

“Mother’s Day”

"Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children."

– William Makepeace Thackeray

To counteract the overly emphasized, materialistic values of our society, and to emphasize Judaism's non-materialistic approach to life, we may want to stress social, familial, ethical kinds of "gifts" to give mother on her special day (Along with the really useable, child made craft project and/or the seedling started at Tu BiShevat). The children can suggest what they think appropriate: putting their soiled clothing in the hamper instead of on the floor, helping set the table, picking up toys after playing, trying to find ways to be more grown-up. (Refer back to Hanukkah gift suggestions.)

It might help to send an explanatory note to mother to let her understand the importance of recognizing the child's "non-material" gifts as well as appreciating something tangible a child has made. In order to learn to be a giving person as an adult, children have to have adults graciously accept their childish offerings whether they be pictures or offers to help dust the furniture.

In our discussions, let's also remember that children have mixed feelings about mother and need to ventilate these feelings. They need to know that everyone becomes angry sometimes, but can get over it because people who love each other are concerned about helping each other. It is mother's job to teach us what is right even though we don't always want to hear what she says. As one child put it, "Big people like to boss little people and little people don't like it!"

If a child does not want to give anything to his mother, don't insist. While we would all like to believe that all mothers have sound, happy relationships with their children, the reality is that some don't. We have to start with mothers where they are, just as we start with children where they are. In the past, some children have made such comments in school as: "I hate my mother. She always yells." "My mother said she doesn't like me." "I don't want to make a present for my mommy." "My mommy throws my pictures away." "When my mommy gets mad she yells. Teachers can be supportive by saying something like "It is unpleasant when someone yells at us, especially if it's our mommy or daddy. It makes us feel upset. It makes our parents feel upset too. Sometimes we say mean things when we are angry. Then when we are through being angry we feel unhappy that we said such things. But we can always make up because underneath we really love each other. If you don't feel like making a gift for your mommy (or daddy if it's Father's Day), you don't have to. We have plenty of

materials, though, if you change your mind when you are through being angry."

This approach allows the child to save face by giving him the opportunity to change his mind. If he doesn't, it's high time teacher investigates what is going on at home. Whatever a teacher decides to reply to such comments, she ought to avoid denying them by such comments as, "Oh, you're just joking. Your mother didn't say that!" Whether mother said it, or the child is phantasizing that she said it isn't important. What is important is that the child feels that way and we want him to always feel free to talk to us about his feelings.

Once a teacher decided to read the book *The Way Mothers Are* by Miriam Schlein. By way of introducing it she asked, "Does anyone know what holiday is coming that reminds us about a person who loves us and takes care of us at home all the time?" To which one youngster promptly replied, "Maid's Day." We have to consider special situations where maids take primary responsibility for caring for the child, where there is no mother in the home, where there is a step-mother, or a grandmother or as one child put it, "I have two mommies and two daddies." These situations have to be carefully handled. There are some children's books on the market dealing with some of these special situations. A teacher could read such a book privately to a particular child or to a small group if a situation warrants it.

Much of the foregoing also applies to our treatment of Father's Day. Four and five year old boys are especially experiencing feelings of ambivalence about Daddy just as their female counterparts are experiencing conflicts about their feelings towards Mommy. They both feel a need to have Mommy and Daddy love them, yet are at a stage of development where they are struggling with feelings of wanting to replace the parent of the opposite sex. We've all heard little boys declare "I'm going to marry my mommy when I grow up." There is also the comment of a 4 1/2 year old girl who said to her father as he kissed her good night, "Oh, daddy, I'll never get over you!"

We need to be sensitive about how to help some children cope with Father's Day when their fathers may not be present in their lives. These children need support around their feelings of loss. During discussions, they can tell about an uncle, older brother, grandpa, or close adult male neighbor, while recalling positive experiences with Daddy. Teacher might comment, "Even though your daddy isn't at home with you, you can always remember how much he loves you and the things you did together." There are many excellent books to choose for both of these special days when such problems occur. Two such books are *Man of the House* and *All Alone with Daddy* published by Behavioral Publishing.

Another resource for children's story books which center on situations of stress, such as death, adoption, divorce, unstable parents is *Recommended*

Reading About Children and Family Life. An outstanding bibliography of special books about life cycle events and other problems is: Fassler, Joan. *Helping Children Cope*. NY: The Free Press, 1978.

Teacher's Books

Anderson, E.	<i>Children in the Family</i>
Bacmeister, R.	<i>All in the Family</i>
Bacmeister, R.	<i>Growing Together</i>
Baruch, D.	<i>New Ways in Discipline</i>
Bettelheim, B.	<i>Dialogues with Mothers</i>
Bowlby, J.	<i>Child Care and the Growth of Love</i>
Chess, S.	<i>Your Child Is a Person</i>
Freiberg, S.	<i>The Magic Years</i>
Ginott, H.	<i>Between Parent and Child</i>
Ginott, H.	<i>Between Parent and Teenager</i>
Goodsell, J.	<i>I've Only Got Two Hands and I'm Busy Wringing Them</i>
Neisser, E.	<i>Brothers & Sisters</i>
Neisser, E.	<i>The Eldest Child</i>
Neisser, E.	<i>Mothers & Daughters</i>
Zborowski, M.	<i>Life is with People</i>

Children's Books

Avery, R.	<i>Wee Willow Whistle</i>
Andry, A & Schepp, S.	<i>How Babies Are Made</i>
Anglund, J.	<i>Love is a Special Way of Feeling</i>
Eastman, P.D.	<i>Are You My Mother?</i>
Fassler, J.	<i>All Alone with Daddy</i>
Fassler, J.	<i>Man of the House</i>
Goff, B.	<i>Where is Daddy?</i>
Hoban, R.	<i>Bedtime for Frances</i>
Krauss, R.	<i>The Bundle Book</i>
Krasilovsky	<i>The Very Little Girl</i>
Kessler, E. & L.	<i>The Day Daddy Stayed Home</i>
Lionni, L.	<i>Little Blue and Little Yellow</i>
Reich, H.	<i>Children and Their Fathers</i>
Reich, H.	<i>Children and Their Mothers</i>
Rojankovsky, F.	<i>The Great Big Animal Book</i>
Schlein, M.	<i>The Way Mothers Are</i>
Yela & Gregor	<i>Animal Babies</i>
Zion, G.	<i>Harry the Dirty Dog</i>
Zolotow, C.	<i>The Night Mother Was Away</i>
Zolotow, C.	<i>The Sky Was Blue</i>