording of the *mishna* in *Avos* that declares the *machlokes* of Korach and his congregation to be an insincere conflict that will not endure. The *mishna* seemingly mischaracterizes the conflict as between Korach and his followers when, in fact, it was a fight between Korach and Moshe. The *Mishna*, though, is very particular in its language. This wasn't a fight between Moshe and Korach. Moshe did not want to fight. He wanted a peaceful resolution. The only ones fighting here were Korach and his followers as they talked right past Moshe's attempts at resolution.

Our job as parents is to teach our kids to fight like Moshe and not like Korach. Our homes and the actual fights that we have with our children (and our spouses) become the real-life laboratory for us to teach our children the skills of conflict resolution. How do we do that? By setting the example and the tone.

We need to avoid ad-hominem attacks, sticking to the issues rather than hurling complaints at and about people. Speak softly and gently, focused on making peace, not war. Seek to understand the viewpoint of your adversary, even if that adversary is your child, before you seek to have them understand yours. (Repeating back the point your child makes in an argument in order to make sure you understood him correctly is great behavior to model for the child to one day imitate.) Identify and discuss potential solutions and try to come up with one that is mutually agreeable. Show your child how to disagree without being disagreeable, never resorting to nastiness, snide remarks, or sarcasm.

It is much quicker and easier in the short run to simply outshout or outrank your child in any conflict. But, the short-term gain will be a significant long-term loss. Should you choose, instead, to spend the time investing in your child's conflict resolution skills, your short-term loss will amount to a very long-term gain, and your future daughter-in-law or son-in-law will be very appreciative!

Good Shabbos,

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