

Rabbi Levi Brachman
at Evergreen
March 16, 2012

Draft final

- Good Shabas. A pleasure to be here.
- Rabbi asked me to talk for 20-25 minutes. Keeping a lawyer on such a short leash is a form of cruel and very unusual punishment
- How do we parents talk about things that matter to our children? How we talk about moral and values and ethics?
- I share some insights gleaned from over 20 years in the classroom in Denver area elementary and middle schools.
- I've created a structure for talking with children about important matters.
- The most effective way for me to share my thoughts is through the words of the children I've taught and the narratives and stories I've discussed.
- Listen to the beauty and poetry of the words from little children
- Start: be our size!
- Talk softly; don't tell us what to think; tell us why we should think it; don't worry about being perfect—we know we mess up too
- We want to create what I describe as a culture of conversation, so that your words are expected, valued and welcome
- Think of the concept of habit: Aristotle wrote, "Excellence then is not an act but a habit." We create a habit of talking.
- I never underestimate these little folks
- Reide: you know what I like about the way you teach? You don't treat us like children. I shared that comment with other fifth grade classes. Responses were dazzling: yeah, I hate being talked down to; it's like getting a kids menu. Yeah, I hate kids menus.
- Honor them the most: put your arm around them and simply ask, "what's your opinion?" What do you think? That makes me feel

important, they tell me. That makes me feel respected. That makes me feel loved.

- How does a child spell love? T I M E
- How do we teach values? How make stronger?
- Life is not easy. We parents would do well to make our children stronger than to try to make their worlds easier
- Doing good is not easy. Doing good requires analytical skill, moral values, self discipline, commitment, often it requires standing up in opposition to others. Anyone that tells a child that doing good is easy weakens that child.
- We must address large issues.. big issues.. cyber bullying; salacious internet material, anti Semitism, on and on
- Drunk friend
 - Outsourcing morality
 - Concepts of friendship, popularity
 - What kind of person think it through...
 - Whether one person or one million people disagree has nothing to do with the morality of your opinion
- Be assertive and be confident in your values. The world goes to the confident.
- Of course, have the humility to question.. gee, one million people disagree, I wonder why? Then get the answers
- Search for truth; morality is based on truth, but truth is not an end in itself.. it is a springboard for action
- Children want you to talk to them: find topics: lady in the S Platte.. Temple Sinai Brotherhood a few years ago dad came up to me.. gee, I never thought of that.. to talk about it...see life as metaphors..
- Let's assess our position as parents: we are competing against the world for moral authority. Every day we are being tested. We are up against extraordinary opponents.. our integrity, credibility, our stature is challenged.. and risks being undermined, and our authority transferred to someone else

- Nature abhors a vacuum... well so do children. Either parents teach them their values or the void will be filled by others.
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- Dad and the chemicals: Dad recently identified his son on a surveillance video of a robbery and persuaded his son to turn himself in.
- Children respect that.... They respected the parents even when they disagreed with the action
- Your words are important: your rhetoric. Words often carry moral content.
- Diversity. A bad idea doesn't become a good idea just because it is believed by diverse people.
- Sincere: a foolish action does not become a wise action just because it was sincerely done. My college professor.. sincere.. a cockroach trying to get out of a flooding bathtub is sincere..
- Here's a word that really bugs me: Tolerance. Doesn't say much. You tolerate something. You put up with it. Tolerance is not based on values. It is not based on judgment. It's based on dealing with an annoyance. And then tolerance changes into other characteristics. Tolerance becomes indifference, standing by, and then it becomes aiding and abetting. And you don't have to be a survivor of Auschwitz, as was Eli Wiesel, to observe that tolerance always favors the aggressor, never the victim.
- But the word is so valued in our culture now and the fact that it is valued shows how trivial and unthinking our culture is becoming
- This is not to say these words should never be used. It is to say that these words have limited value. Know the limitations. Use your words wisely
- My conclusion: the family: the most important fundamental institution for creating virtue and passing on a legacy of virtue
- Shlom Bayit peace in the home Rabbi Zwerin spoke of it in his Kol Nidre sermon more than a decade ago... I never forgot... describes a peace derived from respect and strength and love.

- Where we discuss our most troubling and difficult thoughts in an environment of trust and love and safety. A safe harbor.
- Don't worry about your talking skills; your reasoning skills; changing your mind after later reflection. Whether your skills are somewhere between a silent movie and the Rain Man, remember this: your children want YOU
- We talk with love...
- From the movie *Love Story*, the signature line: "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Few phrases move the hand to the air sickness bag more quickly. You must say you're sorry, particularly to those you love.
- We judge, because we have a moral duty to judge... the disease of non judgmentalism is helping to destroy this once great culture... but in the family, we judge with love... and with peace.

Thank you
MGS

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