

FINDING THE *Joy*

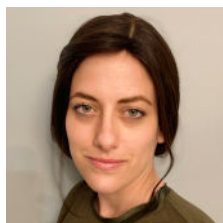
TEMMI HADAR

I didn't win any mothering awards today. It began with oatees and milk at 5:30 am, and continued in an endless day of cleaning up, serving food, changing diapers, and non-stop refereeing between the kids. As I cleaned and fed, washed faces and hands, endless lists of things that need to be done before we all head back to school ran through my head. Unable to deal with the shopping, book covering, cooking, more shopping, stationary labeling, and Shabbos prep with all four children in tow, I just focused on the most basic of all mothering tasks: keeping them all alive.

The low point of the day was at 2 pm. My kids were hot, sweaty and irritable. A friend had come over with four of her children and as we watched them swim and play, and served them lunch, and reapplied sunscreen and broke up fights and got them dressed, and undressed, and dressed again, I could see she was as tired and irritable as I was.

As she was packing up her car, I was making a peanut butter sandwich for my son and I spread the peanut butter on the bread. Before I knew what was happening, my son was face down on the floor, kicking and screaming that he wanted to spread the peanut butter himself. I tried to convince him that he could still spread the peanut butter, I handed him a knife and the jar of peanut butter, but he was so far gone into his tantrum that it seemed beyond help. I stood in the driveway opening the gate for my friend, with my son screaming beside me about peanut butter and bread and mommy you already did it, as I wave goodbye to my friend.

"Five more hours and then they are in bed, we've got this," I tell her, and she waves her hand and drives away, leaving me with my



Temmi Hadar, born and raised on shlichus in Seattle, is now living about a million miles away in Johannesburg, South Africa. In "Finding the Joy," 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.

distraught toddler.

The rest of the day continued similarly and in my head I might be screaming but I managed, through gritted teeth sometimes, to keep it together for my kids and finally it was five hours later and I was hurriedly dressing the baby after the bath so I could feed him and put him to sleep so I could run to the shop before it closes.

As I absentmindedly tried to pull on his pants while he was wriggling in the opposite direction, I noticed something.

My baby is clapping. Joyfully. It's not the first time. In fact, he's an expert clapper. He claps any time there is any music at all. But there's no music now.

But to him, eight months old yesterday, life is good, deserving of a clap. And just like that, something shifts. The irritability I've been wearing all day lifts. This is what matters. My baby is happy and clapping. And in the next room the two girls have declared they are the sharers—the sharing sisters—and have fallen asleep in the same bed.

Sometimes, we desperately want to give this magical, meaningful childhood to our kids, but in our heads we can't even find the magic and meaning ourselves. That's where our children come in. The magic is inside them and they remind us of the magic and meaning all around us. ❧