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"THE STRANGE FATE OF THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT"

Standing fifth in that eternal list of Ten Commandments, is the statement: KABEID ES AVICHA VE'ES IMECHA, "Honor thy father and thy mother". This commandment is perhaps the most well-known of all. No child grows up without hearing those words brandished at him at one time or another. Even those who believe in little else accept this MITZVAH. And the Rabbis equated the honoring of parents to the honor one must accord to G-d.

And yet, its fate has been a strange one. The history of this commandment has been one of oscillation or shifting from one extreme to another. In ancient Sodom, that hot-bed of wickedness, parents were regarded as surplus chattle, and ~~wgetxbixkingxrxabks~~ when no longer able to do work, they were disposed of. A world reeking with such a Sodomite attitude had to hear and obey "Honor thy Parents". Centuries later, the situation was reversed. Parents became so important that children were neglected and maltreated. So much so, that the Rabbinic council at Usha some 1800 years ago had to pass a formal law requiring parents to support their children until they were at least 13 years old. And a maid-servant of Rabbi, Rabbi Judah the Prince, a gentile maid who was a scholar of the Law and whose opinion was highly valued by our Sages, had to declare as an offense, punishable by excommunication, the corporal punishment of grown-up children. Coming closer to our own times, we have had a similar swinging of the pendulum from one extreme to another. In the Victorian Era the father was the absolute and autocratic chief of the family. He was a ruthless dictator whose rule was uncontrolled and frequently inhumane. To such people one did not have to say "Honor thy father and mother". One had, rather, to recall the ruling of AMSA DE'BEI, REBBE, the gentile maid-servant of Rabbi Judah the Prince.

In our own days, we have swung back to the other extreme. A new force has emerged in modern family life, completely replacing the parents as the central authorities of the family. The child has come into his own as the undisputed

despot and pint-sized tyrant whose word is law, whose every whim and wish is sacrosanct and whose authority rests on the New Bible of American Family Life which is - that new book child psychology and how to raise your baby without conflicts, complexes, neuroses or maladjustments. Raised with this mistaken attitude of deference and cringing on the part of his parents, the modern child can never really respect his elders. And our generation, therefore, must hear, as it never has heard before, the clear enunciation of the words "Honor thy father and mother".

But the honoring of parents is no mere mechanical act. Far from being automatic and dessicated, it has a psychology of its own. It has a psychology of its own which is based on the moral tradition of Judaism, and which rejects at one and the same time the harshness and severity of a Victorian father, the cruelty of a Sodom attitude and the silly and ludicrous coddling of children as practiced by the modern mother who reads "psychology" books and does not begin to understand them. To the modern parent who, frightened by the dire threat of complexes and maladjustments, asks "why?" and "what does it mean?" of KIBUD AV VE'AIM, Judaism has a real answer.

Perhaps the Jewish attitude, which is not for Jews alone but for all people, is best expressed, albeit indirectly and subtly, by a story that our Rabbis of the Talmud tell. SHAM¹ALU ES RABI ELIEZER. Rabbi Eliezer was asked - AD HAYCHAN KIBUD AV VE'AIM? - to what ^{extent} must one practice the commandment to honor his parents? What is the significance of KIBUD AV VE'AIM? And he answered, "If you would know the meaning of KIBUD AV, hearken to the story of what one gentile, who lived in the Palestinian city of Ashkelon, did for his father. This man, whose name was Damah ben Nessimah, owned certain rare gems which were needed by the officials of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem for the breast-plate of the High Priest. Furthermore, the jewels were needed immediately, for without them the Temple Service could not continue. Damah was told that he could name his own price if he delivered them without delay. But he refused, because *Se Hareikan Han Nsin Hshan* *1'7k*, because the key to the safe was under the pillow of his father, who

was sleeping at the time, and Damah did not want to awaken him. He was offered the astounding sum of 60,000 - and others say 80,000 - shekels. He still refused to disturb his father. As a reward for this demonstration of respect and honor for his father, G-d rewarded Damah, and the following year one of his cows bore a PARAH ADUMAH - a completely red heifer, which was an expensive rarity, and which was used by Jews LETAHER ES HA'T'MEIM to purify the unclean who were defiled because of contact with the dead."

What Rabbi Eliezer meant to teach by this story is clear enough. If you would live a life characterized by the PARAH ADUMAH, a life of purity and cleanliness and decency and serenity, a life free from defilement and filth and all other aspects of death, a life in which the family is one and at peace, of undiminished and undamaged reputation, then the children must remember that MAFTET'ACH MONACH TACHAS ME'RASHO'SAV SHEL AVIV, that the key lies under the head of father; that no matter how successful one is, no matter how thriving a jewelry trade and no matter how prosperous a farm and cattle ranch you have, the key to your success and your personality, the key to your life and your future, lies TACHAS ME'RASHO'SAV SHEL AVIV, under your father's head. It is your parents who are the source of your future. Man, unlike the lower animals, is not born self-sufficient. In his infancy he is extremely vulnerable and defenseless. In the heads of his parents are the agonies of worry and concern over his care, and ^{upon} in their heads devolves the responsibility for his future. MAFTET'ACH MONACH TACHAS ME'RASHO'SAV SHEL AVIV. The key to the son is the head of the father.

With an attitude of that sort, a generation can be raised which will not be looked upon with horror by the elder, and the term "^{younger} ~~new~~ generation" will not be used as an epithet of frightened contempt; a generation which will not be obsessed with its own importance and possessed of a disregard and studied contempt of everything old; a generation which will not condemn all the treasures of the past as "old fashioned".

Judaism, therefore, tells us moderns that the reason for honoring parents is,

simply, that they are the key to our lives and our futures. Judaism certainly does not object to the legitimate use of child-psychology in the raising of children. Quite the contrary, it always has preached moderation. But, as one educator recently pointed out, "the trouble with child psychology is that children just don't understand psychology". Or, as another ^{wit}/said, "Parents who want to use child psychology on their children would do much better to apply the child-psychology book to them". A generation which is not taught that the key to their ^{future} lies in their parents' past can never hope to unlock the treasury of good-will and humility that is stored up in the human heart.

The way to making children realize where the key lies is not by uninterrupted coddling and shielding them from the realities of life. A second story related by Rabbi Dimi, when he came from Palestine to settle in Babylon, gives us the sense of realism and refusal to accept nonsense which should be practiced. It is a symbolic story, also about the same Damah ben Nessinah, which is most applicable to our own day and age. Perhaps parents who are perplexed by the conflicting advice given them and, at the same time, outraged by the near-complete loss of spiritual, religious and moral value by the younger generation, can find heart and guidance in this symbolic tale. ~~HAYAH LE'VUSH SIRKON ZAHAV~~

SHEL

PA'AM ACHAS, once, Rabbi Dimi told, HAYAH LE'VUSH SIRKON ZAHAV,

וַיְהִי כִּי הָיָה דָּמָה בֶּן נֶסְיָנָה, וְהָיָה לְבִישׁ שִׁרְקוֹן זָהָב, וְהָיָה לְבִישׁ שִׁרְקוֹן זָהָב, וְהָיָה לְבִישׁ שִׁרְקוֹן זָהָב.

(Transalate)

Ah, but Damah's mother was a good mother. She knew that teaching her son KIBUD AV VE'EM was the only way of molding his character and personality properly.

Here was her son, her own boy, who thought that he had "out-grown" his home and family. Now he was wearing a SIRKON SHEL ZAHAV, a gold-embroidered silk, he was being fashionable and keeping with the elite. Not one ~~mk~~ for the masses, he; only silk would do, and it had to be embroidered with gold. If all the world was involved in this mad drive for gold, so would I, thought Damah. If the almighty

dollar ~~for gold, silver and diamonds~~ must replace the Almighty G-d, and monotheism became money-theism, then I too must don this cloak of gold. A modern mother would have "shepped nachas" from a hustler or a son of this sort, a real "go-getter". But no, not his mother. She tore this gold-silk scarf off him. No son of mine is going to live a life of that sort. "No, son", she told, "You are going to get off the gold standard!"

There was a time in Jewish life when a mother's greatest ambition was to have her son become a scholar. The very lullabies they sung to their tots in their cradles spoke not of business and ^Csuccess but of Torah and scholarship. In the famous "ROZHENKES UN MANDLEN" lullaby, the Jewish mother would sing: TORAH IZ DE BESTEH S'CHORAH - "Torah is the best business". Modern mothers, however, are almost afraid of the word "Scholarship". They have stripped their children of the mantle of scholarship, and dressed them in the SIRKON SHEL ZAHAV, gold-embroidered silk. Gold, gold, gold. And let us be honest with ourselves. This attitude is not caused by a desire for financial security for the children. Gone are the days when scholarship was identified with hunger. Today scholars too are assured of comfortable living. It is, rather, a "keep-up-with-the-Joneses" attitude. The little tyrant who today demands the best bicycle - and gets it without question - must tomorrow be able to demand the ^Cadillaacs and holywood-kitchens - and get them without question. But if a mother or father wants respect and honor and love, then she must tear the SIRKON SHEL ZAHAV from off her child, and give him instead the spiritual dimensions which he will need in life.

And in the case of Damah ben Nessinah even more than the profit-motive was involved. Here was her son climbing the social ladder too. He was YOSHEV BEIN GDOLEI ROMI, sitting in the company of great Romans. A modern mother might have envied her - with a son one of the proconsuls of Rome. An important person. A politician. Modern mothers with a penchant for psychological terminology which they do not understand would have advised the mother of Damah to desist and swallow her objections. "Don't say anything", they would have told her, "he's got to live in society, and he had better adjust while he can. Otherwise, he might even become a neurotic!"

But this mother will not allow herself to adopt a cringing attitude of this sort. She knew what "society" meant in those days. She knew that the "400" of Roman-Palestinian society were no philosophers and do-gooders. These were the Romans whose notoriety was known throughout the world. This was a society of degenerates, people of base instincts, lust, murder, and degradation. True, it was fashionable in those days to be a YOSHEV BEIN G'DOLEI ROMI, a member of that elite group of perverts. A young man who had gained admission into their circles was proud and developed a swelled head. But the mother of Damah would not stand for such immorality, psychology or no psychology. And so, TAFCHA LO AL ROSHO. She slapped him on the head. "You are not going to have a swelled head, my son, I will never allow you to be proud of membership in such a society. This is one type of people to which you must never adjust." And then ~~the~~ YARKAH LO BE'FANAV. She expectorated before him. She expressed her undiminished contempt for all that a life of this sort meant. She expressed her disdain for the SIRKON SHEL ZAHAV and the G'DOLEI ROMI, money-madness and social-climbing.

And as a result VE'LO HICHLIMAH, he did not insult his mother. This was more than a ^{generously negative} ~~spontaneous~~ reaction to his mother's violent scolding and reproach. It was, rather, an education he had received by his brave and intelligent mother. How often parents, and especially Jewish parents, express the worry that when they grow old they will be cast aside by their children, insulted and neglected by them. And actually the best way to insure that they will so be insulted, is by impressing them with the fact that they are the undisputed despots of home and family, and that they ^{may} ~~must~~ adjust to prevailing conditions regardless of their ethical or moral nature. But give them the sort of education that Damah's mother did, tear off their gold wrappings, slap their swelled heads and whittle them down to size, and show your undisguised contempt for a way of living that does not recognize that the past is the key to the future, and then there is no doubt but that those children will recognize, in respect, love, and affection, the authority and the wisdom of intelligent parents. Only thus can parents be assured that LO HICHLIMAH, that their children will not only not insult them, but that they will hold them in the high

esteem that parents, as educators, deserve.

The fifth commandment has indeed had a strange fate. From era to era, the history of family life has seen a shift from the despotism of parents to the tyranny of children. Our Torah and our Sages have urged, throughout the ages, that we preserve the middle way, the way of intelligence, honor, and respect. The way of the Torah is the way of life which must ultimately prevail if parents and children are to be bound by the mutual bonds of honor, esteem, and love. "For her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths lead to peace."

Parents must not expect that children can blossom into respectable adulthood in a natural and undirected way. No beautiful flower ever grew into full blossom without conscientious cultivation. The only plant that can grow "naturally", without devoted guidance and intelligent cultivation is - a weed.