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Ben Sorer U'Moreh - The Wayward Child

Parshas Ki Seitzei talks about *ben sorer u'moreh*, the wayward child, who rebels against the Torah, "who does not listen to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother." In this part of the Torah, we are taught that there are children who do not listen to their parents, who do not continue their parents' ways, by forfeiting the path of the Torah that they are taught.

This is especially happening in our current generation, where there are many children who abandon the ways of their parents and they go their own separate ways, throwing away the yoke of Torah from upon them.

The 'Wayward Child' Throughout History

Not every parent merits to have children who listen to them. The first child in history who did not continue in his father's ways was Kayin, son of Adam. Later in history, Noach had a son Cham, who did not either go in his father's ways. Avraham Avinu had a wayward son, Yishmael, and Yitzchok Avinu had Esav.

We see from this that a wayward child is not always due to the parents' fault. It is simply because not every parent has the *zechus* (merit) to be saved from having a wayward child.

Avraham and Yitzchok were perfectly righteous, yet they bore children who completely rebelled against their teachings. And in fact, even Yaakov Avinu, who is praised for having perfect progeny, also had to deal with some grief from his children, so they did not always go in his ways and emulate his teachings. Although the sons of Yaakov were all perfectly righteous, they caused plenty of pain to their father Yaakov Avinu, by refusing to talk to Yosef and by hating him, when they were upset with him.

Although this does not compare at all to the evils committed by Esav and Yishmael, who became wicked individuals that completely abandoned the ways of their fathers, still, the sons of Yaakov Avinu still caused a considerable amount of pain to their father, and this is also a degree of "not going in the ways" of the parents.

So there are two kinds of children who do not continue in the ways of their parents and who cause grief to the parents. One kind of child rebels totally against the Torah, like Esav and Yishmael. Another kind of child can be a good child, but he still can cause some grief to his parents, such as what we see with the 12 sons of Yaakov Avinu, who were all righteous, yet their father had pain from them,

because they did not always emulate his ways.

In our generation especially, there are children who are not going in the ways of their parents, and their parents have considerable grief from them. This problem did not begin in today's times; it has already been rooted into our history, that there will be children who don't go in the ways of their fathers.

The sons of Yaakov were all perfectly righteous, and although their hatred towards Yosef did not take away their status of being *tzaddikim*, it eventually bore evil results later on, in their own descendants. Levi had an evil grandson, Korach, who caused disparity amongst *Klal Yisrael* and he lost his share in the World To Come because of this; he is not counted amongst the progeny of Yaakov Avinu.

Our *Avos* and our *Imahos* had to deal with having evil children like Esav and Yishmael, and they also bore descendants such as Korach. They were as spiritual and as righteous as can be and they did their best, but they were not always spared from having troubles with their children.

Chinuch: How Parents Can Do Their Best

The *avodah* of our *Avos* was to imbibe the principles of belief into the Jewish people. They perfected their own character, and that was how they could succeed in getting their children to emulate them and to continue in their ways.

Thus, *chinuch* (child education) is not simply about training the child to do certain deeds. Parents must work on themselves, on perfecting their own character, in order to imbibe a good *chinuch* on their children and to teach them what they want to teach them, just as the *Avos* did.

But if the parents themselves are weak in their own *emunah* and in their own observance of the Torah, and they live their lives by rote, they will not succeed to implant truth in their children. And when that is missing, there is usually rebelliousness amongst the children, and the child is not to blame for this. *"What should the child do, and not sin?"*^[1]

On a deeper note, when the parents themselves are not earnest in how they live and keep Judaism, there is no "voice" for the children to listen to and emulate. The *ben sorer u'moreh* turns out the way he is because "he does not listen to the voice of his father and to the voice of his mother", but if the father and mother themselves are not earnest about what they do, then the "voice" of the father and his mother are not a genuine voice for the child to listen to. If their voice would be a voice of truth, when their words to him are coming from their heart, there is a rule that "words that come from the heart, enter the heart", and usually the child will be affected by their words, because he knows that his parents are earnest.

Chinuch, Part 1: Expressing Love and Creating 'Simchas HaChaim' In The Home

In our generation, there is more of a need than ever, that the parents show their love to their children, and **express** it to them. It is not enough if the parents know deep down that they love their children; this remains as "hidden love"^[2] and it will not be enough to nourish the children's emotional needs. This was always the case, but nowadays, it is even more so.

The parent's love for the child must be outwardly revealed and **expressed**. Such a home will be a home of *simchas hachaim* (joy of life), which is absolutely necessary for a child to thrive in and develop properly.

Without an atmosphere of *simchas hachaim* in the home, a home might look like it is functioning, and the children have clothing to wear and they have other things too, but there is no spirit of life there.

This is such a basic part of the home, which any home needs: there must be love **expressed** in the home. The parents must keep showering their love in the home upon their children, and this is what creates a *simchas hachaim* in the home that the children will need.[3]

Chinuch, Part 2: A Home of Emes\Truth

However, there is more than this that is needed in the home. A *simchas hachaim* in the home, created by the parents' outward expression of love, is all but the physical layer of the home. There is a deeper part to the home that is needed: the parents need to implant *emes* (truth) into the home. The children must see that their parents really mean what they do. Often the child does not turn out truthful because it was the parents who are not earnest in their own level of *Yiddishkeit*. [4]

But if there is a combination of *simchas hachaim* in the home, together with an atmosphere of *emes* in the home, these two factors together are what creates the proper and successful Jewish home, enabling there to be far less of a chance of a "*ben sorer o'moreh*" from happening.

When The Parents Did Everything Right

Yet, even if the parents did all of the above and they did everything right, there is still no guarantee that the parents will always have perfect children. Is any one of us more righteous than Avraham Avinu? Is anyone among us greater than Yitzchok Avinu? Our great Avos bore evil children, Yishmael and Esav, who totally rebelled against the ways of their parents. Some of our greatest *Gedolim* had children who did not follow in the way of the Torah. [5]

Certainly as a first measure, the father and mother must do everything they can in order to implant **love** and **truth** in their home, as we said; and the son will usually reciprocate these feelings. This is usually the case, for the parent-child bond is such an integral part of life that forms the basis of how the child will act. But sometimes, the parents have done everything they can, and it is not their fault that their child has abandoned the way of Torah.

When that happens, we must be aware of the following. Although the parent-child relationship is integral to our development, and it is a very important part of life which shapes us, there is still a deeper aspect of life than this which we must access than our parent-child relationship.

Dovid HaMelech said, "*For my father and my mother have abandoned me, and Hashem will gather me.*" [6] Our father and mother represent our physical side of life, which must be certainly be healthy in order for us to survive, but there is also our *neshamah* (Divine soul). Our *neshamah* relates only to Hashem as its Father, for only Hashem is "our Father in Heaven". We have a *mitzvah* to honor our physical parents, but the inner essence of life is: to honor our Father in heaven. Honoring parents is just a *moshol* (parable) that helps us reach the *nimshal* (lesson).

Therefore, we must know that the bond we have with our parents is only one side of life. It cannot be everything, for it all stems from our physical side of life. We come from our physical parents, therefore, we are connected to them in the physical sense, for they had a part in forming our physical existence. [7] But our physical layer is not all there is to us, for we have a soul in us, and our essence is our soul. Our soul needs a relationship with Hashem, and it is not satisfied with just the physical relationship we have with our parents.

Avraham had a rebellious son, Yishmael. How did he get over the grief he must have had from this? The Torah tells us that when Hashem told Avraham that Yishmael will not be his progeny, Avraham still prayed for Yishmael's life, hoping that Yishmael would live and continue. But although he prayed for Yishmael's survival, he still knew that Yishmael is no longer regarded as his son. How did he console himself over the pain of this?

It must be because there is a point in the soul which goes deeper than the father-son relationship. The father-child relationship is very powerful, but there is a point in the soul that is even stronger than this: our bond with our true, merciful Father in heaven. (In terms of the soul, the father-son relationship is called the point of "*av u'ben*" (father and child) in the soul, and the point above that is called *l'malah m'av u'ben*, "above father-and-child".)

Therefore, if a child does not go in the ways of his father and he abandons the Torah, the father must certainly repent that perhaps it is his own fault - and hopefully, in this merit, the child will become inspired and return to his father's ways; but if the child does not return, the father must now let go of the father-child relationship, and instead turn to the deeper point in his soul, the relationship that goes beyond father and son: our bond with our Father in heaven.[\[8\]](#)

"Avinu"

These days of Elul are days where we must penetrate into the depths of the soul and find our inner "Father". The inner "Father" in our soul which we must reveal is, essentially, *to feel a palpable sense of our Father*.

Throughout the days of *Selichos*, Rosh HaShanah, the days of *teshuvah*, and Yom Kippur, we keep saying the words, "*Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu, Avinu Malkeinu!!*" ("Our Father, our King"). But if we really mean it, we must really *feel* that Hashem is indeed *Avinu*, our Father.

How, indeed, can we get ourselves to realize that Hashem is "*Avinu*"? We know that when a child grows up with his parents, he turns to his parents for all his needs. Later he grows up and he becomes more independent of his parents, but at first, a child is totally dependent on his parents. He asks his parents for anything he needs. So, too, one must turn to Hashem for everything, for all his needs, just like a child in his parents' home. He must ask Hashem for everything, big or small. When a person gets used to this, he will slowly begin to feel that Hashem is indeed his Father.

One who merits to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring parents properly has a good *moshol* to work with for this. But even if one did not merit to fulfill the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, he can still get used to asking Hashem for everything and thereby come to relate to Hashem as his Father.

During these days of mercy, we ask Hashem for many things. We ask for life, livelihood, health, Torah, *yiras shomayim*, and more. Although all of these requests are about things we need, the deeper part of life is to build for ourselves a bond with our Father.

We all have this power, but it has become concealed deep within and it is covered over by many layers that have accumulated from all the years. But we still all have this power in ourselves deep down, and we just need to reveal it outward, from its hidden state.

One can train himself to keep turning to Hashem, on a regular basis, for all things that he needs. This will slowly enable a person to have a bond with Hashem, more and more, as we get used to this. When one lives this way and he turns to Hashem hundreds of times throughout the day, and not just during the three *tefillos* we daven each day, he slowly develops his bond with Hashem and he begins to relate to him as the true "Father."

Yamim Noraim - Days of Learning How To Talk To Hashem

These days of mercy reveal to us this particular aspect of realizing that Hashem is our Father. These days are not just about *davening* more; these are days which show us how the rest of the year should look like - to constantly turn to Hashem for everything and relate to Him as our Father.

Of course, this does not mean *chas v'shalom* that we should *daven* the entire day and not learn Torah. The point we are saying is that the inner layer to the life that we live is, to always talk to Hashem, over all matters, big or small, and to turn to Him throughout the day whenever we need something.

Getting used to it helps us acquire the nature that is really deep in our soul to turn to Hashem. It enables a person to have true closeness with Hashem throughout the day. It transforms a person's Torah learning into truthful Torah learning, and it makes our prayers more earnest, and it causes our performance of the *mitzvos* and the act of doing Hashem's will to stem from a deeper place in ourselves, to be more genuine.

In Conclusion

This is the perfection of our *avodah* we can reach on this world – to merit a relationship with Hashem in which we feel like He is our Father and that we are His child. And when we feel like a child of Hashem, we will be like the child who naturally listens to his parent – the child who hears the voice of Hashem.

But in order to truly feel like a child of Hashem, we need to relate to Him as our Father, as we explained above.[\[9\]](#)

This is the true kind of life – to be constantly connected with Hashem, every day and throughout the entire day, always desiring a closeness with Him.

[\[1\]](#) From the prayers we recite in *Selichos*

[\[2\]](#) “*ahavah musteres*”, “hidden love”, a concept mentioned in sefer *Tanya*, who explains that although we all have a hidden love for Hashem in our hearts, it is not enough for us to develop feelings for Hashem, and we must reveal it outward.

[\[3\]](#) For more on expressing love in the home and in bringing *simchas hachaim* into the home, see ***Getting To Know Your Family_02_Expressing Love In The Home***, and ***Getting To Know Your Family_09_Infusing Spirituality Into The Home***

[\[4\]](#) See ***Getting To Know Your Simcha_011_Raising Happy Children***

[\[5\]](#) Editor's Note: Some examples are the sons of Eli HaKohen (Chofni and Pinchas), the son of King Chizkiyahu (the wicked king Menasheh), and the wicked sons of Dovid HaMelech – Avshalom and Amnon. In recent history as well, many righteous *tzaddikim* did not merit to always have good children.

[\[6\]](#) *Tehillim* 27:10

[\[7\]](#) See ***Tefillah #0124 - The Only Lasting Connection***

[8] Refer also to ***Getting To Know Your Feelings, Chapter Seven: Developing Our Relationships***

[9] Editor's Note: The sefer of *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Daled* ("Bilvavi" Part 4) is devoted to how we can build a father-son relationship with Hashem.

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