

Shabbat Parashat Ki Teitzei
The Power of Routines and Rules

SHANA TOVA!! A very happy new school year to everyone in the VTT community. While there is a certain peace and productivity that accompanies the quiet in the school during the summer months, there is nothing like the excited boisterousness of students, parents, and teachers beginning a new school year! However, I always have a greater appreciation for the rest I take on the first Shabbat of the school once the first few days with my new classes of students is over. It is my pleasure to welcome everyone to another year of Erev Shabbat Torah study through my column in VTT's Hadashot.

As every new school year begins, I remind myself of the importance of establishing order, rules, and routines with my students to set the tone for the rest of the year. Educational literature teaches us that these first few days go a long way in determining what the rest of the year is going to look like in any given class. Mr. Robert Broughton, a new VTT faculty member teaching in Grade 3 this year, shared his language and vision of “first day-first week-first month” with the admin team and other new members of the faculty this summer. It sounds simple enough, but taking this approach to planning one’s time with a new class will have an immeasurable impact on successfully beginning a new year of learning. I can see it at work in my own teaching already. So, thank-you to Mr. Broughton! From entry foyer to classroom to lunchroom, playground, and gym – whether during our school opening assemblies or individual class periods with teachers, we have taken on a renewed approach to establishing order, rules, routines, and culture around the school. We hope you are seeing a difference because we surely are. Feel free to ask your children about what they are seeing and experiencing.

The notion of using rules, routines, and order to establish culture is an ancient aspect of Jewish tradition. Our *mitzvot*/commandments from the Torah and the Oral Tradition govern all aspects of living within the Jewish civilization – from religious ritual to legal jurisprudence – and set the tone for the kind of nation that we strive to be. Will we always meet the expectations? No, but that is what this season of *t’shuva*/introspective reflection before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is for. We refocus ourselves on aspiring to and working toward changing ourselves in order to make our civilization and our world a better place. It is a daily effort during which only slow (if any) progress is achieved. However, not to undertake the work of attempting to live up to the expectations and observe the *mitzvot* would be a missed opportunity. If there was any one weekly *parasha*/Torah portion that draws our attention to the details and roles of the *mitzvot* in our lives, it is Ki Teitzei this week. With a total of seventy-four commandments in its text, it is the *parasha* with the single greatest number of *mitzvot* in the entire Torah. A wide range of subjects is covered, teaching us that Judaism and Jewish culture has the potential to touch every aspect of our lives, if we allow for the opportunity for it to do so.

Rules, routines, and order not only help us to establish culture in school and Jewish life, but they can also be incredibly beneficial to parents as we all work to establish a family culture in our home. With the freedom and flexibility of summertime hours now over, transitioning into the wake-up, school, homework, and extra-curricular activity schedule can be a challenge in any household. What can help make the transition easier? Rules, routines, and order. While these things in the home do not carry the same weight as the *mitzvot* of our Jewish tradition, the end product of the creation of a positive and productive household culture can be the same. If you feel that your children or family is having a hard time getting into the new school year rhythm, take a lesson from this week's *parasha* and try out some new rules and routines. It is likely that you will see some of the same benefits in your home that we are seeing in our school.

Shabbat Shalom and Shana Tova!