

Matot – Masei

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When I first read the parshiyot for this week, I wasn't exactly sure how I would write a sermon. In Matot and Masei, we learn about various rules and restrictions. They don't all relate to each other completely, but they all discuss detailed information.

So what can we learn from this? How can we relate this information to our modern lives? To begin with, before we had psychologists, therapists and social workers, Hashem helped us realize the importance of structure and boundaries. There is a constant discussion about how we raise our children these days. With so many different view points, it is hard to know how to do what is best. We all want to have healthy, happy, successful children. We want them to have good manners, behave well, treat others nicely. We want them to be mensches. In addition, parents want kids to have high self esteem and confidence. But, do we accomplish these goals by restricting every move? Do we treat them as equals so they feel important? Do we let them have independence to thrive and learn from their own experiences? Helicopter moms, Crunchy moms, Zen moms, Career moms, these are just a few of the labels that have been used to describe the many different parenting styles.

In the book, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*, author, Wendy Mogel discusses raising children in modern society. She uses biblical references, religious views and psychology to make her recommendations. I received this book when I had

my first son, Asher. It was my first installment from PJ library. I remember reading it and thinking, “how am I going to remember all this as he gets older.” The book had such an impact on me, that I have recommended it to almost all new parents. If the parents are not Jewish, I even give the disclaimer to try to ignore the Jewish background and to just learn from the lessons without the religious twist.

This book reminds me of our Torah portion. Kids NEED rules. They need boundaries. Even if they don’t realize it themselves, it is our responsibility, as parents, to provide the safety found with structure. Hashem is our parent, as a Jewish people. He provides protection throughout our lives. At the time our ancestors were getting ready to enter The Promised Land, he gave them extra security in the way of structure, rules, and guidance. There are always the kids who rebel, but, they are usually worse off if parents give in. It is scary for children to have too much freedom and can cause anxiety and problems later on. Wendy Mogel spends a lot of time talking about providing the structure for success, while also recognizing societal norms. We have to respect our community. What is acceptable in part of the country may not be acceptable in another. There are many levels to rules and regulations. The ones that our children must follow from us, but also the ones from the many levels of our communities and society as a whole.

Elie, my younger son, likes to tell me that I’m mean. My response is, “I know! That is my job.” Adam, my husband, and I often explain to our children that we wouldn’t be good parents if we didn’t make them do certain things even if they

don't like it. It is our job, our responsibility to ensure they grow up to be good adults. To do that, we have to set rules and stick to them. We may not like seeing them sad or angry. It hurts more than they know to see them cry. In the end, it would hurt so much more if we did not provide them with structure and boundaries.

What about rules for adults? We become independent as we get older, but we still must abide by rules and laws. These may include governmental laws, unwritten rules pertaining social behavior, regulations and policies at work and many more. We mature and our brain develops better impulse control, but as humans we always need some form of structure. The laws of the Torah may not all be relevant in modern times, but they remind us that Hashem has provided a scaffolding to build upon. Societal norms are important. They may be important for us to follow or for us to work hard to change. The same is true for laws. I'm often told that I'm a "rule follower". On the other hand, I know a lot of people who choose on their own which rules they follow. This usually is guided by whether or not they agree with the rule. In the parshiyot, there is no "opt out" option. Just like today, we can work to change laws we disagree with, but we don't get to decide if we have to follow them. If a person gets ticketed or arrested for breaking the law, she can't argue, but it was a stupid law".

Although I may not completely understand or even agree with all the details in the current parshiyot, I respect Hashem taking care of his children. I look at it like parents raising children. We may not get everything perfect, our kids may not follow everything we teach. In the end, though, we still need to provide the rules

and they still need to feel the safety and security those rules impart upon them.

This continues throughout our lives as even adults are the children of Hashem and our elders. Rules are made to be challenged and questioned, but not broken.

Shabbat shalom!