

Treating Children Equally

I just spent an enjoyable Yom Tov with my siblings, and in discussion, the following argument ensued. Our parents have always made it a point that 'what is for one, is for all' and worked hard to ensure that every child received the exact same treatment.

This meant that, if they treated one couple with a trip to Eretz Yisroel, or any other gift, then they would do the same for the other married children. It turned out that there was much resentment amongst my siblings towards this approach.

Many of them said that they would have preferred help when they asked for it, and that, since every child has different needs and wants, parents shouldn't have a uniform system of helping all of them.

My own children are teenagers and I am growing worried. I have three children that want to go to sleepaway camp, but one whose Rebbeim insist that he *must* go- normally, I would have sent all three, just to be fair, though it's a financial strain. Now, I am rethinking it and wondering if I can just send the one who needs to go and explain that to the others- they have unique needs too.

I hope I am making sense and that my question is clear.

Your question can certainly fall into *maaseh avos siman l'bonim*. We must learn from the story of Yaakov and the extra coat that he gave to Yosef, not to be more generous with one child than with the others. Equal treatment of children, even of grown-up siblings, is a crucial factor in *shalom* and in helping to maintain high standards of character

I am not sure what you and your siblings meant when you said that your parents "shouldn't have a uniform system of helping all of them". Do you mean that each child should have received the exact same gift e.g. a trip to Israel; or do you mean that each child should receive the same value of gift? If for example, one sibling needs cash to make his mortgage payment and would rather exchange his gifted trip to Israel for that amount, then he should be allowed to do so. All of the siblings should be aware that the individual gifts are of the same value, and that the parents have treated the siblings the same. Therefore no animosity would ensue. However, if your parents insisted that each child receive the same, exact gift, then I fully disagree with your parents.

In your present situation, if you and the Rebbe truly believe your child must go to a sleepaway camp, then you should explain to your other children, as best you can, the special needs their sibling has which requires him to have this experience. Your explanation should not compromise the child's privacy in any way. You should also explain that the financial situation at this time does not allow you to send all three to a sleepaway camp. However, it will be made up to them at a later date when the situation eases either by sending one child at a time to camp or in some other comparable fashion. It is important to maintain transparency. No child should ever be told to keep secret a gift from his parents which was not given to any other child. There is no such thing as a secret in this world.

Your children might not understand your actions in sending their sibling to camp because of their emotional involvement and because we live in an era of instant gratification. It is very hard to be "put on hold" when it comes to a gift. In the long run, they will come to terms with it and will not resent your seemingly preferential treatment of their sibling.