Caring About Your Pictures Means Caring About the People Who Will Be Seeing Them!

If you are taking a picture of something you are probably doing it because what you are seeing means something to you. A beautiful garden, a new baby, a new Kalah or an anniversary - there is something special before you that you want to capture and share with others and remind yourself of in the future. Hash-m puts many wonderful things and moments into our lives and He wants us to appreciate them and help others appreciate these wonderful things (see Chovos Halavavos, Shar HaBechina). So what you are seeing is important and meant to be shared! The question is *how do I convey these strong feelings* in a two dimensional rectangle of light and color (photography means "writing with light")? Well, AHAH, that is what photographers have been breaking their heads over for over a hundred years. So we will try to see how light and shapes and colors can help us *recreate these moments* that we want to share.

So there are few things for us to consider first. One is how to *set up the equipment* so it will do what we want. Two is how to *compose our subject* so he or she creates the right impression (this can even be done with kids on the move).Then we have to *set the exposure* (the amount of light coming into the camera) so the light expresses what we want. And fourth, is *dealing with software* for the finishing touches to make it pop out our message. So here we go!

Before everything – if you don't read anything else, read this:

Avoid clutter! Most photographs that will help you friends and relatives *work on their midos* are because there is a lot of extraneous clutter in the picture that distracts from the main subject. Frame the picture so only your subject and whatever is necessary to frame the subject is in the picture (more on this below)

Avoid mug shots! A mug shot is where the subject is facing you directly and is in the center of the frame. Try to shoot from an angle and put some "turn and tilt" in the picture (see Composition below)

1. Know Thy Equipment!

Sometimes cameras need our help to get things right! So we have to help them along, for instance, how to make up for *when the camera can't figure out how dark or light to make your picture*

This is known as *exposure*, which means how much light gets through to the sensor. . Adjusting this is known as Exposure Compensation and it is done with something like the following to increase the lightness (of course different cameras will use different buttons):

1 Select the exposure compensation.

- Press the (FUNC SET) button, then use the ▲▼ buttons to select ±0.

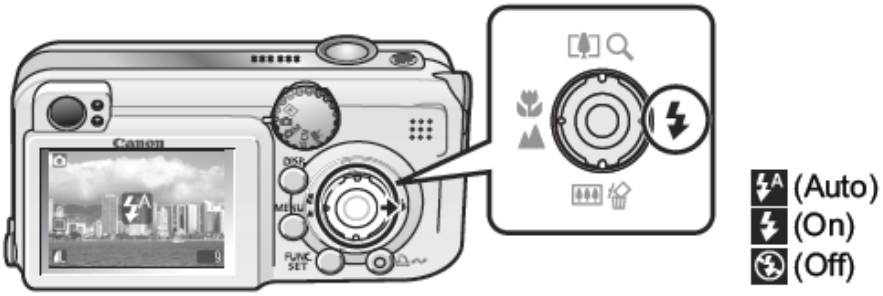
2 Adjust the Brightness.

- While watching the screen, press the ◀▶ buttons to adjust the brightness, then press the (FUNC SET) button.
- After the picture has been taken, return the setting to 0 (zero).

Yes, for instance– we will be discussing how to avoid *shadowy sockets* (i.e. eye sockets)

by turning on your flash so it always fires (the On setting below) called *fill flash*

1. Press the ϟ button to cycle through flash settings.



And what to do when the whole picture looks like the *wrong color*:

Which is called Setting the White Balance, which may look like this:

Adjusting the Tone (White Balance)

The White Balance (WB) function adjusts the optimal white balance for natural looking colors.

1 Select a white balance setting.

- Press the (FUNC SET) button, then use the ▲▼ buttons to select AWB.

2 Select a menu item.

- Press the ◀▶ buttons to select a menu item, then press the (FUNC SET) button.
- After shooting, return the setting to AWB.

AWB	Auto	Automatically sets the optimal white balance for the location.
☀	Daylight	Fine weather condition, outdoor shooting.
☁	Cloudy	Cloudy, shady, twilight conditions.
💡	Tungsten	Tungsten, bulb-type 3-wavelength fluorescent.
▦	Fluorescent	Warm-white, cool-white, warm-white-type (3-wavelength) fluorescent.
▦H	Fluorescent H	Daylight fluorescent, daylight-type (3-wavelength) fluorescent.
	Custom	Manually sets the custom white balance.

Then we will be ready to actually take the picture, *so* –

2. Keep your Composure!

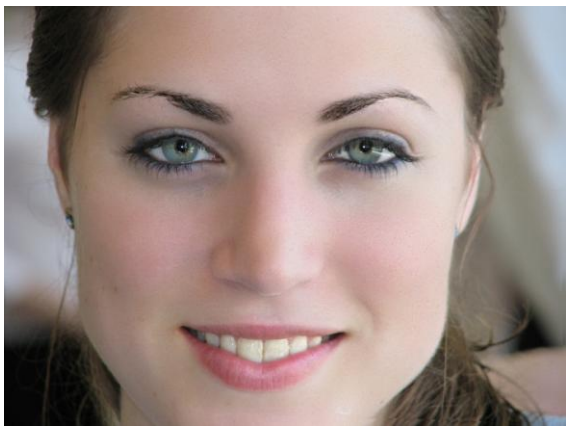
Avoid Distracting Backgrounds!

This may be the *most important sentence* in our whole careers (as photographers)! We want to present our message very clearly so we have to be aware of *<u>everything in the frame</u>.* Are there objects or colors or lines someplace in the pictures that confuse our message or take our attention from it? In the picture below on the left, do the books in the stack have anything to do with the beautiful Kalah? Let's move in or zoom in to focus on what moves us. Does the lady in the background in the picture on the right add anything to our message, or just take away? Nothing to do now, but before we took the picture we could have moved around to just include our story! Did I mention avoid distracting backgrounds?

And Unflattering Angles

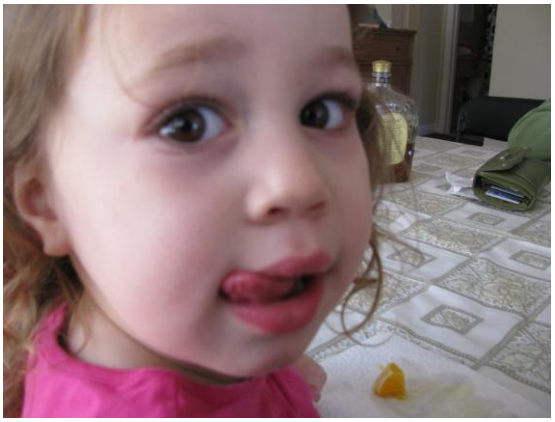
In general try to avoid "mug shots" strait on pictures with the subject in the middle of the frame, it creates a very static and lifeless feeling (unless the feeling you want to express in static and lifeless). Rather look for the "*turn and tilt*" wherever possible, like in the picture above, where

the head is *turned at an angle* to the camera, and it is *tilted towards one of the shoulders*. It is usually a good idea also to turn the shoulders at an angle to the camera and have one shoulder lower than the other, as above. If you are taking a full height picture, try having the person *turn ¼ away* from the camera for a *more flattering,* ***thinning*** *look*. Also, avoid putting the subject in the exact center of the frame looking straight ahead. Exception: with models (Chaya Esther's portrait was enhanced with professional portrait software) and children you can sometimes get away with a straight on shot (although with Shoshana she at least had that cute tilt).




Watch out for the wide angle lens

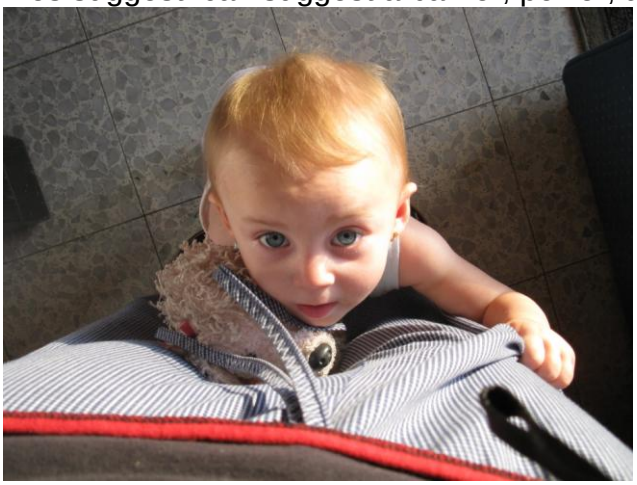
.In general, wide angle lens settings and being too close to the camera stretch out and distort features (like below). Try *zooming in* for a more flattering look (the pictures above were zoomed in all the way), although you might have to step back a little. Remember - ***Step Back and Zoom In!***



Use Shapes and Colors to Convey the Feeling

Different lines in the picture suggest shapes and different shapes suggest different emotions. Different colors, or shades of colors also suggest different emotions. You can *use these all to convey the feelings* that you find so special in your eyes. Let' look at some examples

Vertical (up and down) lines suggest can suggest a barrier, power, and strength, like below



A *diagonal* line suggests life, movement and speed. The picture on the left uses the diagonal between EB and CE (using Chaya Esther's arm for accent) to suggest life and dynamics between a mother and child. The one on the right shows speed and movement

Horizontal (flat) lines, on the other hand, give a feeling of something stable, restful, and calm

Triangles suggest a stable order of things with a little dynamic feeling, good for group portraits. But can you suggest two things to improve the picture below?

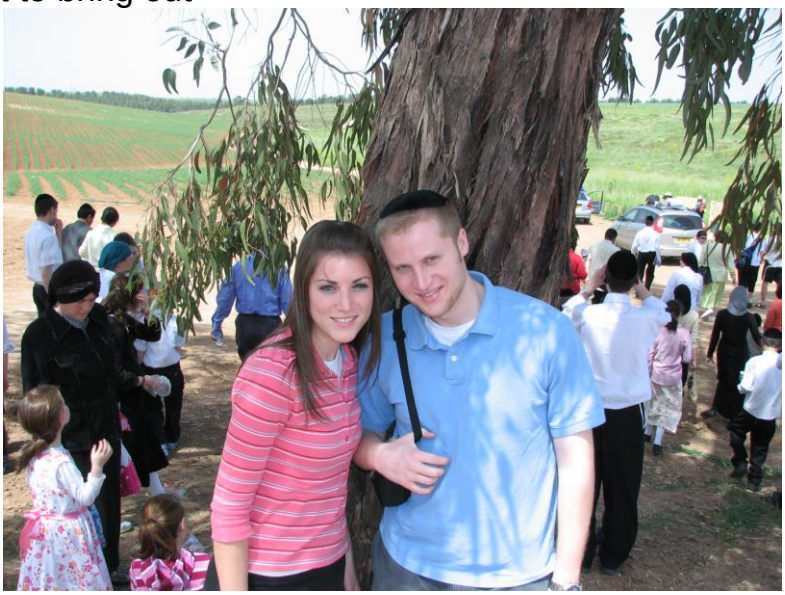
Answers: 1) Crop out the left side a little, the toy is competes for interest with the family, and 2) the color is a little reddish, needs to be adjusted (in software).

Circles and Curves have a flowing gentle feeling like the end of a day at Speedy Kef or the elegant line of Shifra's arm.

Watch for Colors That Can Convey Your Message

Colors play a very important role in communicating emotions and they can help you *express your vision* if you get used to *thinking about* them when you frame your pictures or enhance them in software, called *post processing* or *pp*.

Bright and warm (tending toward red or organge) draw the eye and can help people focus on what you want to bring out -



And different colors can evoke different emotions:

> *"Blues and greens bring to mind coolness, freshness and calmness. Oranges, yellows and similar colors are instantly associated with warmth and energy. More generally speaking, dark colors set a mysterious mood – the association with the unknown. Dull colors create a sombre mood, while bright and vivid colors are associated with energy, joy, hope, life and excitement."(from the Color Ebook by Mitchell Kanashkevitch)*

Let's see some examples –

Oranges, yellows and similar colors are instantly associated with warmth and energy

Blues and greens bring to mind coolness, freshness and calmness

dark colors set a mysterious mood

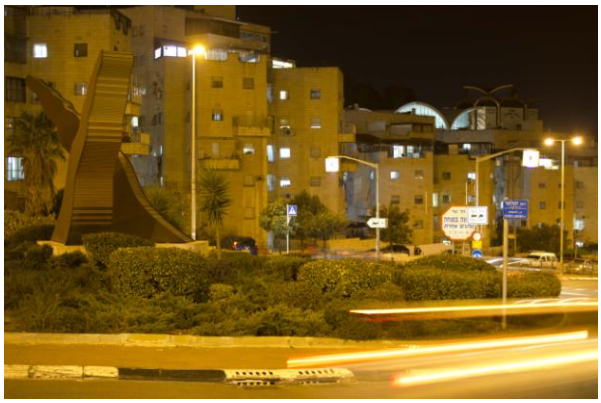
while bright and vivid colors are associated with energy, joy, hope, life and excitement

3. Exposure Exposed!

This image was a great idea, but tragically doomed from the start. What could be better than an attractive pose of Bassi with the striking landscape of Eilat as a backdrop. But, of course, you can't really see Bassi, and the landscape is too light, washed out (called *over exposed*), and lacks life. But it does illustrate a couple of important facts about digital cameras, that can be *very helpful* to us if *we keep them in mind*. The more obvious one is that cameras can't deal with a very big difference in light levels like our eyes can. We would be able to see Bassi and the background very well, that's why the photographer took the picture in the first place, but we have to *try to see like a camera* and not like ourselves. The second point is much more subtle, but very useful for us if we take advantage of it. What the camera did is measure the total amount of light coming in through the lens and said "this must be an average lit scene and allowed enough light in that an average lit object would look (be exposed) just right. The problem is that nothing had average illumination, Bassi was much darker than average, and the background was much lighter than average, so nothing got the right treatment! Dumb camera! But this is how cameras *work* now,

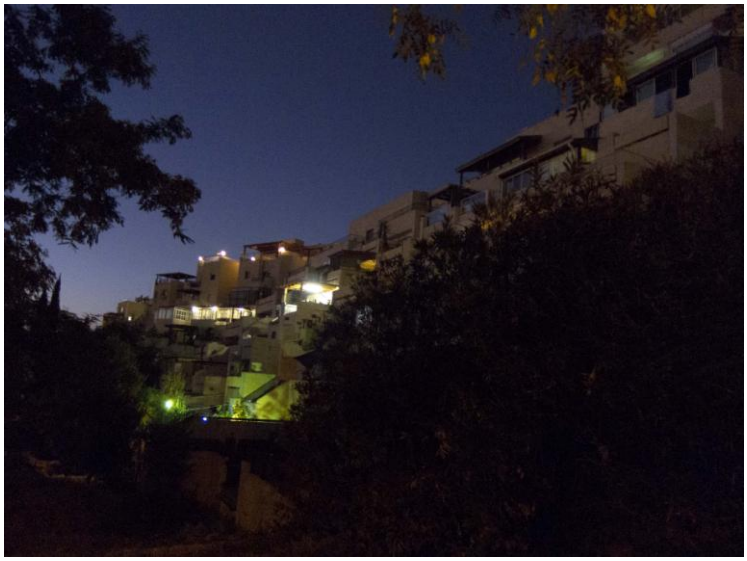
they just assume everything has average illumination, and sets the exposure that way. So if you *want to bring out something special* in the scene, like Bassi, you have to take control and tell the camera to let in more light so Bassi will look normal. That is where exposure compensation (see section 1) comes in. You can just set the camera to let in more light so we can see Bassi, that is called to *over expose* (although for Bassi it will be just the right exposure, but the camera *thinks* it is over exposing). Now if you let in more light so Bassi looks normal, the background will look even more washed out than it does now, and might turn to pure white (called *blown highlights*, where the highlights just turn white and loose all detail), but if you want to feature Bassi, because she is more important to you than the landscape, that is the trade off. But if your Photographer's Eye is more intrigued with the landscape, you'll have turn down the exposure so that the background doesn't look so washed out. Better yet use fill flash and Bassi and the background will be exposed properly!

Here is another example of the camera acting dumb. The first picture was taken in Har Nof at night. Now the camera noticed that there wasn't a whole lot of light coming in, but it had to do its duty and try to make the picture look like an average lit scene, so it let the shutter (the thing that opens to let in the light and closes to stop the light from coming in) open for a long time to make it look like average lighting. The fact is that what the scene really looked like is the second picture which I darkened up in software. I could have done the same thing by telling the camera to underexpose when I took the picture but I thought the first picture was interesting -



The main point of all this is that you have to think about the main subject of your picture and make sure that it is as light or dark as you want it to be, even if you have to override the camera.

Let's see some expamles before we do it ourselves –



Now this pictures was taken at dusk and I wanted it to look like that, but the camera would have lit it up by leaving the shutter open to make it look average. So I had to tell the camera to underexpose by 2 (it shows you numbers on the camera) to make sure the scene looked like what I saw.

Let's go back to the picture of Boruch

Now Boruch basically looks fine, not too dark or too light. But the problem is that light coming down from above casts a shadow over his eyes so the sockets look spooky. We don't want to tell the camera to overexpose to lighten up those eyes a little because the rest of his face will get too light. So what we do is tell the camera to move the sunlight so it comes in at a more flattering angle to lighten up his face evenly. OK, we can't move the sun. But we tell the camera to add its own light straight ahead to lighten up everything evenly by firing its flash (called fill flash, from section 1) ! Don't worry, the picture won't get too light because the camera knows it is adding extra light to the scene and it will automatically shut down the exposure a little to get back to average lighting! Not so dumb after all. By the way the picture of Bassi in Eilat could have been saved by using a fill flash on Bassi until she was as light as the background.

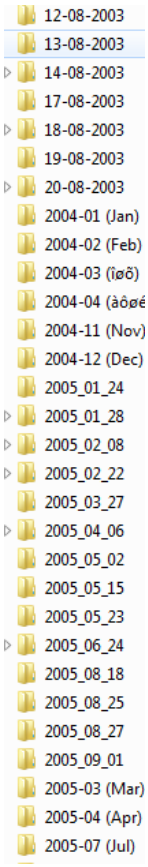
A professional photographer once said, "*Never use your flash indoors, and always use it outdoors!"* What was his thinking? The problem with flash indoors is the "deer in the headlights" look where just the subject's face or body is lit up all white and the background is all dark. Now *cameras do this on purpose*. The idea is that since the flash on a point and shoot is so small and its beam is so narrow, the camera just assumes that the area lit up by the flash will be your subject, which it usually is, and it figures I'll at least try to get the subject exposed right and gives up on the rest. The problem usually is that the subject gets so much light that it is overexposed, and you can't really see too much detail, and the whole thing just doesn't look real. There are ways to handle this with a separate flash, but sometimes the best idea is to just turn off the flash and try to make do with available light (called *ambient* light). The problem with this is that sometimes the camera has to turn up the amplification of the sensor so much to make do with ambient light, that it starts to distort the picture, called *noise* like the picture below. Check the *ISO* (amplification) on your pictures*, if they go over 400 on a point and shoot, you will probably get pictures like* this where there are so many speckles and blotches that you can barely see any detail (the ISO on this picture was 1600).

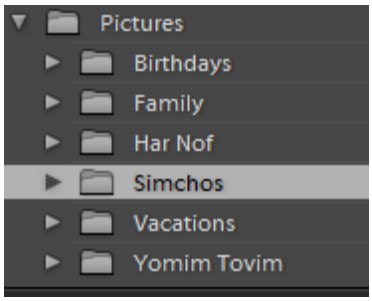
Compared to this which was taken with a separate flash

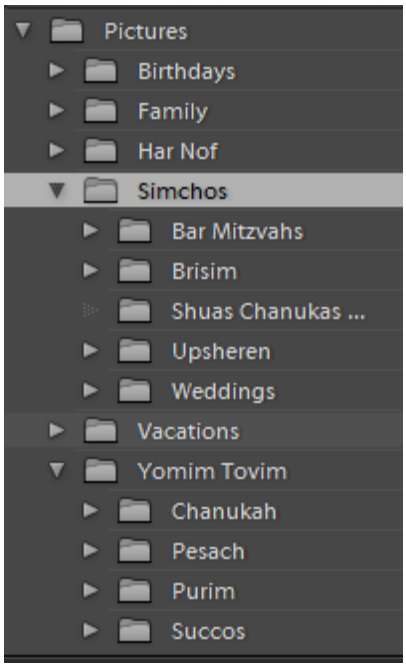
Important Summary: The bottom line is *try to talk to yourself – what is moving me in this scene?* Then try to *move around or tilt the camera, zoom in or out, until the lines and colors bring out what you want and there is nothing distracting in the frame*. Then make sure *that what you want the viewer to focus on is exposed the way you want*. Don't be afraid to fiddle with exposure compensation until it is as dark or light as you want. Hopefully you will have created an image that can excite or move someone else with your vision!
Now on to the last step - doing the computer thing.

4. Software - Keep Thy Limitations!

First and very foremost don't let this happen! But do this instead -







The left *is just part* of what Picasa did to make my pictures impossible to find, the list is *much longer*. The two right screen shots of how I organize my pictures now. As you can see the left list

is useless. The right two are totally useful. So number one is learn how to organize your pictures into intelligent folders if you ever want to find them again. Then don't unwittingly ruin your pictures when you think that you are making them better, as follows -
Due to the way that digital cameras work, you should know that as soon as you press the shutter, **you have lost two thirds** of the light information coming into the lens – each pixel (dot) only records one color, red, green or blue, not all three! And by time the image is written to your memory card you've lost **nine tenths of whatever was left** (unless you have a DSLR or a very fancy point and shoot)! Therefore - Guard Thy Digital Information! Every little loss of information after this makes for *mushy, blurry, unrealistic* pictures. Here is why -
"*The jpg format is a very popular and widely used format. It's great for small files used on websites and for emailing because it can load and send faster. However, despite the usefulness it can have, saving an image in the jpeg format also comes with some not-so-great side effects. The JPEG format uses a lossy compression method during saving. This means that when you save your image as a .jpg some of the [unnecessary] data from the original image file is discarded and your image is saved with a reduced file size. The quality that is lost (discarded) from your image can not be recovered.* ***In addition, each time you save your image more data is lost and image quality reduced.*** *This is also very common with images taken on mobile devices such as camera phones and for many point-and-shoot cameras*." (from Topaz Labs)

So everytime you use Picasa to "enhance" your pictures – make them darker or lighter or change the color balance – you are actually making them *more blurred*!

So is there anything that can be done? Serif Photo Plus (around $55 on Amazon) and Adobe Lightroom 4 (around $124 on Amazon) are right out of the box non-destructive and both let you enhance your pictures tremendously. Lightroom is the current choice for almost all pro and advanced amateurs for basic organizing and editing, and can give you amazing results without any degradation of you pictures. If you can afford Lightroom,and take a little time to learn it (lots of very good tutorial books available, esp.Scott Kelby's and free tutorial videos on the web) you should be able to keep track of your photos, share them by email or on the web, and edit them beautifully.

Anyway this is our little introduction to our Workshop where we can actually put some of these ideas into practice. Hope you enjoyed it and that Hash-m should help us to take beautiful, meaningful pictures of His beautiful, amazing world!

Please share any questions or comment with me: aryehb@bezeqint.net