

Raccoons for Sale

I often find myself saying, "*There's never a dull moment.*"

Make no mistake, this is not necessarily a bad thing, it is just my way of expressing the constant "busy-ness" in my life. Most of the busy-ness comes from being blessed with Hashem's goodness. I know there will come a time when my children are grown and my wife and I will be sipping tea on the rocking chair as we stare out into the abyss. I also know that these years will fly by fast, and yes, I am trying to make the most of the moments and enjoying them immensely (I've heard the *shpiel*). However, now things are hectic, so as I say, "*Never a dull moment.*"

A couple of weeks ago my wife had to go out of town for a few days. I was happy to give her a break, as usually I'm the one who's traveling (G-d bless her for holding down the fort). I was confident that everything would go smoothly, and thankfully it did. My children had a fun Sunday with Dad playing outside, riding bikes, and getting together with friends. Finally, the day was coming to an end, and it was time for bed.

Bedtime can sometimes be challenging, but it is all worth it once everyone is sound asleep and I am able to catch my breath for a moment or two. Everything was going exactly according to plan. I got the baby down and then began the bedtime routine for the other ones. They brushed their teeth, I got them tucked in, and it was time for a "scary" story from Daddy. (Thankfully my job as a Rabbi has trained me in the art of putting people to sleep. This is no simple profession and takes years of Rabbinical studies to master.)

Just to give you some insight, my scary stories always start off with a "scary" beginning just to grip them in and then it slowly transitions to a slow calming hypnotic tone until their eyes close and they drift into dreamland. I'd give more details, but I can't give away all my tricks.

Anyway, as I was beginning with my usual "scary" intro we heard a noise. I first thought maybe a neighbor or family member came in, but remembered the doors were locked. I ignored it and continued the story when suddenly we heard the noise again. It was almost as if there was someone controlling

this noise in sync with my story!

The noise grew louder until it sounded like someone was walking upstairs. The kids started to get scared. *"Daddy, do you hear that noise? It sounds like someone is trying to break into our house!"* I wasn't sure how to respond (because these noises did sound serious) but I didn't want to freak them out (or myself). I remained calm and told them that it was probably just the wind and trees blowing against our house and that there was no need to worry.

I made sure to stay in the room, keeping my boys calm until they fell asleep. Once they fell asleep it was time for Daddy to take out the baseball bat and see what was really going on!

I followed the noise, and it led me to the upstairs bathroom directly below the attic. At this point I was able to clearly hear the noises and came to the realization that it sounded like an animal was trapped in the attic. We were having the perfect day and now this!? Let me just say, the first thing that came to my mind was that I was glad my wife was out of town, and it wasn't the other way around (if you know, you know). The second realization, half a second later, was that I better do something!

The next morning, I immediately reached out to an exterminating service and that day I had someone at my home dealing with the situation. He set up his trap and sure enough a couple of days later (after waking up to a loud snapping noise at 3am), there was a raccoon trapped in the cage. My boys got a lot of entertainment watching the animal control guy all decked in camo gear as he removed the cage to bring the raccoon to her new home in the woods far away from us. My four-year-old, Ezra, was having so much fun that he was sad to see the man take the raccoon away. In fact, he even asked if we could keep her as a pet! (For those of you who read my last ramble -- this was a hard no.)

I was so glad that this was finally over, and I could go to sleep at night without having to think about an animal in my home. My wife Sarena made a joke before we went to bed that night saying, "I hope she didn't have any babies up there." Well, guess what? Yep, you guessed it! That night the noises continued, and the next morning there was a little baby raccoon in the second trap. When the exterminator returned, he stuck his light through the tiny hole and reported back that there was a litter of raccoons in our attic!!

According to google a "litter" is referred to as a mother with at least four cubs. As I am writing this ramble, our home sounds like the rain forest at the Cleveland Zoo with purring, chittering, growling, snarling, hissing and whimpering. The worst part of it all was looking back at the original price agreement and seeing how much this would cost us. In addition to the fees for setting up the traps, there is an additional fee for each racoon that needs to be removed. I told Ezra that maybe he would get his pet racoon after all!

As I was stressing about these racoons in my home and the fees associated with removing them, I was calmed by something that I was just learning in Mussar (study in self-improvement). One of the classic Mussar texts is a book written by Rabbeinu Behaye called *Chovot Halevavot*, translated as *Duties of the Heart*. It was written many years ago, but just like many other Mussar texts, has much relevance to today. In the chapter that discusses trust in Hashem he writes about the benefits of an alchemist vs. a person who trusts in G-d.

The best way I like to think of an alchemist in today's modern day is imagining someone who has a money tree. Of course, most people would think that if they had a tree that grows money, they'd be pretty set. However, the *Chovot Halevavot* explains that if you trust in G-d, you'll be better off than this alchemist. One advantage of the believer in G-d over the alchemist is regarding one's health. No matter what the alchemist acquires though his magic formulas, none of it can guarantee his health. Likewise, in our times, a person might have a fabulous stock portfolio, he might own magnificent real estate, but it pales in value if he doesn't have his health.

I am reminded to thank Hashem for the good that is in my life. Thank G-d my family and I are in good health. There is a saying in Israel: *Ha'ikar ha'briut* — the main thing is health. I took this as a reminder not to take the good in my life for granted. As long as we are alive, there will always be challenges. I am reminded to put my trust in a higher power, appreciate the good in my life, and stay focused on the bigger picture.

In the meantime, party at the Grodkos!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Josh