



PARENTAL PRIORITY

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayetzei 5783

Dear Parents,

The power of a parent to influence the trajectory of his child's life is well known. What is not so well known, is how far *Chazal* view the potential reach of that influence. We are all familiar with the words from *Mishlei* – (22:6)

חנוך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה.

“Educate the child in accordance with his ways, also when he grows old he will not veer from it.” The well-known explanation is: Discover the child's nature and work with and develop the child in accordance with because that nature will always remain and the *Chinuch* implanted in tune with his nature will become permanent.

“...*Reuven ... only picked Dudaim from an ownerless field (hefker).*” it,

There is a *Midrash* in this week's *Parsha* which takes the *Pasuk* in a different direction, imparting another foundational and all-important lesson. In the famous incident of *Reuven* bringing the *Dudaim* to his mother *Leah*, the Torah tells us (*Bereishis 30:14*) “And *Reuven* went during the days of the wheat harvest...” The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 72:1)* is apparently troubled by the *Pasuk* including the seemingly irrelevant detail that this took place during the days of the wheat harvest. In paragraph 2, the *Midrash* explains that this detail is coming to praise *Reuven* in that he only picked *Dudaim* from an ownerless field (*hefker*).

Based upon that information, the *Midrash* in paragraph 1 quotes the *Pasuk* of “*Chanoch L'Naar...*” and explains that many years later, when the time came for the *Bnei Yisrael* to divide up *Eretz Yisroel* that they were now entering, the tribe of *Reuven*, *Reuven's* descendants, chose the lands east of the Jordan river, because they contained abundant grazing fields for their many cattle.

“...*they were emulating their ancestor Reuven, ...to not take something that belonged to another.*”

The commentator *Eitz Yosef*, quoting the *Yefe Toar*, says this interest in the lands outside of *Eretz Yisroel* proper was in order to avoid the lure of grazing the sheep on other people's lands. Because the grazing was so abundant east of the Jordan, as opposed to *Eretz Yisroel* itself, they would protect themselves from the possibility of theft. Furthermore, explains the *Eitz Yosef* – with this level of scrupulousness in avoiding theft, they were emulating their ancestor *Reuven*, who implanted this sensitivity to not take something that belonged to another.

How astounding is that?! Because *Reuven* demonstrated a heightened devotion to avoiding theft, many generations later, his progeny's actions in showing special care for the property of others are considered an outcome of *Reuven's* devotion to that behavior. By applying the *Pasuk* of “*Chanoch L'Naar...*” to this request of *Bnei Reuven*, the *Midrash* is telling us it came directly from what *Reuven* taught to his children. According to this interpretation, the *Pasuk* can be understood to be teaching; “Teach (train) the child according to His (Hashem's) way, so that in his old age (and beyond to future generations) the descendants will not veer from it (what the father was so devoted to and passionate about).”

We all have something we are particularly passionate about, feel strongly about or enjoy immersing ourselves in. We need to realize that our children will pick up on what is really important to us. Those things that really animate us and that we focus on will have a very strong impact on our children, whether for good or for not so good. It is sobering to realize that when we make the effort to improve in a certain area, whether in learning, mitzvah observance or sensitivity to others, we not only impact ourselves, but the reverberations are literally for generations. We have the power to set our family on a beautiful path that can bear fruit for centuries to come.

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May Hashem grant us the extra strength to continue to work on improving and perfecting our attitudes and behavior, the greatest gift we can impart to ourselves and our future generations, IY'H.

Best wishes for a wonderful *Shabbos*,

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Principal