

A Loving Father

Dear Parents,

At the very beginning of *Sefer Shemos*, the *Medrash Rabba* speaks of how to properly raise children. The first *Pasuk* begins with a reference to the sons of *Yaakov* who came down to *Mitzrayim*. Troubled by the seemingly extra word *את* in the phrase *את יעקב באו*...וביתו איש... the *Medrash* quotes the well-known *Pasuk* from *Mishlei* (13:24) "One who spares his rod hates his son..." The *Medrash* questions how can it be that one who doesn't hit his child hates his child. No one will deny that if a person reports to a parent that someone else hit the parent's child, he would feel anger and perhaps even enmity towards the person who physically abused his beloved child. It should therefore follow, that not hitting one's child shows love!

To answer this question, the *Medrash* brings numerous well-known unfortunate examples of wayward children (*Yishmael, Esav, Avshalom, Adoniyahu*) in *Tanach* and explains that by failing to deliver strong discipline when necessary, **by "sparing the rod," a father will end up hating his son, for the kind of sinful person he will grow into as a result.**

Through this explanation, the *Medrash*, according to the *Yefe Toar* (commentary on the *Medrash*), is pointing out that the *Pasuk* included the extra word *את*, to highlight that *Yaakov's* parenting approach was to work with his sons. The fact that the 12 sons who went down to *Mitzrayim* were all great *Tzadikim*, was due to the fact that *Yaakov Avinu* raised them with the proper discipline. Their towering spiritual achievements were equal to those of *Yaakov* and were the product of the (proper) effort *Yaakov Avinu* put into them.

The *Dubno Magid* is quoted as explaining there are two types of people who do good for others. **One is motivated by a desire to help others while the second possesses a sensitive nature that is disturbed when he sees another suffering.** The first type acts to fill another's need, the second type, in actuality, acts to fulfill his own need. The difference between the two intentions won't be noticeable until the needs of the other require that he be dealt with strongly, perhaps even harshly. The first will do whatever it takes to help the other, while the second won't act, because the act of causing the other to suffer will intensify his own suffering.

This is very clearly evident when a loving parent forcefully holds down his own screaming child so the doctor can insert a painful needle into the young child with a life-saving treatment. It is not heartlessness that compels the parent to act, it is true love and concern for the child. Without causing the child temporary pain in this circumstance, the parent would be evidencing cruelty and callousness towards his child.

Every parent wants their child to be happy. The common adage "a mother is only as happy as her least happy child" sounds beautiful, and reflects a special sympathy, but it runs contrary to how the Torah directs us. Proper upbringing includes allowing a child to endure difficulties that inevitably occur in life. **Always smoothing the path for a child will never equip him with the ability to handle a difficult terrain.** The inevitable bumps that one encounters will knock him off his feet, if he has not had experience with setbacks and obstacles earlier in life.

The *Yefe Toar* brings this concept full circle and it has great relevance to our present situation. The *Yefe Toar* explains this idea of allowing children to experience some vicissitudes of life and it is brought here in the *Medrash*, at the introduction to our people's struggles in *Mitzrayim*. Just as a wise and loving parent knows to allow his child to experience hardship, pain and setback to reach the ultimate goal of healthy, spiritually strong adulthood, similarly *Hashem*, our loving Father, caused us to endure the harsh environment of *Mitzrayim* in order to build a healthy foundation for *Klal Yisrael*.

We do not understand the ways of *Hashem*, but we know that what the Jewish People is enduring these past three months is the 'rod' of our caring, benevolent Father. Just as a child needs to endure difficulties to achieve success and fulfillment in life, so too does *Klal Yisrael* need to suffer pain and challenge to bring us to the ultimate *Geula*, may it come speedily, in our day.

Best wishes for a wonderful, hopeful *Shabbos*,



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