

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There is, on the face of it, a fundamental contradiction in the Torah. On the one hand we hear, in the passage known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, the following words: The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious G-d, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth ... Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” (Ex. 34: 7)

The implication is clear. Children suffer for the sins of their parents. On the other hand we read in this week’s parsha: Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin. (Deut 24: 16)

The book of Kings records a historic event when this principle proved decisive. “When Amaziah was well established as king, he executed the officials who had assassinated his father. However, he did not kill the children of the assassins, for he obeyed the command of the Lord as written by Moses in the Book of the Law: ‘Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.’” (2 Kings 14: 5-6).

There is an obvious resolution. The first statement refers to Divine justice, “at the hands of heaven.” The second, in Deuteronomy, refers to human justice as administered in a court of law. How can mere mortals decide the extent to which one person’s crime was induced by the influence of others? Clearly the judicial process must limit itself to the observable facts. The person who committed the crime is guilty. Those who may have shaped his character are not.

Yet the matter is not so simple, because we find Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the two great prophets of exile in the sixth century BCE, restating the principle of individual responsibility in strong and strikingly similar ways. Jeremiah says: In those days people will no longer say, ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—their own teeth will be set on edge. (Jer. 31: 29-30)

Ezekiel says: The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: “The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? “As surely as

I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die. (Ezekiel 18: 1-4)

Here the prophets were not speaking about judicial procedures and legal responsibility. They are talking about Divine judgment and justice. They were giving the people hope at one of the lowest points in Jewish history: the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple. The people, sitting and weeping by the waters of Babylon, might have given up hope altogether. They were being judged for the failings of their ancestors that had brought the nation to this desperate plight, and their exile seemed to stretch endlessly into the future. Ezekiel, in his vision of the valley of dry bones, hears G-d reporting that the people were saying, “Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost.” He and Jeremiah were counselling against despair. The people’s future was in their own hands. If they returned to G-d, G-d would return to them and bring them back to their land. The guilt of previous generations would not be attached to them.

But if this was so, then the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel really do conflict with the idea that G-d punishes sins to the third and fourth generation. Recognizing this, the Talmud makes a remarkable statement: Said R. Jose b. Hanina: Our Master Moses pronounced four [adverse] sentences on Israel, but four prophets came and revoked them ... Moses said, The Lord ... punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” Ezekiel came and declared, “The one who sins is the one who will die.”¹

In general the sages rejected the idea that children could be punished, even at the hands of heaven, for the sins of their parents. As a result, they systematically re-interpreted every passage that gave the opposite impression, that children were indeed being punished for their parents’ sins. Their general position was this: Are not children then to be put to death for the sins committed by their parents? Is it not written, “Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children?” – There the reference is to children who follow in their parents footsteps (literally “seize their parents’ deeds in their hands,” i.e. commit the same

¹ Makkot 24b.

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sins themselves).²

Specifically, they explained biblical episodes in which children were punished along with their parents, by saying that in these cases the children “had the power to protest/prevent their parents from sinning, but they failed to do so.” As Maimonides says, whoever has the power of preventing someone from committing a sin but does not do so, he is seized (i.e. punished, held responsible) for that sin.³

Did, then, the idea of individual responsibility come late to Judaism, as some scholars argue? This is highly unlikely. During the rebellion of Korach, when G-d threatened to destroy the people, Moses said, “Shall one man sin and will You be angry with the whole congregation?” (Num. 16: 22). When people began dying after David had sinned by instituting a census, he prayed to G-d: “I have sinned. I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.” The principle of individual responsibility is basic to Judaism, as it was to other cultures in the ancient Near East.⁴

Rather, what is at stake is the deep understanding of the scope of responsibility we bear if we take seriously our roles as parents, neighbours, townspeople, citizens and children of the covenant. Judicially, only the criminal is responsible for his crime. But, implies the Torah, we are also our brother’s keeper. We share collective responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of society. “All Israel,” said the sages, “are responsible for one another.” Legal responsibility is one thing, and relatively easy to define. But moral responsibility is something altogether larger, if necessarily more vague. “Let a person not say, ‘I have not sinned, and if someone else commits a sin, that is a matter between him and G-d.’ This is contrary to the Torah,” writes Maimonides in the Sefer ha-Mitzvot.⁵

This is particularly so when it comes to the

relationship between parents and children. Abraham was chosen, says the Torah, solely so that “he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” The duty of parents to teach their children is fundamental to Judaism. It appears in both the first two paragraphs of the Shema, as well as the various passages cited in the “Four sons” section of the Haggadah. Maimonides counts as one of the gravest of all sins – so serious that G-d does not give us an opportunity to repent – “one who sees his son falling into bad ways and does not stop him.” The reason, he says, is that “since his son is under his authority, had he stopped him the son would have desisted.” Therefore it is accounted to the father as if he had actively caused his son to sin.⁶

If so, then we begin to hear the challenging truth in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. To be sure, we are not legally responsible for the sins of either our parents or our children. But in a deeper, more amorphous sense, what we do and how we live do have an effect on the future to the third and fourth generation.

Rarely has that effect been more devastatingly described than in recent books by two of America’s most insightful social critics: Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute, and Robert Putnam of Harvard. Notwithstanding their vastly different approaches to politics, Murray in *Coming Apart* and Putnam in *Our Kids* have issued essentially the same prophetic warning of a social catastrophe in the making. For Putnam, “the American dream” is “in crisis”. For Murray, the division of the United States into two classes with ever decreasing mobility between them “will end what has made America America.”

Their argument is roughly this, that at a certain point, in the late 1950s or early 1960s, a whole series of institutions and moral codes began to dissolve. Marriage was devalued. Families began to fracture. More and more children grew up without stable association with their biological parents. New forms of child poverty began to appear, as well as social dysfunctions such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and crime and unemployment in low-income areas. Over time, an upper class pulled back from the brink, and is now intensively preparing its children for high achievement, while on the other side of the tracks children are growing up with little hope for educational, social and occupational success. The American dream of opportunity for all is wearing thin.

What makes this development so tragic is that for a moment people forgot the biblical truth that what we do does not affect us alone. It will affect our children to the third and fourth generation. Even the greatest libertarian of modern times, John Stuart Mill, was emphatic on the responsibilities of parenthood. He

² Berakhot 7a, Sanhedrin 27b.

³ Hilkhos Deot 6: 7.

⁴ See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, New York, Schocken, 1972, 329-333.

⁵ Sefer ha-Mitzvot, positive command 205.

⁶ Hilkhos Teshuvah 4: 1. The reference is of course to a son under the age of thirteen.

wrote: "The fact itself, of causing the existence of a human being, is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility—to bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing—unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being."

If we fail to honour our responsibilities as parents, then though no law will hold us responsible, society's children will pay the price. They will suffer because of our sins. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"An illegitimate person [mamzer] shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even his tenth generation shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord" (Deut. 23:3) One of the most difficult biblical laws to understand is that of the mamzer, the product of an adulterous (or incestuous) sexual liaison, who may never enter into a marriage relationship with another Jew.

We can readily understand why the adulterers themselves are forbidden from marrying each other, even after they become divorced from their previous spouses; they, who showed such disdain and disregard for the exclusive and sacred marital relationship by betraying their marital partners, dare not enter together into matrimony, since G-d "has sanctified His nation Israel by means of the nuptial canopy and the marital ritual of kiddushin" (the initial blessing, along with the blessing over the wine, at a wedding ceremony). The glory of the Jewish people has always been the purity of our family life.

But why punish the innocent product born of such an adulterous act? He/she has done nothing wrong; he has certainly not controlled the nature of the act which led to his/her birth. Why forbid him/her to ever become married in Israel? In order to understand the meaning behind this law, I believe it is necessary to understand the difference between the Written Law (Bible), which the sacred Zohar calls "the harsh law" (dina de'takfa), and the Oral Law (Talmud and Responsa) which is called in turn "the soft and compassionate law" (dina de'rafiya). The interpretation I am now exposing in differentiating between these two corpora of legal doctrine is hinted at both in Maimonides's Mishne Torah, Laws of Blows and Damages (1, 3) and Guide for the Perplexed (part 3, chapter 41).

Even a cursory glance at the Bible will reveal the many instances in which capital punishment is called for, the Bible declaring that the offender "must surely die, is certainly to be stoned to death" (mot tamut, sakel yisakel). The Oral Law, however, greatly limits these extreme punishments, insisting that a trial

can take place only if two knowledgeable and objective witnesses give testimony that they saw the actual crime being perpetrated (circumstantial evidence not being admissible in a Jewish courtroom), and took the opportunity to give proper warning to the assailant, determining that he was aware of the action he was about to commit and its punitive consequences; hence R. Akiva and R. Tarfon both declare that if they had been on the Sanhedrin, no human being would ever have been tried for a capital crime. And our Sages declare that if a culprit was put to death once in 70 years, the court would be declared "a murderous court" (Mishna Makot 1;10).

The difference in punitive attitude becomes clear when we remember the different purposes guiding each legal code: The entire Pentateuch is heard each year by every Jew who attends Sabbath services, so that the goal of the biblical readings each week is to inform and inspire the consciences—first and foremost of the Jewish attendees—by inspiring them to understand the critical importance of ethical and moral actions.

The Oral Law, however, which sets down the actual punishments, must mediate the law with life, taking into account that if, G-d forbid, the wrong person is put to death for a crime he did not commit, there is no judicial recourse to bring him back to life. Hence the Oral Law softens and even sweetens the penalties, even bending over backwards to be lenient with the defendant.

For example, the Written Law warns "an eye for an eye," since the only way an individual can understand the enormity of his crime of taking out a person's eye is for him to have his eye removed; the Oral Law then explains that, since different people have different levels of eyesight and some professions require greater use of the eyes than do others, the actual penalty must be monetary remuneration rather than the removal of the eye.

The Bible, since it wished to inspire Israel to respect and protect the moral integrity of the marital union, teaches that if one degrades the marital fidelity, the product of such a liaison would never be able to enter a marital union, for all subsequent generations. However, the Oral Law made it virtually impossible to have a practical instance of mamzerut: not only would there have had to be two witnesses who gave warning to the transgressing couple prior to their act of adultery, which would have had to take place in front of those witnesses, but the halachic presumption is always that since the majority of sexual acts are between husband and wife, every child is presumed to be the child of that husband (and since paternity tests are not 100% accurate, they are not sufficient proof of adultery). When the case of a woman whose husband went overseas twelve months before she gave birth was brought before a religious court in Talmudic times, the judges declared the child to be "kosher," assuming that

the fetus had gestated in the woman's womb for 12 months! And in a similar incident they ruled that the husband had secretly returned for a night unbeknownst to anyone.

In more modern times, I do not know of a single case of mamzerut for which Hacham Ovadia Yosef or Rav Moshe Feinstein did not find a positive solution enabling the person in question to marry into the Jewish community. Unfortunately, the present religious establishment is not as bold as the decisors of previous generations. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The saga of the captive woman described in this week's Torah reading has always remained a somewhat puzzling subject. The Talmud itself reacts to the realities of war – those young male soldiers and vulnerable female captives – by stating that the Torah is reacting to the natural base desires of men in times of stress and danger. So to speak, the entire matter is a concession to evil instinct and the inability to demand complete control over sexual desires in certain situations.

While all of this is undoubtedly true, it does not provide us with a very spiritual explanation of the event as it is portrayed in the Torah. Rashi, following the lead of the Talmud and Midrash, portrays this type of behavior as one that leads to severe and tragic consequences in the future.

Disputes over inheritance, severely rebellious children, all follow on the heels of this act of uninhibited passion. The Torah itself warns that the man himself who committed this physical act will not find satisfaction with wife that he acquired in such a fashion.

The Torah, in essence, guarantees only trouble and travail as a consequence of the act that the Torah itself previously condoned and made possible. There is an important lesson in life that is to be gleaned from this problematic situation. And that is that not everything that is permitted will lead to a cheerful and good outcome.

What is basically permitted does not mean that one should avail one's self of actually performing the legally permitted act. It is the wise person, the person that possesses perspective and an understanding of Torah values and lifestyle, who will properly avoid such an act which, while permitted, can only lead to troubles and eventual disaster.

Life is always filled with problematic situations and difficult choices. Many times, if not even most times, these choices are complicated by our basic drives and desires. These natural instincts, which exist within us, are very powerful and fully capable of overriding our logical, intellectual, and protective self-interest.

Rarely does the person who is faced with monetary or physical temptation truly make a reckoning as to the consequences of what he or she is about to do. The rabbis in Avot cautioned us to always make such a reckoning – the pleasure of the act versus the irreversible consequences that it will engender – before deciding to go ahead and perform the act in question.

One can always rationalize one's behavior, technically and legally, and say that an act was permitted and not extralegal. However, the wise person realizes that this may not be beneficial or positive.

There are many who direct scorn and criticism at those who adopt certain stringencies upon themselves, even on issues which are technically permissible. While everything should be done in moderation and with good sense, the Torah itself allows for such behavior.

In the famous words of the rabbis, "one who sees an unfaithful wife being shamed should refrain from drinking wine." That is undoubtedly the lesson to be derived from this situation described for us in this week's Torah reading. ©2015 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The love between G-d and His people is often compared to the marital relationship. So the prophet Hoshea describes G-d, declaring: "And I will betroth you to Me forever." (Hoshea 2:21) The Song of Songs is similarly viewed as an allegory for the relationship between G-d and Am Yisrael (the Jewish people).

Indeed, throughout the year this imagery prevails. For example, every Friday evening we recite the Lekha Dodi-Come my Beloved (referring to G-d), let us greet the Sabbath bride.

And the holidays of the Jewish year evoke the picture of G-d's love for us. On Passover we recall walking through the sea with the help of G-d, much like bride and groom walking to the huppa (wedding canopy). On Shavuot (the festival commemorating receiving the torah), we reenact our hearing the Aseret Ha'Dibrot (Ten Declarations) which can be viewed as the ketubah, the marital contract between G-d and His people. On Sukkot (the feast of booths) we eat and some try to live in a sukkah, beneath the skhakh (Sukkah roof), which can be seen as a kind of bridal canopy.

But, of course, this comparison has its limits. This week's parsha records the right of husband and wife to divorce. And if following the divorce the wife marries another, she may never remarry her first

husband. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) Taking the analogy to its fullest, does this mean that we, the Jewish people, can permanently separate from G-d? Doesn't it mean that if we separate from G-d, and, if you will, "wed" to another albeit false god, that we can never return to G-d Himself.

It is here during the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that a new picture of love between G-d and His people emerges. It is the idea that we are G-d's children and G-d is a parent figure. Thus, we recite Avinu Malkeinu – referring to G-d as our Father. So, too, do we speak of G-d as Hashem Hashem Keil rahum (the Lord is a G-d of mercy). The word rahum comes from the word rehem which means womb, conveying the idea of a mother's infinite and endless love for her young.

The difference is obvious. A husband and wife relationship can be terminated. But no matter what happens in life a parent always remains a parent. Similarly, G-d's love for us is limitless. Even if we separate from Him, even if we "marry another," we can always return- and G-d will always embrace us.

One last thought. Even the parental relationship has its limits since no one lives forever. G-d is however, the Eternal Parent. Hence during these days we recite Psalm twenty-seven, in which we proclaim, "Even if my father and mother have left me, G-d will gather me in." (Psalms 27:10)

Our relationship to G-d parallels the deep love between husband and wife. It intersects with a parent's love for a child. In fact, it transcends all. It is as deep and deeper than a spousal encounter, and it is beyond the endlessness of a parent's love for a child—it is eternal. ©2015 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not obey his father or his mother..." (Devarim 21:18)

Children are remarkable creations, for a number of reasons. However, tragically, one of the most important reasons is greatly ignored: the opportunity they represent for their parents, and anyone else who will influence their lives.

It actually reminds me of a situation that most computer owners have to deal with at some time or another. I certainly have had to on a few occasions, and though the example is a little crude, it makes the point.

The hard drive of the average computer over time becomes a smorgasbord of programs and applications. Out of the box, a new computer is streamlined, thoughtfully loaded up with an operating system and subsidiary programs meant to maximize

the user's computing experience with the least amount of resistance. The goal is to be "user-friendly," and if not done right, technology can become anything but.

Some users however usually want more from their computers than what the average manufacturer provides, and add application after application to expand the computer's capacity. In some cases too much new, or incompatible, software can create a point of diminishing returns. This causes a computer's OS to freeze, or worse, to crash. Important information can become irretrievably lost.

More than once have I been forced to start from scratch again. After adding applications, and then all of my personal preferences, problems developed over time that were best resolved by restoring my computer to its original out-of-the-box state. I had then to painstakingly "rebuild" my hard drive again, application by application.

It can be very time-consuming, and frustrating, especially if it happens during an important time-sensitive project. Once it took me three days to get back up to speed again. As bothersome a process as it is, there is an advantage as well: I get to consciously redesign my hard drive giving me more control over the final product. Taking advantage of wisdom gained, of what works well together and what does not, I can organize by computer to be more efficient.

Out-of-the-box, so-to-speak, a baby is also quite "streamlined." We don't have a whole lot of say regarding what we get, only what we do with the baby after we bring it home. The original programming is G-d's: "[A baby in the womb] is also taught all of Torah, from the beginning until the end... As soon as it sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely... It does not emerge before it is made to take an oath... to be righteous, and to never be wicked..." (Niddah 30b)

After the baby has been born we are the ones who add the programs and the "applications," in a manner of speaking, that allow the child to develop and become so much more than it was born.

There is a fundamental difference between what we do to a hard drive and what do with our children. The goal of adding information to a hard drive is to make it more user-friendly for us. The goal of adding information to a child's brain is to make life more user-friendly for the child. We want our children, those to whom we give birth, and all those whom we will eventually influence, to make the most out of their lives.

If you think about it, the analogy is not so crude after all, because the initial years of a child are all about programming and conditioning: "Long thought to be a clean slate to which information could be added at any time, the brain is now seen as a super-sponge that is most absorbent from birth to about age 12... Stimulation directs cells' organization, scientists have found, and the basic framework is complete by about age 12..."

Information flows easily into the brain through 'windows' that are open for only a short duration. Then the windows close, and the fundamental architecture of the brain is completed. 'A kind of irreversibility sets in,' said Felton Earls, a child psychiatrist at Harvard University." (Chicago Tribune)

Eventually children grow up and question so much of what they were told and taught, but in the beginning, they just automatically and quite unconditionally absorb and assimilate everything. They do this either through our words, actions, or general mood.

What makes this process so critical, as unassuming as it may seem to most adults, is that it is during these years that a person develops his core beliefs about life. These are the most fundamental of fundamental beliefs that a person develops, what it is, what it is for, what he can expect from it, and what he should give back to it, while sharing the universe with billions of other people.

An overall positive and responsible message will result in the creation of an overall positive and responsible mindset. The child will be conditioned with an overall positive and responsible outlook towards life, and eventually, once he matures significantly, his actions will reflect this. He will be programmed to be a successful human being.

Even though a person will think about and feel millions of things over the years, when it comes to making a decision about what to do in any given situation, his acquired mindset will dictate the "rules of engagement." He will be inspired by what he has become conditioned to be inspired by, and dedicated to what he had been programmed to find important. Life is that precarious.

Therefore, to change one's mindset later on in life, which is often a matter of changing one's incorrect core beliefs from youth, while possible, is not so easy. This is why some people become ba'alei teshuvah and others do not: The former grew up with some semblance of Torah values, albeit in a secular environment, that the others did not, making the change of mindset less radical, and therefore, less difficult.

Not surprisingly, the Torah world is the only one that really seems to take this reality of life seriously. It urges the parents to jump into the child's intellectual life extremely early, at an age at which most other cultures assume it is too early to educate a child. When the child is most open, and therefore the most vulnerable, most cultures, especially in the secular world, leave their children on shaky intellectual and emotional ground.

Even the Torah word for "education" is very instructive: chinuch -- Ches-Yud-Nun-Vav-Chof -- which, like the word "Chanukah," means "initiation" or "inauguration." It also means "dedication," making it clear that whatever we teach a child, and in whichever

manner we teach it, the bottom line is that it will educate the child about what is worthy of dedication in life. Make a mistake about this, and the child, adolescent, and eventually the adult, will waste his time and energy on meaningless pursuits.

The root of "chinuch," which is "chayn" -- Ches-Nun -- also says a lot. Usually translated as "grace," more accurately it describes a phenomenon that results from a spiritual energy emitted by a person whose soul is able to reveal itself to the world beyond his body. This happens when a person acts in a soul-like manner, that is, in a noble fashion. This in turn has a magnetic effect on other people, since it touches their souls as well.

In life, there are always exceptions to the rule. However, more often than not, the rule rules, which is why life is so consistent. Thus if a child grows up with inspired parents who live an inspiring life, more than likely his life will follow suit. He will be inspired, and he will be inspiring, accomplishing meaningful things in life while inspiring others to do so as well.

If a child grows up in an uninspired home, which happens too often, then he will lack inspiration and the ability to inspire others. His mindset will be negative, and his core beliefs will dictate that life has little to offer him, so why should he offer life back anything in return? The person's life becomes meaningless unless by the grace of Heaven something dramatic occurs to change the situation.

This reveals the great opportunity of raising and molding children. It is not just about giving a child an education, but about giving him an entire life of meaning and productivity, and not just him, but everyone else he or she will impact along their journey. No wonder we need so much Heavenly help to be successful when raising children, which apparently begins even before a child is born. Divine inspiration begins as early as in the womb.

The greatest symbol of failure in this respect is mentioned in this week's parshah, which says: "If a man has a wayward and rebellious son, who does not obey his father or his mother, and they chastise him, and [he still] does not listen to them, his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, and to the gate of his place. They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not obey us; [he is] a glutton and a guzzler.' And all the men of his city shall pelt him to death with stones, and he shall die. So shall you clear out the evil from among you, and all Israel will listen and fear." (Devarim 21:18-21)

This is the mitzvah "Ben Sorer u'Moreh," of the rebellious son who the Talmud says is killed before he can do any real serious damage and lose his portion in the World-to-Come. Though the Talmud is not certain that such a punishment was ever carried out, given the conditions that had to be met to make it possible, its

message is clear.

After all, how do we know that the child won't change for the better? History is filled with Ba'alei Teshuvah who have come from the worst of backgrounds to become relatively righteous. Maybe the Ben Sorrer u'Moreh will grow up and become more mature and change his erring ways.

The Torah is saying that it is highly unlikely. So unlikely, in fact, that we do not gamble with his portion in the World-to-Come and let him live. How does the Torah know? Because any child who can do such evil at such a young age is one who was programmed so poorly that the potential for teshuvah is either minimal or non-existent. The parents, somehow, squandered the opportunity to properly educate their child and now it is lost forever.

It doesn't have to be that the parents abused the child in any way, or that anyone else did for that matter. It can be that the parents just did not provide the emotionally safe haven children require while growing up. They need this until they are emotionally mature enough to cope with the trials and tribulations of living in this world on their own. Clearly the number one ingredient for a well-balanced child remains to be shalom bayis -- a peaceful home.

Children apparently remember everything, the good and especially the negative. They don't always do this consciously, which makes matters even more difficult later on in life. It is our unconscious negative memories that are our skeletons in our closets. The less we have as children, the less we will have as adults. © 2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states, "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of G-d, even the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of G-d forever. Because they did not meet you with bread and water in the way when you came forth out of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 23:4.5).

Rabbi Shimon said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer that from here we see the punishment of those who withhold kindness. During the forty years that the Israelites spent in the desert they had manna from heaven, quails and water from the well that went with them. In addition, protective clouds encircled them and journeyed before them to show them the way. In short, they lacked nothing. Nevertheless, courtesy requires that if people come from a journey, they should be welcomed with food and drink.

For failure to afford the Israelites this basic courtesy, the Ammonites and Moabites were banned from entering the assembly of the Almighty (they were not allowed to convert to become Jews). This involved the exclusion of the males of these two nations from marrying a Jewess even if they converted to Judaism

(Yevomos 76b). From here we see the retribution of those who failed to show kindness to those who did not need it. How much greater will the punishment be for those who do not show kindness. *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

At the very end of Parshat Ki Tetzei we encounter one of the more famous commandments, instructing us to remember what Amalek did to us as we left Egypt. While the whole world saw the Jews as untouchable, Amalek decided to kill us by attacking the weak people lagging behind, thus proclaiming to the world that they weren't afraid of G-d by attacking His nation. However, by attacking the weak ones they proved that they were indeed afraid of the Jews. Strangely, though, the next few Pesukim (verses) tell us to wipe out the memory of Amalek from this world. So which is it? Should we remember what they did to us, or should we wipe out their memory and forget? At the end of this section the Torah then reminds us again to not forget!?

To help us understand the issues involved here, Chazal (our Rabbis) have explained, using an analogy, that it's as if Amalek jumped into scalding hot water, and although they were burned, they cooled the water, and everyone around them was a little bit more comfortable with the hot water. As the book "Majesty of Man" elaborates, human nature dictates that the more we see of something, the less sensitive we are to it. So what's the solution? The Torah tells us to remember, erase, and yet remember: Remember the elements in this world that would pick on the weak and defy G-d and authority, but only so that you could erase them, thereby erasing their influence. The final step is to never forget what happens when we surround ourselves with negative influences.

As human nature dictates, and as the history books (following this battle) record, we are influenced by our society, neighborhood, and by our friends. Just as we must be careful not to let ourselves be affected by anything negative, we must also remember that we can have a positive or negative effect on those around us. May we have the strength to control ourselves and inspire others. *From Love Thy Neighbor © 2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"When (if) a person has committed a sin that has a death penalty, and he is put to death, you shall hang him on wood. Do not let his corpse stay on the wood overnight; rather you shall bury him on that same day, for those who belittle G-d are hung" (D'varim 21:22-23). Based on the order of the

wording (death and then hanging), the Talmud (Sanhedrin 46b) teaches us that the guilty party (earlier the Talmud discussed which sinners this applies to) is first killed and then hung. As far as why it is only a momentary hanging, the Talmud (see also Tosefta Sanhedrin 9:3) quotes Rabbi Meir's parable of twin brothers, one of whom is appointed king (in the Tosefta he was not necessarily appointed king, and is king of the world) while the other becomes an armed bandit. After being caught, the bandit is hung, but because of his resemblance to the king, people think it is the king who was hung. (In the Tosefta, this is where the parable ends.) Therefore, the king has his brother's corpse brought down (so such confusion will no longer occur). Rashi (on our verse) quotes the Talmud, adding a thought he shared in his commentary on the Talmud to explain the parable: man was created in G-d's image. Since man was created in G-d's image, having a man's corpse hanging for all to see disparages G-d.

Mizrachi, quoting and explaining the issues Ramban has with Rashi's explanation, presents a very simple question: how can anyone confuse the corpse of a sinner with G-d Himself? Whatever similarities there are between man and his Creator, they don't include anything physical, especially since G-d has no physical characteristics. Man doesn't "look like G-d," so why would anyone seeing a man hanging think it was G-d who was hung (as it were)? Granted, the parable is not meant to be taken literally, as G-d and man obviously do not resemble each other the way identical twins do (see Gur Aryeh), but still, why would someone punished for committing a very serious sin be compared by anyone to G-d in any way, to the extent that his corpse must be removed immediately so as not to belittle G-d?

Alshich says that by not leaving the corpse of the sinner hanging because man was created in G-d's image, we show that the "G-dly image" that had been subdued by the person's sins was once again intact after the punishment was received. Although a nice thought (and Alshich is not trying to address our question), technically this does not seem to be the best place to have it taught. First of all, since the "stain" from the sin is only gone after the punishment has been administered, the "G-dly image" could only have returned after the person was already dead, and whatever comparison there is between man and G-d, it has little (if any) connection to man's physical body. (As opposed to if the "G-dly image" had been there until the punishment was administered, whereby the fact that there had been a "G-dly image" could be the basis for any comparison between the one who was hung and G-d.) Secondly, if the reason to remove the corpse is to send a message (that after the punishment, the "G-dly image" returns), hanging the corpse for less than a few seconds ("one person ties while another loosens") doesn't allow much time for such a message to be sent.

If we would have hung the corpse (and left it there) to send a message to others that they better not do the same thing, but because of the damage done by sending this message (as somehow people will think it was really G-d being hung, whatever that means) we only go through the motions of hanging and remove the corpse immediately, the process makes sense. If, however, the point of removing the hanging corpse is to show that the "G-dly image" has returned, there is little time to get that message across, and most will be completely unaware of such a message. Additionally, we would still need to figure out what this "G-dly image" refers to that allows such a comparison to be made (had we allowed the corpse to remain hanging), and thereby teaches us that this "image" has returned.

When Rashi explains what it means that man was "created in G-d's image" (B'reishis 1:26 and 1:27, using words he also uses in his commentary on our verse, "d'mus" and "d'yukin"), he says it refers to man's ability "to understand and be intellectually active." It is precisely our intelligence that allows us to be compared to our Creator, and using this special gift for inappropriate purposes reflects poorly not only on the Creator, but on the value of these abilities.

The first reaction upon seeing that someone was hung (after he was killed by stoning) for committing a major sin might be revulsion against the sin itself, or perhaps getting the message not to do anything similar, but if the corpse were to remain hanging, the reaction could change to trying to understand what led to such an act being done. Aside from it being unhealthy to try to recreate the thought-process of a sinner, the G-dly intellect that we have each been bestowed with, and was misused by the sinner, will seem less special. In order to avoid this aspect of G-d, one that He shared with us, from being belittled, we are commanded not to let the corpse of a sinner remain hanging. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

