



THE **BIG BOOK** OF BEDTIME RULES

GOLDIE GROSSBAUM

There's no such thing as having bedtime down pat. And should you ever feel smug that you've gotten it down to a science, know that such thoughts do not go unpunished. The very next night will be mayhem. So if you do have a good night, keep it to yourself; don't start your consulting business just yet.

Of course there might be nights of systematic and successful bedtime—but don't be fooled into thinking you've won the bedtime war.

It's just a phase.

The good news is that although phases pass, they also come again.

Bedtime used to be a cinch when I had three little ones under three. I'd deposit them in their respective cribs while singing *Shema*, followed by a resounding *We Want Moshiach Now!*, kiss them on the nose and close the door,

all before 6:30 pm. I'd walk downstairs with the smallest hint of a smile and a tremendous feeling of success at mastering this 43-second bedtime routine. That might be against the rules in *The Big Book of Bedtime Rules*, but it worked. No long-winded story reading or songs that don't end. We did plenty of that during daytime hours.

But that phase is long gone.

Some nights just work and some nights we have what I call a Jack-in-the-box bedtime.

Because they keep popping out of bed.

The two-year-old used to love being tucked in by 6:30 and then would hang out in his crib, chatting with anyone who passed by or with himself, until eventually he'd fall asleep.

But not anymore. After a week of screaming on top of his lungs to come out and begging any favorite sibling to take him out, well, he won. Now he stays up until the next shift goes.

It's bedtime again. My husband is out giving a class so I'm heavily outnumbered. I round up the middle division (ages two to nine) and off we go upstairs. The bigger kids need to be post-*Shema* and in their beds if they want me stop in and shmooze. I make the rounds and they are all so sweet and charming.

I head downstairs, ready to tackle my to-do list of yesterday.

I hear some footsteps.

"I'm thirsty."

"Of course you're thirsty; it's bedtime! But if you were sleeping, you wouldn't be thirsty. Go get a drink."

I know, I know, I should say wait for morning. That's what *The Big Book of Bedtime Rules* says, but here in this house, sometimes saying yes is a shortcut. Please don't tell on me.

Off he goes to get a drink. Or at least it seems like he's going in that direction.

My seven-year-old appears. He's hungry.

"Ok, think about everything you'll eat for breakfast."

I hear noise in the other room.

It's my six-year-old again. He forgot he was getting a drink and is now busy looking for his marbles.

"It's bedtime. Back upstairs."

He starts giving me some lengthy explanation of the urgency of his marbles.

I remind him to tell it to me tomorrow.

Six-year-old and seven-year-old head upstairs.

And now my four-year-old joins me in the kitchen.

"Can you read me a book?"

"Of course. In the morning."

He knows there's nothing to discuss so he tries

something else.

"I'm thirsty."

"So take a drink."

He takes a drink and heads upstairs.

And my six-year-old is back.

He's thirsty.

"But you already were thirsty!"

"I forgot to take a drink because I was looking for my marbles!"

Whatever. I can't get into it.

My nine-year-old is calling me. He can't fall asleep with everyone making so much noise.

Seven-year-old is back. He needs to find his papers for tomorrow.

I remind six-year-old and seven-year-old children that they are sleeping.

They turn to go upstairs and have a direct collision.

They're both crying as loudly as possible and out comes the ice pack, in the shape of frozen hot dogs, to ease their bruises.

My four-year-old is back.

He doesn't want to sleep in his bed.

My nine-year-old comes to tell me again that he can't fall asleep.

And so I say one of those so-mother things: If you guys don't want to go to sleep, I'll go instead!

Everyone heads back upstairs.

Time for the two older ones to go up.

They make their way upstairs and the party starts up once again.

And the light in one of boys' rooms is on again, for the tenth time.

Thankfully, the two-year-old is just running a stream of commentary from his crib, minding his own business. And the baby is sleeping. So bedtime is not a total disaster.

See, you do still have a handle on it after all, I tell myself, trying not to feel incompetent. Even if *The Big Book of Bedtime Rules for Successful Mothers* has different rules than me.

I try to find some patience. I know they will all go to sleep



eventually, and I think nostalgically of those days of the smug 43-second bedtime.

And it continues. Every time one gets in, someone else is out. And I hear too many paper-rustling sounds coming from there. More than one person is reading.

Then there are those nights where it just works like a charm.

We go upstairs. Everyone gets in bed. *Shema* is said. They look so sweet and innocent.

I make my rounds and kiss everyone good night. The big kids quietly make their way upstairs at 9 and everything stays nice and calm. I wipe down the counters, just like the moms who follow *The Big Book of Bedtime Rules* probably do after they finish their successful bedtime routine.

I look at the clock. 9:05 pm. It's quiet. Maybe I'm one of those successful moms after all.

But deep down, I know something is going on. I know why it's quiet. I know it's not because I have it down pat. It's not because I followed the magical *Big Book of Rules*.

But I shush that voice. I'm enjoying the moments of feeling successful.

At 10:05 my four-year-old quietly makes his way down the steps.

He has a sly smile on his face.

"They're playing cards," he whispers to me.

"I know," I whisper back.

He runs back upstairs.

I hear the muted laughing and the hushed chatter. Of course, when they play at 10 pm when they are supposed to be sleeping, they all get along perfectly.

I continue to mind my own business. I know they will go to sleep eventually. And they'll be tired tomorrow. And it'll be okay. ❧

Goldie Grossbaum and her husband, Rabbi Yossi Grossbaum, are the directors of Chabad of Folsom | El Dorado Hills in Northern California and the proud parents of nine children *ka"h* – their brigade of junior *shluchim*. To read more of Goldie's writings, visit littleyellownotepad.com or make sure your subscription to the *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* is up to date.

A Gift For Our Rebbe & Rebbetzin
IN HONOR OF THEIR 90TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

900 WOMEN
TO REVIEW THE HALACHOS OF
Taharas Hamishpacha
WITHIN THIS YEAR UNTIL THEIR NEXT ANNIVERSARY
- DEADLINE 14 KISLEV 5780 -

Please submit your full Hebrew name and your
mother's Hebrew name to 900review@mikvah.org

FREE ONLINE REVIEWS ON
mikvah.org

For all your
WRITING NEEDS,
visit

www.shulaswritingservices.com

We offer pre-written and custom speeches
for all occasions!

We also edit large projects and smaller writings including books, blogs, websites, presentations, newsletters, letters, articles, essays, speeches, ads and e-mails.

We will make sure your writing is free of grammar errors and typos.

We are also happy to help you with the content and progression.