



BUBBY *and the* BOYS

A boy's *cheder* day ends late, and even when he gets out early on Sundays, it might be close to dark. And that's without Masmidim or Friday and Motzoei Shabbos learning programs. If Mommy hardly gets a chance to spend time with her boys, what can Bubby hope for?

Despite all this, determined grandmothers have found ways to bond with their grandsons, from the very youngest, who admittedly are more available, all the way up to the *yeshivah bachurim*.

Bonding Over Learning

Celebrating Torah with our grandsons is not exclusively Zeidy's domain.

Mrs. Malka Berliner,* a Brooklyn grandmother whose current set of elementary-age local grandchildren consists of all boys, has implemented a meaningful tradition. The Friday after *Shabbos Chazak*, when the last *parshah* of a *Chumash* is read, all the boys are invited for a grand *siyum*. The program is simple but memorable. First, the boys take turns reading the last few *pesukim* of the *sefer*. After that comes a rousing chorus of "Chazak chazak v'nis'chazek." Then, the *sefer* is lovingly kissed by each child. One of the younger children who can't read yet is honored with returning the *Chumash* to its place.

As with any *siyum*, it's not over yet. A different younger child gets to take out the next *Chumash*, and one boy is selected to learn the first *pasuk* of the first *parshah*. The new *Chumash* then gets pride of place on the table, where the boys know it will remain until the next *siyum*.

What then? Well, the nosh, of course!

This beautiful tradition cements both the intergenerational bond and the connection to Torah, and the only supplies needed are a set of *Chumashim*, and some popcorn and sour sticks.

Are your grandchildren too far away? Mrs. Chaya Perl's* grandsons will always call to share a *siyum*, because she responds with a \$5 bonus! As they get older, she also gives a small cash incentive for each *blatt Gemara* learned. This ensures that the boys keep her very up-to-date on what they're learning, and she often gets to hear about their lives at the same time.

Bonding Over Food

Many grandmothers have found that if they want to gain entry into their grandson's lives, the best way to do so is over a good meal.

Mrs. Devorah Neiman* invites one teenage grandson to join her for a Shabbos *seudah* each week, and finds that it adds a deeper dimension to their relationship.

Mrs. Leah Stern* has younger grandsons, but still enjoys

inviting them to Shabbos meals, one at a time. “I prepare their favorite dessert. They get to do their *parashah* sheet and the *dvar Torah* and the song of the week... In their own homes, they have to share the floor with their siblings and can’t always recite the whole Shabbos booklet!” They thrive on that only-child feeling; Bubby and Zeidy are listening intently and no one’s rushing or interrupting them.

“My husband’s grandmother invites all her *bachur* grandsons for a (takeout) supper once a week. They enjoy spending time with their cousins, and she gets to enjoy the *nachas*,” says Mrs. Miriam Donner.*

“When my grandson turned 10,” says Mrs. Debbie Hammer,* “I started a tradition of treating him to a birthday dinner — just the two of us.”

Some grandmothers who move to Eretz Yisrael or Lakewood, leaving married children behind, have found that their grandsons show up in their new hometown to learn.

Gittel* was pleasantly surprised when her grandson came to learn in a yeshivah nearby. “When I moved away, the hardest part was leaving my grandchildren. And now, here was my grandson. He came Friday afternoons for kugel and sometimes on Shabbos as well. I did his laundry, sent him homemade goodies, and took plenty of pictures of him to send home to his family. Here was this boy who’d always lived so far away, and now we’re really close.”

“My son was learning near my mother,” says Tzippy.* “She prepared special food whenever he came for a Shabbos meal, and she would invite him to come sometimes during the week as well. They enjoy a special relationship until today.”

Recreation

Other grandmothers have found that they connect most easily to their grandsons through play. A popular choice is board games, especially chess, with some *bubbies* first teaching their grandsons the game, and then engaging them in play.

Another way to motivate boys to visit is to provide long-term projects that they might not be able to do at home with younger siblings around, such as wood or metal model kits, complex Lego sets, and paint-by-numbers. These can be worked on in a designated space where they can leave them undisturbed between visits.

Reading together is another common pleasure. One grandmother specifically chooses science-themed books, as she finds that boys are fascinated by the world and how it works and don’t always get enough of this in yeshivah.

Others try to take advantage of the little free time their grandsons have and take them on small outings. Most find that Friday afternoons work best and is when the mothers

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are most appreciative of having their boys entertained for a bit. Also, mark your calendar with the days off, like Shushan Purim and legal holidays, and use them to spend time together.

“I take them to the Jewish library, and we read together. Then they each choose one book to take home,” says Leah Stern.

If you’re in Brooklyn, a great place for boys who are 8 years old and up on a long Friday afternoon is the Living Torah Museum (reservations

required). Presentations cover topics as diverse as the source of *techeiles*, the stones of the *Choshen*, and the coins of the Talmudic era, so you can always return for more.

Do as the Boys Do

And finally, there are those grandmothers who simply get out there and do what the boys do. Some take a ball or a picnic to the park.

Mrs. Bracha Segal* loves to join the fun outside. “In the summer, I even let them throw splash balls at me,” she confesses, “just don’t put my name to that!”

Chava Dumas, on the other hand, has no problem admitting that she likes what the boys like. “They run, jump and climb, and dig in the dirt. They adore little creatures like bunnies, squirrels, frogs, and birds. I’m a nature-lover too, so we enjoy it together.”

And sometimes, it’s a matter of learning a grandchild’s needs.

“My son loves to discuss politics, and I have no interest in the topic,” says Chany Levy.* “My son calls my mother every Friday, and she listens to his diatribes on current events. My son thrives on the attention and it strengthens their bond.”

Judith Bron makes a point of focusing on the things that are important to her grandsons. “I’ve found out enough about the yeshivah system to ask them questions that don’t sound like ‘girl questions,’” she says. “If you learn their world, you have a better chance to be allowed inside.”

With a bit of planning, it seems that Bubby and the boys can both reap the benefits of an enhanced relationship. ■

*Names have been changed.

Mrs. Paluch is the author of “Boy Oh Boy!” — the engaging guide for mothers of one boy or a dozen. Comments and topic suggestions related to this column can be directed to magazine@hamodia.com.