

FAMILY FRICTION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's Torah portion deals with many different issues of human behavior and family relations. We are all aware that the relationships between parents and children, as well as between other relatives in the same family are often difficult ones and fraught with potential danger, frustration and even tragedy. People within a family are very capable of disliking and even hating one another despite their biological and social connection. This is because in the basic family structure there exists a bond of love between the members of the family that is natural and quite strong. And any time strong love is present, the possibility of strong hate always lurks in the background.\

Precisely because children love their parents, they feel justified in holding them to unrealistic standards of behavior and attitude. And since parents often fall short of such absolute perfection, the resentment towards them can become so great as to lead to awful family disputes. Hard statistics reveal that most murders occur between perpetrators and victims who are related or know each other well. These family members have experienced disappointment and often complain of severe mistreatment.

There are many current theories as to how to properly raise children and create tranquility and harmony within the family unit. But, as is true in almost all areas of life, one size does not fit all, and it is difficult to fit each separate case into any general rule. Because of this, it is obvious that every family must sort through relationships and affairs individually. Very rarely if ever can any outside source, no matter how wise or professional, solve the problems and workings of the family unit.

From the narrative that appears regarding the rebellious son – a narrative that according to one opinion in the Talmud is to be treated only as a metaphor – it is clear that we are being taught that there are instances when no logical or rational solution is present or possible. It is difficult for us in our time, when we have unlocked so many doors regarding the mysteries of science, technology and medicine to have to admit that there are basic human problems that exist within family relationships that we are powerless to solve on our own.

Later in the Torah we will read that that there are many hidden things in human life that only Heaven can deal with. We can only do the best that we can, to the extent that we are physically, emotionally and intellectually able. There is no question that this limitation upon our omnipotence is very frustrating especially to modern humans who believe that they are capable of everything.

By realizing that paradoxically we can accomplish more than we thought possible in times of

difficulty, eventually we know that we must rely upon the God that infuses us with life, to help us solve all difficult situations and to accept God's will.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein