



\$600 Designer Glasses: A Shortsighted Proposition?

Q: Not long ago, my teenage daughter asked me to buy her a pair of \$600 designer eyeglass frames. When I told her that I thought \$600 was outrageous for a pair of glasses, she told me that her friends are wearing even more costly glasses.

Although I am not as well-to-do as some of the parents of these girls, I can afford to buy my daughter the glasses she wants. Should I do so?

A: This question depends on many factors. How many of your daughter's friends are wearing these designer glasses — 20% or 90%? If you say no, will she be able to accept it without questioning your love? Is your daughter going through a particularly difficult time now?

If only a few girls are wearing these glasses, your relationship is generally good, and she's not experiencing any particular difficulty, then there are a number of reasons why spending \$600 on glasses might be unwise. Spending that kind of money on glasses will either cause the glasses to take on inflated significance, or reduce the value of money in your daughter's eyes, neither of which is good *chinuch*. We are not saying that people who have money shouldn't enjoy the gifts Hashem's given them. But even then, you

shouldn't go overboard and lose all sight of what value you're getting for your money. Will your daughter see any better, look any better, or be more comfortable in \$600 glasses than in \$100 glasses? Unlikely. Chances are all you'll gain is the designer label. Why pay \$600 to provide free advertising for a company in Paris with grossly overpriced merchandise?

Keep in mind that there is already social pressure in her class to wear designer eyeglasses, as evidenced by her request. If your daughter buys these glasses, it will only intensify the pressure on those girls whose parents cannot afford to spend \$600 on glasses.

It is always prudent to avoid conspicuous consumption. Besides, you may be introducing your daughter to a possibly unsustainable level of spending. In the not-too-distant future, she will be married, and who knows if her husband will be able to keep up this level of spending? For that matter, who knows if *you* will be able to do so? No one's financial future is certain.

Spending so much money on glasses is shortsighted (pardon the pun), and might ultimately be a major disservice to your daughter. The Steipler Gaon said the reason so many people today are depressed is because they never lacked anything when growing up, so they never developed skills to cope with disappointment. You would not want

your daughter to fall apart if she is not accepted to the seminary of her choice or is turned down for a *shidduch*. The best way to prepare her for these possible disappointments is in the training ground of eyeglasses and other minor letdowns.

Each time we indulge a child's want, we reinforce it and turn it into more of a need.



Conversely, each time we deny our children something they want, we teach them to want less. This is true, however, only of wants, not needs. Needs, if unmet, intensify with time and lead to feelings of deprivation. Therefore, a good way to determine whether a request represents a need or a want is to see what happens when you say no: Will she forget about it after a few days or continue asking for it incessantly?

If your daughter really needs the glasses, you should consider getting them for her. But if she only *wants* the glasses, then her initial disappointment at not getting them will fade quickly, and she will be stronger and happier for the experience.

Before dismissing your daughter's request as outrageous, try to understand the real reason behind it. Then you can look together for alternative ways to satisfy the underlying hunger — for attention, social acceptance, etc.

Often, “yes” and “no” are not your only two options. You could buy her something of lasting value — a piece of jewelry, perhaps — instead of faddish eyeglasses, or have her shop around for similar eyewear at a more reasonable price. Once you put yourself into a mindset of consideration, even if you decide not to buy the glasses, you will be able to cushion the “no” with compassion she can accept it without resentment.

In summary, carefully consider the pros and cons of buying her the glasses, evaluate whether this is a need or a want, identify the hunger underlying the request, and seek how to satisfy it without compromising your values or your relationship. | JE

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