

PARENTS NEED TO SPEAK TO THEIR CHILDREN WITH A UNIFIED VOICE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #559 - The Double Portion of the B'chor. Good Shabbos!

Parents Need To Speak To Their Children With A Unified Voice

This week's parsha contains the laws of the Wayward and Rebellious Son (ben sorer u'moreh). This is one of the most difficult chapters in the Torah to comprehend. The Talmud in the eighth chapter of Sanhedrin explains that this is a very exceptional situation. The parents notice a trend in their young son's spiritual development that will almost inevitably lead to a lifestyle involving robbery and perhaps even murder. Therefore the Torah advises that he should be put to death "at the stage in life when he is still innocent," rather than allowing him to mature to a point where he will actually be fully deserving of death.

There is an opinion in the Talmud [Sanhedrin 71a] that an actual case of ben sorer u'moreh never happened, and never will happen. It was, according to this opinion, included in the Torah merely for the lessons of life which it contains. At any rate, the chapter clearly does present lessons regarding how parents should and should not act when raising children.

Rav Dovid Feinstein makes an interesting linguistic inference from the wording in this chapter. When the Torah originally describes the situation of the ben sorer u'moreh, it states "he did not listen to the voice of his father nor to the voice of his mother" [Devorim 21:18]. However when the Torah describes the testimony of the parents in Beis Din, there is a subtle change of language: "He does not listen to OUR voice" [Devorim 21:20].

There are no secret formulas to raising good children. Raising children is the most difficult job in the world. However, there are clearly certain things parents should try to avoid. Parents should always present a unified message of their expectations to their children. When a child hears mixed messages - one thing from the father and another thing from the mother - that is a garden in which weeds can grow.

When the child hears mixed messages, he follows whatever he thinks is right. Since one parent says

one thing and the other parent says another thing - "let the third pasuk [verse] come and reconcile between them." Even if the parents present a unified approach as to what is good and what is not good, what can be done and what can not be done - there is still no guarantee that the children will come out perfect. But at least the parents have removed one of the greatest reasons why children go astray.

Therefore, the Torah stressed at the outset that the parents were not of one voice and one opinion. The child did not listen to his father's voice and independently he did not listen to his mother's alternate voice. Only subsequently, when the child has already left the tried and true path, do the parents come and, sadly, tell the elders of the court: "Now we are together. We have a unified voice and we know that what our son is doing is wrong." Unfortunately, by then it is too late.

Parents may have disagreements among themselves as to what is the proper course in raising children. But those disagreements need to be decided among themselves. When parents come before their children, they need to articulate a clear, decisive, and uniform position. When they reach the status of "our voice" rather than "the father's voice" and "the mother's voice," their chances for success will be much greater.

Ingratitude Leads To Far Worse Sins

The parsha teaches "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem, even their tenth generation shall not enter the congregation of Hashem, to eternity" [Devorim 23:4]. This means even an Ammonite or Moabite who converts to Judaism is not allowed to marry a native member of the Jewish nation. This is contrasted with the law of an Egyptian, whose third generation convert is allowed to marry a native Jew or Jewess. We know from the story of Rus that the prohibition only applies to the male members of Ammon and Moav.

The Torah [Devorim 23:5] specifies the reason for the harsh treatment of these two nations. First, the Torah states that it is because of the fact "that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt". They refused to even sell us the bare necessities of food and drink during our travels from Egypt when we approached their land. Their hatred for the Jewish nation went so deep that they passed up the opportunity to make a great business profit, just to cause hardship to Klal Yisrael.

The Torah continues in this very same pasuk with the second reason for our enmity towards the nation of Moav. It is because "he hired against you Bilaam son of Beor, of Pethor, Aram Naharaim, to curse you."

Rav Elyah Meir Bloch makes the following observation:

Suppose a person comes home from shul, he walks into his house, his wife takes one look at him and she notices that he has a bloody nose. She asks him, "What happened?" He responds, "I was walking down the street and saw another fellow who I don't particularly get along with. Not only did

he not say 'Good Shabbos' to me, he punched me in the nose!"

The two complaints are anything but equal. If a person we know does not wish us 'Good Shabbos' and also punches us in the nose, we don't take equal insult. In such a scenario, the fact that he didn't say 'Good Shabbos' is nothing compared to the punch in the nose.

This is analogous to the explanation the Torah gives in the above quoted pasuk. The fact that they didn't greet us with bread and water was not very hospitable on the part of Moav and Amon. But it wouldn't have been the end of the world. However, the fact that they hired Bilaam to curse us, that was like a punch in the nose!

What is perplexing is that the verse treats the two insults as if they were equal. "They did not greet you with bread and water" and "hired against you Bilaam son of Beor." How do we explain this pasuk?

The answer is that we have a long history with Ammon and Moav. They are our cousins. They descend from Lot, the nephew of Avraham. Were it not for Uncle Avraham's rescue, Lot would have been consumed in the destruction of Sodom. If there are any two nations in the world who owe us a debt of gratitude, whose existence is dependant upon us; it is the nations of Ammon and Moav.

This pasuk is telling us that the fact that Ammon and Moav did not welcome us with bread and water is far more serious than merely not saying 'Good Shabbos'. Such lack of action is indicative of the rottenness of these people. Any person that won't return a favor to someone who saved their life is so corrupt to the core that there is no hope for them.

Because they are so corrupt and rotten to the core that they could forget this favor, that is why they went to the next step of hiring Bilaam in an attempt to curse and eradicate the Jewish people. The second part of the pasuk is the natural consequence of the first part. People that forget those who saved their lives can turn around and try to destroy those very same people towards whom they should show exceptional gratitude.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky Explains A Difficult Mishneh

In this week's parsha we are introduced to the laws of divorce. The Torah specifies the way to end a Jewish marriage. The last Mishneh in Tractate Gittin [90a] cites a difference of opinion as to justifiable grounds for divorce: Bais Shammai rule that a person should not divorce his wife unless he finds that she has been unfaithful to him ('ervas davar'; i.e. - adultery). Short of that, a person is not allowed to divorce his wife according to Bais Shammai.

Bais Hillel rule that a man may divorce his wife even if she burns his dinner. Rabbi Akiva goes even further than Bais Hillel, ruling that a person is allowed to divorce his wife merely because he found another woman more pleasing to him. This is the same Rabbi Akiva who told his students: All that I have learned and all that you have learned is attributable to my wife ("mine and yours is hers") [Kesuvos 63a]. He certainly was appreciative of his wife. Nevertheless, he rules that finding a better-

looking woman than one's wife is valid grounds for divorce! This is a difficult Mishneh to understand.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky was once asked to explain the interpretation of this Mishneh. Rav Yaakov stated that one must look at the language of the Mishneh very precisely in order to properly understand the opinions of Bais Hillel and Rabbi Akiva.

Bais Hillel rule "even if she burned his dish". Rav Yaakov asked, "What does it mean HIS dish?" She made dinner for the two of them. It should say she burned "their dish". So what must have happened? She was cooking dinner and noticed smoke in the kitchen. She ran to the stove and found that the bottom layer of the dish was burnt, but the top layer was still not burnt. She cut the food in two, slicing off the upper layer from the bottom layer. She then served her husband the bottom layer and told him - "YOUR portion got burnt!" However, she was able to eat HER portion because it did not get burnt. Bais Hillel rules that one is allowed to divorce such a woman. A woman who is so selfish, who does not view marriage as 'us' or 'we' but as 'my portion' and 'your portion' (with 'your portion' being the burnt portion), one may justifiably divorce such a woman.

Rav Yaakov was then pressed as to the interpretation of Rabbi Akiva's ruling, whereupon he replied in a similar fashion. The Mishneh is not teaching justifiable reasons for divorcing a wife; the Mishneh is enumerating situations of "sick marriages" where divorce may be appropriate. How, asked Rav Yaakov, can one think that there is a woman out there who is nicer than his own wife?

If a person believes in G-d, if he believes in the idea of 'basherte' [being Divinely destined to marry one's own spouse], if he believes in 'hashgacha pratis' [personal Divine Providence] he should be confident that he is already married to the woman that the Almighty wanted him to have. That being the case, how is it possible to find "a nicer woman than his wife?"

A person who enters marriage and life believing that the Master of the World is in charge and that "He takes care of me" cannot possibly think that he has found a prettier, nicer, better woman than the woman who is already his wife.

The reason why Rabbi Akiva says that a man can divorce his wife under such circumstances is because if a person doesn't appreciate that the wife he has is the wife that the Almighty wants for him, then the marriage is fundamentally flawed. In that case, the marriage may - and perhaps should - be terminated.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for the weekly parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series is provided below:

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