



# ***Knee Deep in Mud***

Goldie Grossbaum

It's the favorite time of year for little boys. Water, fish, sand, and, if you're lucky, mud too. It just doesn't get better!

It's *tashlich*.

And feeling so experienced in the boys-mud-water-sand department, I remind my kids to wear their Crocs to *tashlich*. Most of them follow directions and I let it be. How dirty can they get anyway? Maybe I am being over-protective, or a little paranoid.

Arriving at *tashlich* only four minutes after my boys, I'm greeted by muddy feet and wet pants.

And that's when I see my oldest. In the mud.

"I lost my shoe, I need to find it!" he hollers.

We are at the pond. The pond that has been shrinking all year due to the lack of rain. And what is left in place of where lots of pond used to be is thick, heavy mud. The type that when you try to walk across it, your shoe gets stuck. Which is apparently what happened.

I see the crowd gathering at the gazebo, just a few hundred feet away. I see my son, knee deep in mud in his (new) dress pants. He is entirely caked in mud till his elbows. I tell him to get out of the mud.

I tell him his shoes are lost and it's too

late to save them.

I tell him it is more important to get out NOW than to find his shoes.

He waves back and reassures me that he will find the missing shoe.

I tell him to get out of the mud.

He tells me he will find his shoe.

I breathe deeply and count to ten slowly.

I need to think quickly.

And then I tell myself what I tell my kids when they are in crisis mode:

*You have a few options.*

So what are my options now?

I could scream at him to get out.

I could threaten him.

I could take away all computer time for the next 18 years.

I could take away his camera indefinitely.

But as I slowly reach ten, I know none of those would work. He is not coming out.

He is going to find the other shoe. With all the kids watching him, that is more important to him than 18 years of computer time.

I need an alternative plan.

*Think about him, not about yourself!*

The crowd is nearing the pond, ready to recite the *tashlich* prayer.

I look at the approaching people.

I look at my son, covered in mud.

And there I stand with just a minute to leave with grace.

Breathe, count to ten again.

"Alright, I hope you find your shoes. You sure are determined."

I turn to face the crowd, watching as they register what they are seeing.

Yes, the rabbi's son, in his dress clothes, is knee deep in mud.

*My son. My oldest son.*

The looks of amusement, horror and disgust are pretty obvious.

He will have to figure out how to save his pride, but I have to figure out how to save mine.

Because, after all, if anyone is judging my child, why then, they are ultimately judging *me*.

And so I say the only thing I can think of, the thought I would be thinking if it was someone else's child:

*"Whose kid is that?! Where are the parents?! Which irresponsible mom lets her ten-year-old get knee deep in thick, goopy mud in his dress clothes?!"*

The ice is broken; now they are all on my team! We laugh together.

And my son, his pride also intact, emerges from the mud, waving his mud-soaked unrecognizable shoe with a look of triumph.

I bite my tongue hard to hold back any reprimanding because I realize it's not necessary. Mud has its own natural consequence. I don't have to tell him what is going to happen.

Mustering up whatever dignity he can find, he tells me in his most grown-up way that he is going home to hose himself

down in the backyard so he doesn't bring any mud into the house. I enthusiastically agree it's a good idea.

I'm squirmy at the sight. I'm not a mud person. And deep inside, I'm still mortified. But that's not my son's problem. I will not take that out on him.

I'm also just a teensy bit proud of his determination. And his courage to face the crowd. I remind myself that these traits will serve him well as an adult.

He strides off with all the little boys watching him in awe and with the greatest respect while the moms are cringing.

And I sigh in relief.

True, I didn't win. He got his way.

But sometimes winning is figuring out how to lose gracefully. ■

Goldie Grossbaum and her husband Rabbi Yossi, together with their rambunctious children, direct Chabad in Folsom, CA. To read more of Goldie's musings on kids, motherhood and life in general, visit her blog at [www.littleyellownotepad.com](http://www.littleyellownotepad.com).



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