

## Because I Said So

By Mariashi Groner, director,  
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Our sages teach us that there is nothing extraneous and redundant in the Torah. Every letter, vowel, or dot has a reason and a lesson for us. So, there is no question that every mitzvah and type of mitzvah commanded in the Torah has a reason and a purpose.

I have always wondered about the category of mitzvot called *Chukim*. In the Torah the 613 mitzvot can be divided into three categories, the first being *Mishpatim*, laws that are logical and easy to understand. They are also laws that one would typically see in a well-run, responsible community. In an ordered society one would not even need these laws included in the Torah.

The second category is *Edut*, laws that are seen as testimonials, reminders of events, miracles and history. Mitzvot connected to Shabbat, Sukkot, Pesach and others like them are all categorized as *Edut*. Once again, there is a rationale connected to these. As humans we like to mark time, experiences and memories.

However, the third category, as I mentioned above, is *Chukim*, laws that absolutely make no sense and at times defy logic. There is no rhyme, reason or method (as we know it) to these mitzvot. Kashrut (following kosher dietary laws), *Shatnez* (not wearing wool and linen together), and others like these are all *Chukim*.

So, back to my original question: What is the reason and purpose for laws that really don't make sense? They are laws that we follow just because God said so. In modern society that can cause discomfort. We are a free, democratic society. We believe that nobody has a right to tell us what to do, unless we understand why we have to do it. When our children misbehave or make bad choices, we are advised to talk, explain and reason. So how does the inclusion of *Chukim* type laws teach us about our life-style today?

I am not suggesting that there should be no reason, explanation or logic in the choices we make. In fact, I believe that the methodology of teaching discipline, rather than disciplining children, is an improvement over how educators have managed their classrooms and schools in the past. Educators often use global behavior management plans. But ... I remember the year that I threw these plans out in favor of individualized plans as needed for each child's specific learning style and emotional make up. Lots of conversations, self-reflection, and reasoning takes place. There is an opportunity for understanding and common sense.

However, it must be that since the Torah contains commandments that have no apparent reason, there is a place for those commandments in our lives, too. Parents and educators today are often uncomfortable with the

"because I said so" reason. We need to reconsider this discomfort. There are times when children should do something simply because they were told to by a responsible adult. I believe that often our reasoning is too abstract and confusing for children to consider, and they would rather that we just make the decision for them. When we do not take this responsibility we leave them feeling unsafe and uncared for.

Wendy Mogel writes, "Children are not our equals, and they don't want to be. It's important to start teaching that you are the Boss when they are very young, and to keep reminding them until they're old enough to leave home."

Take a look at the Ten Commandments. The first one states very clearly, "I am your Lord, your God, you will have no other gods besides me." He is the authority. He is the "Boss." In the same way, we should tell our children, "We are your parents; we have a responsibility to raise you as a productive human being, and you will do as we say, because we said so." The negotiations that

take place between parents and children — and I am embarrassed to admit, in my home, too — are counterintuitive and counterproductive.

Also, in the Ten Commandments we are told to honor our parents. Interestingly, it does not tell us to love our parents. That is, in and of itself, a lesson. The Torah is not concerned whether or not we love our parents, as much as it is concerned that we give them honor because they are our parents. There is no other reason. There are many parent-child relationships that do not seem to war-

rant honor, and yet the Torah commands us to honor them just because.

Let us put the original order back as it was intended. Let's teach our children honor, respect and obedience to authority. The hierarchy in a family is important; it clearly identifies each family member's place. Children embrace structure, defined boundaries and clearly articulated expectations. So if your children ask you why you are making changes that they think are too strict or unfair, you can just tell them, "Because I said so." ☆

## Morah Donna Receives Graduate Certificate in Jewish Education

Donna deGroot, who teaches 3rd and 5th grades Hebrew and Judaica, has recently completed her Graduate Certificate in Jewish Education at Baltimore Hebrew University (now integrated into Towson University.) When asked why she chose to spend two and a half years in this intensive program, she replied that she wanted to formalize and validate her teaching experience and knowledge. Donna holds a Bachelor's Degree from UNC, Chapel Hill, in sociology and psychology, an RN certificate from a nursing school in Israel, and a Masters Degree in maternal and child health from USC, Columbia.

Ten years ago, after working and teaching in many areas of nursing, Donna decided that her

true goal in life was to be an excellent Hebrew and Judaica teacher. While simultaneously teaching at CJDS and Hebrew High and directing the religious school of Temple Emmanuel of Gastonia, Donna learned about many new curricula and attended many workshops and mini-courses. She has always utilized and improved upon the latest cutting-edge material.

Some of Morah Donna's favorite courses of study were: learning to integrate special needs students in Jewish studies; comparative prayer, where she studied the siddurim and philosophies of the various Jewish movements; and the history of Jewish education in Holland. The most inspiring part of the program was Donna's independent study in Israel, where she found new ways to teach about Israel in a positive light.

After several frantic years of checking the syllabus on Tuesdays, reading everything on Shabbat, and writing academic papers every Sunday and Monday, Donna claims that she is finished with formal schooling. Only time will tell if this is true. Meanwhile, CJDS is proud of Donna's constant quest for knowledge, and we wish her many more fruitful years on our staff. ☆



Morah Donna deGroot celebrates receiving her graduate certificate in Jewish education.


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