

FINDING THE *Joy*

TEMMI HADAR

I took one of my kids to the park this afternoon for some much needed one-on-one time.

Therefore I'm in the running for Mother of the Year. Definitely. By the way, I'm all for self-awarded awards in the parenting arena. It's not like anyone else is gonna give you any recognition. But I digress.

So I am at the park, and I am chatting with a friend. She's there with her toddler. He's adorably dressed. She looks calm and put together.

I ask her how everything's going. Candidly she tells me that things are good now, but for the first few months after her second child was born life was hard with two kids under 18 months.

I agreed with her and we both chatted a little bit about how challenging having little kids close in age can be.

A stranger looking at us chatting in the park might think we have our lives, or at least our parenting, under control.

But let's all be honest for a minute.

Parenting is hard work.

I'm not even talking about the agony that some of us need to go through to even become a parent but rather those dark moments as a parent where we look at ourselves and think *who is this person?*

The thing is no one else is around when you are at your worst, so no one sees that side of parenting.

No one is there at 4 a.m. when we finally wake up our husbands who are sleeping blissfully, shouting like a lunatic that if he doesn't wake up and take care of this child and let you sleep you will lose your mind.

Or at 6 p.m. when you hide yourself in the bathroom, sobbing hysterically, because you are sure you just scared your children for life after you told them, in a voice so loud that you are hoarse, that if they don't put their toys away you will literally throw each one in the garbage, after first



breaking each one.

Or the times when your dinner after the children are finally asleep consists of picking at your children's leftovers and some leftover cookie dough microwaved in a mug for a minute.

Or when you look in the mirror and don't recognize the person with dark under-eye circles, grey in her hair and enough wrinkles to warrant oh-my-goodness-I-look-like-my-bubby. I'm not even getting into the body that exists below the neck.

Our darkest moments in parenting are usually when we are alone. (That's probably *why* they are the darkest.)

There's always that thought in our head, and usually some irritating person to voice it as well, that this isn't what we signed up for. Why are we doing this again?

But you know something? It's okay. It's okay to say that parenting is hard. It's okay that sometimes you are just trying to make it through the day. It's okay if you don't love every minute of it.

You know why?

Because in my 30 years of living I have yet to encounter something of value, something meaningful, something important that isn't also difficult and challenging.

And we can still be good parents, and even great parents, while admitting that it's hard. Lonely. Crushing, at times.

Of course it is. It is supposed to be. You get a helpless barely human seven-pound creature and somehow 18 years later you are supposed to present a fully functional adult to the world.

At the end of the day, the

most challenging part of parenting is accepting that we are not in control of the outcome. We can be amazing parents and have enormous challenges as parents. Conversely, there are people who have horrible childhoods and become remarkable adults. *G-d is in control*. To embrace that idea requires enormous faith.

Ultimately, I believe that our most difficult children and our hardest parenting decisions force us to dig deep within our own selves and become better human beings. To constantly check and reevaluate our priorities and our values.

In the seven years (tonight!) that I've been a mother I know that I am an infinitely more patient and tolerant human being than I used to be.

This afternoon I fetched my son from school and parked in the back parking lot.

Mommy, I thought this is only for the teachers to park, my three-year-old asks me.

No, I reassure him, in the afternoon moms can park here too.

It's sometimes hard to remember that G-d watches everything we do. But I've got my little humans in the back seat to remind me of it, because they notice and question everything I do, and at the

end of the day, I've got to be that example for them.

I sit here now, putting my baby to sleep. Watching his tentative first steps earlier today I can see the little boy he is turning into.

We think we are shaping and molding our children into human beings. We are. But more than that, it's our kids who make us into better people.

So let's embrace the hardship. It's okay to recognize that parenting is hard. Almost impossible. Because then it means it matters. And that you care enough to want to do it right. ❧



Temmi Hadar, born and raised on shlichus in Seattle, is now living about a million miles away

in Johannesburg, South Africa. This is the fifth installment of her column, "Finding the Joy," in which she ponders the meaning of life while perpetually sleep-deprived and attempting to juggle the roles of mother, wife, shlucha, teacher, writer and human being.



One day, when my kids are grown up, I'm gonna wake them up at 4:30 a.m. Not for any catastrophe, but just to share some love with them, perhaps ride a bike through their rooms at top speed. I may ask them to make me an omelet at 5 a.m., or to help me find my slippers—which are in the closet. I haven't completely decided. I'm going to do that so they can appreciate fully the fact that they are still alive and taken care of, after doing that to me for years on end.