



# David E. Simai M.D.

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Dear Readers,

Many times, as I enter an examination room to see a newborn on his or her first visit, there is often someone in the room who gives me comfort and even confidence that the baby, G-d willing, will fair well. That person is the grandmother, “Bobbie” in Yiddish or “Savta” in hebrew, “Babushka” in yiddish.

You see, when a new baby is born - life becomes much happier, but at the same time a little more challenging. As helpful as we husbands can be, we cannot come close to the level of a grandmother. Throughout the years, I encourage my new mothers to receive guidance from the grandparents. Yes, physicians are trained in medical school about invasive and dangerous diseases, and about common and rare illnesses in pediatrics. No one however, taught us how to close a newborn diaper, what wipes to use during diaper changes (I recommend pure water wipes, or just warm sink water), and no one reminded us not to drink warm water from the sink - which could elevate the lead level in children.

For these common, simple, but yet very important skills - we need the support and caring of grandmothers. A new mother who is cared for in the weeks after giving birth will be more likely to be successful in nursing, less likely to have post partum depression and subsequently, have a better chance to raise a happy and healthy child.

Throughout the years I have seen how dedicated the grandparents are in the life of many families. On some occasions, the first visit at the office with a newborn is conducted without the mother in the room. The grandparents allow her to stay home and rest, and I call to discuss the baby’s visit over the phone. Throughout the child’s lives, I often see that the grandparents bring the children for sick visit and keep them company while the parents are at work. It is heart warming to see the strong bond that forms between the child and his grandparents.

As physicians, we try and guide parents to deliver proper care, which includes giving the baby proper nutrition, stimulation and how to avoid issues like anemia, dental caries and developmental delays. These are called anticipatory guidance and preventive medicine. We also treat babies and children when they are ill and make recommendations to help the healing process. Many times, when a parent shows appreciation for my work, I remind them that in the great scheme of things my job is fairly simple. I have to decide on a diagnosis and give my opinion +/- a

prescription. The hardest hurdle is to take that advice and implement it. For asthmatics, it may entail nebulizing a frightened child 4-6 times a day, for kids with dehydration - it involves the parent sitting next to the child for a few hours and giving them 1 teaspoon of pedialyte 5 minutes apart. For a simple cold with fever, it entails hydration, steam showers, making chicken soup, treating the fever with cool compresses and Tylenol every 4 hours. This list goes on and on - and as you can see raising a child is all about constant caring. The job is not a simple one, but it is rewarding.

There are a few people that I have come across in my professional career that stand out as truly remarkable, kind people. The first is Mrs. Silberstein, a mother of a large family from Kiryas Yoel, Monroe. She was one of our favorite patients in our entire Pediatric Department. You probably wonder why? The reason was clear - Mrs. Silberstein would come to our office with a home baked chocolate bobka at almost every visit!!! It was so delicious that by the time the plate arrived at my desk, only crumbs remained, so Mrs. Silberstein always had another roll in the room for the Doctors and PAs. But baking was not why I mention her first. After having more than 10 children of her own, and numerous grandchildren, she adopted a child with Downs Syndrome. Her devotion to this child was so special. She would bring him to our office for every cold, visit multiple specialist 50 miles away for his heart and gastric issues. At one point, I asked Mrs. Silberstein in awe - "How do you manage to raise your family?" Do you physically have room for them? She gave me a big smile and in semi laughter explained how she was raised with over 10 siblings in a 2 bedroom apartment in Bnei Brak, and here, in Kiryas Yoel, she has 4 large bedrooms!!! Personally, I feel that I live in a mansion. For this reason when I think of self-sacrifice, good heartedness and true toughness, I think of Mrs. Silberstein.

But acts of kindness definitely cross borders. Recently, I learned that one of my special needs patients was adopted by a Rebbetzin from the Five Towns. I know that this Rebbetzin has a full family of her own, but that did not stop her from opening her house. The girl is flourishing in her new family and her parents have time to try and manage the house and still see her on some weekends. I feel that all of us should derive our inspiration in life from these remarkable people.

In the spirit of Mother's Day I would like to thank another special lady in our community, my mom. My mother has and continues to be with G-d's help a fountain of strength and a symbol of dedication to me and my family. I have so many reasons to thank her! Thank you mom for driving me anywhere I needed to go and then teaching me how to drive. Thank you for feeding me at home and for the surprise visits to my YU dorm (against all school policies) in order to fill up my fridge with her delicious stew and rice!!! But I want to mention a few other moments that I thank her for.

Firstly, in the summer of 1989, when my family emigrated to the U.S. from Israel my parents encouraged me to apply to high school and skip 8th grade. My mother accompanied me to my interview at Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Queens. Rabbi Harris offered me a great, warm smile, and gave me a short verbal test in Gemara and a short

quiz in English and Math. Unfortunately, despite having a great English teacher in my elementary school in Jerusalem (Mrs. Livazer), I could not understand the English or Math questions, and I failed miserably. Rabbi Harris genuinely thought that I would benefit from a year in 8th grade before entering the Yeshiva.

My mother seemed to agree with him, and stayed calm until we left the Yeshiva, but as soon as we left the building, we began walking back to our house. I was wondering why? We came via bus and our house was a few miles away! But in her wisdom my mother used that walk to give me the motivation of a lifetime. Do you think that coming to the U.S. would be easy for you? You are going to have to work much harder than you did in Israel. You cannot just cruise along here! For a good 30 minutes my mother used this time on our walk home to address this theme and I was really scared. She was completely right I thought to myself. Until now I did fairly well in Israel with minimal work, but now would come my true test.

The next morning, my mother bought me index cards and started picking words out of the dictionary. I jotted them down and she quizzed me at the end of every day. I saved those cards and showed them to my kids recently. My mother also sent me to my aunt's house - Rebbitzen Rivka Levine in Lakewood. There, none of my cousins spoke Hebrew. Despite this, I had one of the most memorable summers there, and it taught me more than just a lesson in the English language. It made me appreciate the wonderful Aunt, Uncle and exceptionally warm and friendly Cousins I have on Oakwood Avenue in Lakewood. A few weeks after returning from Lakewood, my parents persuaded Rabbi Harris to re-test me. To be honest, I am not sure that I passed the re-testing even though the questions were extremely familiar, but Rabbi Harris agreed - and the rest I guess, is history. The Yeshiva changed my life and I am still grateful for that second chance.

Lastly, I have to thank my Mom for making me who I am - a Pediatrician. Yes, I was born to be a doctor - that was everyone's expectation. My father was the oldest of eight children in Iran. He lived in difficult days of worldwide depression, and despite being discriminated against for his religion, he was the Valedictorian of his high school in Tehran. He went on to become a doctor and landed a prestigious OB/GYN fellowship in Paris. He returned to Iran where he established a successful private practice. Two of my uncles followed in his footsteps and became outstanding OB's as well. So when it was time to choose a specialty, the natural choice was - you guessed it! OB/GYN. I loved surgery and was excited to fulfill my father's dream. I went through all the necessary rotations, including 5 grueling weeks working in Gynecologic Oncology with Dr. Abulafia at Downstate. The word in school was that whoever gets up for rounds at 5am and ended at 9pm for 5 weeks, would get a letter from Dr. Abulafia which would open the doors for an OB residency in the best hospitals. But at the last moment, my mother encouraged me to choose Pediatrics, which would allow me a better lifestyle she said. I asked my Rabbi, Rav Goldwicht what he thought would be best for me and without knowing the options he also replied, "Pediatrics - a nice happy field."

To Dr. Abulafia's shock, I chose Pediatrics. But to my mother's credit - I could not imagine how rewarding it would be to become one. And as for my dreams of becoming a surgeon, I have happily settled on stitching lacerations, which is an amazingly gratifying job for me.

So I would like to thank my mother, and all the wonderful mothers in our community and in Kiryas Yoel, for always being there. For their acts of kindness, whether big or small, in my eyes - you are the true heroes among us!

Wishing you a Happy Mother's Day,

David Elazar Simai M.D.