

Septelul is coming . . .

Well, it's that time of year, the letters have gone out announcing nit check and bus schedules. It all reminds us of one painful, guilt ridden thought; we never had our kids do any of their summer homework! I shouldn't assume that just because I am inept in this area means that the rest of you share this weakness, but keep reading and I'm sure you'll find something to relate to in the article anyway. The bigger problem than not having done the homework is the way we make ourselves and our kids feel about it. Notice I carefully selected the words "make ourselves feel" rather than just saying "feel". We have the power to be in charge of our feelings and, yes, we often (unnecessarily) "make" ourselves feel a certain way.

Summer homework is important from an educational perspective. The kids' skills wane without practice and so more review is needed at the beginning of the school year to bring them up to snuff. I know this, and I believe it, so my lack of enforcing its performance is not a public display of defiance to the educational establishments in general or a strike against the teachers in particular. It is just life. Camp carpools, sunny days with late night bedtimes, visiting relatives, swimming, etc., they all get in the way of this all important task. If we get flustered about this as the school year approaches, we bring about a domino effect of negative feelings. Firstly, we deflate the excitement that we and our kids have built up doing these fun activities over the summer and spoil our memories. Secondly, we set a tone of panic in our kids who now assume that they are going to fail the entire upcoming school year because of it.

How do we recoup our losses? (Now this sounds like a financial advice column.) There are two important philosophical points that we can teach our children about the missed work. First and foremost, lamenting about a missed opportunity does nothing but create a sense of hopelessness that negatively impacts our past, present and future. Putting this in kids' lingo, feeling overly bad about something that we can no longer fix to the point of becoming grumpy, does just that. It makes us grumpy. When we are grumpy we don't feel good about anything we did well yesterday, anything we're doing well today, and have no energy to even try to do anything well tomorrow. The second message is this: It's never too late to try! We can still teach our children that the idea of review is an important one. They are not going to earn all of the points or prizes that their teachers have promised for doing all of their work, but they can still accomplish something by sitting down to read a book, daven a few kapitlach of Tehillim and borrow money to practice math skills. Have them select a book that will be engaging enough to them to actually want to read it and short enough that they actually will. Obviously different age children require different levels of books, miforshim and amounts of money with which to practice. Try sending your teenager to the grocery for you and see how shocked they are at the cost of food.

I am one who uses and reuses items to their max. I am a garage sale buyer and one who recycles my stuff to the local tzedaka thrift store, Nearly New. With that in mind, let's use the lessons of summer work to the max and recycle them for other uses. With the advent of September has also come the advent of Elul. While it might seem disrespectful to have put the mundane discussion before the

Holy, human nature is that it is easier to accept less, all-encompassing changes than loftier ones. You needed to “buy” the earlier discussion first to be able to move on to this next one. I could practically recopy the first paragraph but change it slightly to read: “It all reminds us of one painful, guilt ridden thought; we never worked on the middos we said we’d work on this year. . . we never did our spiritual homework!” Enter the Satan, stage left, who mimics paragraph three and tells us: “Lament about a missed opportunity and create a sense of hopelessness that will negatively impact your past, present and future.”

How do we “earn our points” at this point? How do we “improve our spiritual skills and bring them up to snuff”? Remember the lessons of the summer homework: Read a book, daven a few kapitlach of Tehillim and practice your money skills. Choose a book, or Sefer, to help you change your life that is inspiring and of interest particularly to you. Different authors, or Michabrim, have different learning styles. Select one that is engaging enough to you to actually want to learn it and short enough that you actually will (to quote paragraph three). Working on our davening, bringing ourselves closer to Hashem, is always important. Seriously, if you are not a daily Tehillim sayers, try one or two a day between now and Yom Kippur. The opportunity to use our money to give Tzedaka tends to find its way right to our door step at this time of year. Take advantage of it. As we know, Torah, Avodah and Gemilus Chasadim hold up the world! Let’s make sure to review this and use our summer lessons to their fullest.

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She loves to hear from you and about how you
are working on your summer homework and
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