



GOLDIE GROSSBAUM

IF YOU'RE GOING TO WORK IN A CAMP THIS SUMMER, THIS ARTICLE IS FOR YOU

WHAT YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH WITH JUST THREE DOLLARS



“BUT YOU SAID YOU’D GIVE IT BACK on the last day of camp!”

“Never said such a thing!” responds the head counselor, totally disregarding the camper’s wide, innocent eyes as he watches an adult not keep his word.

“I never give things back when I take them away, sorry!” And the head counselor moves on to his many other responsibilities.

Sure, it was only a three-dollar keychain, nothing of much value. That is, nothing of much value to the head counselor.

But that’s three whole dollars to this child, plus his integrity, being tossed in the trash.

It happened the first week of camp; the spunky ten-year-old had his three-dollar keychain with him during *davening*; the head counselor approached and asked for it and he gave it; that’s when he was informed that it was being taken away.

And that’s also when the camper remembers being told that he would get it back on the last day of camp, and the head counselor doesn’t remember anything of the sort. And why would he, considering the millions of things he’s dealt with between the first week and the last.

The child comes home from camp; he’s had an amazing experience filled with inspiration, trips, activities,

swimming, games, sports and more. But what’s the first thing that he says?

“He took my keychain and wouldn’t give it back! Even though he said he would! And it was three dollars!!”

A broken promise from an adult.

After much deliberation, the child’s father reaches out to the (young) head counselor and tries to bring him into the bigger picture—the harm in adults failing kids and breaking their trust—and asks the head counselor to replace the keychain. It’s not about the three dollars, it’s about the lifelong lesson of adults keeping their word when they make promises to children. The father says he will send him the three dollars; please show him you take him seriously. He is convinced you told him he’d get it back.

“Sure,” agrees the head counselor, understanding that it’s about more than the money. He doesn’t have the keychain, of course, but it’s easily available to replace.

“He’s going to send you the keychain,” the father tells his son; the look of his eyes lighting up, of his integrity and trust being restored, is hard to miss.

A week passes, followed by the father receiving a message from the head counselor: “I changed my mind, I’m not

sending it. I don't give back things that I take away from campers."

Huh? What?

All conversation ceases to exist; he has made up his mind and does not respond to any follow-up conversation.

And this trusting ten-year-old is trusting no more.

"I don't give back things that I take away!"

How is that a thing?

Who is right? Did he say it or didn't he? Is the ten-year-old remembering correctly or is the head counselor? At

this point, it's not relevant, because there's something bigger going on.

And he most certainly said he would return it during that first phone call from the father to the head counselor.

There's a great saying: Mean what you say and say what you mean, but don't be mean.

A kid is using something inappropriately or at the wrong time? By all means, take it away.

But the purpose of taking away should be for the purpose of the respect and discipline needed at the time, not for the gratification of showing a child that your stuff is worthless, so I will toss

it. Too bad.

Three dollars. An insignificant amount to an adult.

Three dollars. Sometimes it's that cheap and easy to teach trust and respect, and the principle of keeping your word. Three dollars to show I respect you as a human.

And three dollars to destroy it, too.

Don't forget the big picture. 🦋



Goldie and her husband, Rabbi Yossi Grossbaum, direct Chabad of Folsom and El Dorado Hills in Northern California, with the able help of their children. Goldie blogs about being a mom of nine boys and two girls, ranging from baby to teens, and finding the humor in the ups and downs, leaps and lurches, of raising kids. Read more of Goldie's writings at www.littleyellownotepad.com.

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