



# Ask The Rabbi...

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This edition contains:

1. Torah: A Censorship Dilemma
2. Answer to Last Week's Riddle

Mrs. Goldman on CompuServe wrote,

*I recently purchased a Chumash, written in simple English specifically for children at the request of my five year old daughter, in order to read the Parsha with her every week. Though we know that everything in the Torah is Kadosh (holy), I am discovering that the text without the meforshim (commentaries) and an adult perspective is surprisingly unsuitable for a child: After Bereishis, one quickly encounters (on the surface) what we understand to be killing, lying, deception, punishments, and even sexual encounters. My question is about Torah, Chinuch (education) and children: How do I explain that everything in the Torah is unquestionably holy, while at the same time I find myself telling my daughter that many parts of the Parsha are really not suitable for her now?*

Dear Mrs. Goldman,

You make a point which I believe is the very seed of the answer to your question. You said that if you teach the Torah to your daughter *without the commentaries and without an adult perspective* then all sorts of problems can arise. I couldn't agree with you more and that's why you must use both when you teach Torah to your children.

*Kedusha* is the right word to use in the context of our discussion, because *kedusha* means elevating the mundane. In this case you take concepts which appear mundane or even sinful, and after careful study, discover their *kedusha*. In this way the Torah mimics the world around us, which often looks decadent and criminal but is, after unraveling its many layers, pure holiness.

I spoke at length about your question with Rabbi Nachman Bulman, *shlita*, and he commented along the following lines: Much of our sense of the inappropriateness of subject matter mentioned in the Torah is because we have been influenced by the attitude of society at large. If our first contact with these ideas had come from the teaching of Torah with the proper sensitivity and *kedusha*, not only would we not find them offensive, but those teachings would inoculate us against the unhealthy attitude of those around us.

There is a way to teach every section of the Torah to children. For example, you come to the section where Moshe kills the Egyptian. You have a dilemma: Isn't it wrong to kill? Instead of just leaving the whole thing to your child's imagination, you

can develop the concept of the importance of life and helping others, and say, "Hashem wants there to be many people in the world." Then move to how terrible it would be to kill someone, unless Hashem wants this. At this point you mention that Moshe knew that Hashem wanted him killed, and only then did he kill him.

If, however, you have not yet found an appropriate way to teach a certain concept to your child, then skip it. If your child is not ready for a concept in the form you plan to present it, you don't have to teach it. Just remember that when you don't teach it, it's because you haven't thought of a method for doing so, and not because it's intrinsically improper.

Something else to keep in mind: Although you have to present things to your daughter in a way she will understand, the truth cannot be compromised. When she grows up she should say: "**Now** I understand what my mother meant," and not "This ain't what my momma told me!"

I wish you much success in your endeavor.

This discussion calls to mind a joke:

A mother brought her son to school for the first time, and before he entered the class she gave him a last minute pep talk.

*"O.K. now sweetheart you be a good boy. Remember sweetheart, you do everything the teacher tells you. Don't be worried sweetheart, I'll pick you up right after class. Are you ready, sweetheart? Let's go in."*

Later in the day the Mother picked up her son and gave him a big hug.

*"How was it sweetheart? What did you learn?"*

Her son looked up at his mother with a look of consternation on his face and replied:

*"I learned...that my name is **Moishe** and not **Sweetheart!**"*

Sources:

- Malbim - Vayikra 19.
- Shiurei Da'at.
- Avotot Ahava pp.83-84.

## Answer to Last Week's riddle!

Question: Where in the prayers do you find four different, consecutive words that all have the same roof?

The answer was sent in by Rabbi Yitzchak Tzvi Freeman, an instructor at the Jewish Free School of London, England:

In *Nishmat Kol Chai* of the Shabbat davening, it reads *M'Aluf Elef Alfei Alafim* — ...one of the thousand thousand, thousands of thousands... (p. 402 in the ArtScroll Siddur).

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to ohr@jer1.co.il. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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