



נעימות החיים
Ne'imas HaChaim Project
In memory of Naama Markovits A"H
לע"נ נעמה חנה ע"ה ב"ר יהודה איסר נ"י



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שבת פרשת נצבים-וילך כ"ה אלול תש"ע

Lesson #4: Fair Play

(Prepared by Eliyahu Freeman)

“When the pitcher has the ball, the runner has to stop, right?” My son knew the rules of the game far better than I did, considering backyard kickball was the sport he spent his afternoons perfecting this past summer. The truth is honesty has always been very crucial to me. As the game neared its end, I put my arm around my son and said in a gentle tone, “Son, when you play, you have to play fair.” He knew the drill. It’s not as if this was the first time we have had this conversation. He smiled at me and I smiled back.

That week, as I approached the Expressway on my way home from work, the hunger I was experiencing had reached new heights. I rushed out of the house that morning having eaten almost no breakfast. Lunch also got lost in the shuffle. I was also exhausted from a previous night of insufficient sleep. As I neared the exit for the Expressway, I could see that there was bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Expressway and there was a long line of cars waiting in the exit lane. “Okay,” I thought, “at least let me minimize whatever traffic I can - instead of getting in line now with the rest of these cars, I will just sneak in at the front - right before the exit.” I normally feel uncomfortable about doing this in order to avoid a Chillul Hashem, but under the circumstances I viewed this as a Mitzvah D’Oraisa

I zoomed ahead as far as I could, waiting right before the exit until a good Samaritan would be so kind as to let me in, but the drivers were not budging. It was at that moment that I was dealt one of the greatest Mussar lessons that I ever experienced. A window rolled down and a face emerged with a pained expression similar mine. The words struck me like an arrow, “Hey buddy - didn’t anyone ever teach you to play fair?!”

There I was trying to teach my son the rules to live by and I then go ahead and disregard them. This Shaliach stung me with the same words that I had so confidently used just a few days earlier. Was it not Hashgacha that he chose my phrase as opposed to the numerous other expletives in his arsenal?

People tend to bend the rules, or break them slightly when something they need or want is just out of their reach. It usually is accompanied by some justification; that nobody is really getting hurt or that other people also don’t always play fair. Yet, for some reason those justifications seem inadequate when offered by children. Unfortunately our society tolerates, and even admires, those who succeed by avoiding the limitations of the rules. The culture may say that if you’re not caught it’s not a crime, but we know differently.

I realized that afternoon on the Van Wyck Expressway that “when you play, you have to play fair” is an outlook in life that transcends beyond the backyard kickball game, but invariably will extend into one’s adulthood in the form of traffic jams, leaving one’s shopping cart for only a moment on the check-out line, double-parking for “just a second” while running into the bank to use the ATM, taking a few extra helpings of lunch before someone else has a chance to take his first, etc.

The Gemara applies the pasuk of Midvar Sheker Tirchak to many aspects of court order, for example not bringing false witnesses who have no intention of testifying, as a means to intimidate the other litigant. The secular world would laud the attorney who used such a means to win a case. Playing fair as it applies to living our lives means always remembering that our every action is significant in the eyes of Hashem.