



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

תשפ"ג "Ki Tetzei

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Partners Detroit

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Partners In Torah

Mission Statement:

Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Thank you for coming!

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.

The boy was trouble from day one. Even in the hospital, the nurses couldn't figure out how to stop his incessant crying. As he got older, the crying stopped, but the mischief and mean tricks he played on his siblings and friends only got worse. No school could keep him, and the only thing that he could do competently was cause trouble, which he did abundantly. Nothing his parents said to him or did to him had any effect on his behavior. Consultation after consultation with educational specialists yielded no improvement. As much as they tried, and try they did, they could find nothing that could motivate him to change his ways. Stealing from his parents was something that he did regularly to help him pay for his gluttonous habits of eating meat and drinking wine. By the time of his bar mitzvah, he was a full-fledged terror. After his bar mitzvah (via which he became an adult), his parents actually took him to court for stealing from them, and the court administered the standard punishment, lashes. This was the first time that he had experienced such a harsh punishment; yet the hope was still that he would finally learn his lesson. Unfortunately, he again stole enough to buy himself a nice sized steak with a bottle of strong wine, and then only partially grilled the steak and washed it down with the wine. What are parents of such a child to do? If when he is just 13 years old this is the way he is acting, can you imagine what he will do when he is older and stronger?

The child described above is the topic of discussion in this week's Torah portion. He is called a *בן סורר ומורה* - *the rebellious child*, and the Torah has a very unusual way of dealing with this impossible youngster.

The Torah says (Deuteronomy 21:18-21):

יח) כִּי יִהְיֶה לְאִישׁ בֶּן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה אִינָנוּ שְׁמַע בְּקוֹל אָבִיו וּבְקוֹל אִמּוֹ
 וַיִּסְרוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם
 יט) וַתִּפְשׁוּ בּוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְהוֹצִיאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל זִקְנֵי עִירוֹ וְאֶל שְׁעַר מִקְדָּמוֹ
 כ) וְאָמְרוּ אֶל זִקְנֵי עִירוֹ בְּנֵנוּ זֶה סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה אִינָנוּ שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלֵנוּ זֹלָל
 וְסָבָא
 כא) וּרְגַמְהוּ כָּל אַנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ בְּאֲבָנִים וְמֵת וּבַעֲרַת הָרַע מִקִּרְבָּךְ וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל
 יִשְׁמְעוּ וַיִּרְאוּ

18) *If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, but he does not hearken to them; 19) then his father and mother shall grasp him and take him out to the elders of his city, at the city gate. 20) They shall say to the elders of his city, "This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard." 21) **All the men of his city shall pelt him with stones and he shall die; and you shall remove the evil from your midst; and all Israel shall hear about this, and they shall fear.***

How could this be? The only "hope" for this poor, albeit quite troublesome child, is to kill him? How could the Torah, which is full of mercy and kindness, recommend such a harsh irreversible solution? How are we to understand this law?

The Talmud tells us (Sanhedrin 61a):

אמר רבי שמעון וכי מפני שאכל זה תרטימר בשר ושתה חצי לוג יין
 האיטלקי אביו ואמו מוציאים אותו לסקלו אלא לא היה ולא עתיד להיות
 ולמה נכתב דרוש וקבל שכר

*Rabbi Shimon said: Because he ate a tartimar (4 oz) of meat and drank a half a log (7 oz) of Italian wine his father and mother must take him out to have him stoned? In reality, however, **a wayward child never happened and never will!** Why then, did the Torah speak about it? **To learn from it and derive reward.***

The Sages are telling us that our opening scenario could never happen. It is impossible that a child should be so bad that the parents must have him killed. However, ***learn from it and derive reward***, for in these four verses, the Torah reveals profound lessons for properly educating our children and giving them the tools they need for life in this world and in the world to come.

We begin with a basic but important question. How can the Torah command parents who have such a child to hand him over to the court to be killed? Does Hashem expect parents to have their child executed just because he stole some money and partied a bit with it? It sounds so heartless and barbaric. What kind of parents would do such a thing to their child?

When we think about it, though, that precedent has already been set.

Hashem commanded Avraham our Forefather to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, and Avraham was prepared to do so with no qualms. Yitzchak was not a problem child. On the contrary, he was a complete tzaddik who was destined to continue his father's holy work of spreading belief in Hashem, One G-d. Yet Avraham was prepared to sacrifice him. What was he thinking? How could he do such a thing to a righteous and upstanding person like Yitzchak? And, how could Yitzchak, a 37-year-old man, go along with such a seemingly cruel command? What could possibly have motivated him to allow his father to sacrifice him on an altar?

There is only one answer to these questions. Avraham and Yitzchak realized that life in this world is given to us to be lived for the greater life that our souls will live in the World to Come. Therefore, they were prepared to give up life in this world for the

eternal life in the World to Come, where Hashem would reward them for their righteous deeds in this world.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) (4:16) states:

טז) רבי יעקב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא.
התקן עצמך בפרוזדור, כדי שתכניס לטרקלין

16) Rabbi Yaakov said: This world is like a hallway to the next world. Prepare yourself in the hallway, so that you may enter the ballroom.

The life we live in this world is the way that we prepare ourselves for the eternal life that our souls will live in the world to come. There we will reap the rewards of our good deeds in this world, and the punishments for those that were less than good. The sublime pleasure that we will experience there, will be the good that we created in this world through the good choices that we made. On the other hand, if a person committed crimes in this world, he will as well face their consequences in the world to come. The proper focus for a Jew in this world *is* the next world. We are in this world *solely* to earn reward in the world to come, not for this world's momentary and transitory pleasures.

Hashem created us to give us that sublime reward in the World to Come, and this is why we have children: to give *them* the opportunity to earn that sublime future reward. Children are not here to give us pleasure, to run errands for us, or to make us proud so that we look good in front of our peers. On the contrary, we exist for them. Our responsibility to them as the parents, who brought them into the world, is to teach them how to use their lives properly to earn the eternal reward of the World to Come. This is why the Torah repeatedly commands us to teach our

children Torah and the Mitzvot. These are the tools that they will use to earn their place in that World to Come. So that they can do this, one of the most important components of Judaism is raising healthy wholesome Jewish children. A Jew who leads his life according to the Torah's laws and values will live both a most upstanding and meaningful life in this world and will reap its benefits in the next. *This* is the ultimate good that what we want for our children.

With this understanding of what Hashem expects from parents, we can understand how, in concept, parents would take their wayward child to the court to have him killed. If a child's life in this world will only earn him punishment in the next world, he is better off not being here! Parents who brought a child into this world with the goal of giving him the opportunity to earn reward in the world to come, but realize that their little son is on the path to becoming a murderer who will have nothing but pain and suffering in that later world, are doing him the biggest favor by turning him over to the court and ending his life before he gets there. He will then have a much better place in the world to come instead of having to account for a life of crime and murder. As cruel as they may seem, these parents really have their son's best interest in mind.

This concept is taught in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 8:5:

בן סורר ומורה נידון על שם סופו ימות זכאי ואל ימות חייב שמיתתן
של רשעים הנאה להן והנאה לעולם לצדיקים רע להן ורע לעולם

The rebellious son is judged [now] based on what his future will be. Let him die meritorious [now] and not die guilty [later]. For, the death of evil people is good for them and good for the world, while the death of righteous people is bad for them and bad for the world.

The lesson is, (as it never happened and never will) that the rebellious son is not sentenced to death for the seemingly trivial crime of eating meat and drinking wine. These activities alone certainly do not subject him to the ultimate penalty. Rather, the Torah has predicted that, based on his uncontrolled behavior at such a young age, he is on the path to becoming a thief and a murderer. Once he has developed such a gluttonous lifestyle, when he will later not have what he wants, he will steal and murder to get it. A confirmed murderer receives the death penalty; but we are nonetheless administering it here, to this 13-year-old boy, *before* he actually kills anybody so that he will not die with blood on his hands. In other words, since he is destined to receive the death penalty one way or the other, it is better that he die now, before an innocent life has been lost and before he has the guilt of spilt blood on his hands. This is the Torah's rationale for having him killed.

This concept also serves as a model for the way Hashem deals with His people. Our Sages point out that Hashem deals with his children, the Jewish people, in the same way. When they rebel and violate the Torah, Hashem, for the sake of their portion in the world to come, may judge them and have them leave this world earlier but meritorious, rather than later with much sin on their hands. *The death of evil people is good for them and good for the world.* Good for them because they do not accrue more sins to their record, and good for the world, because there are no more victims.

The Torah is neither a story book nor a history book. It is *the* book of life, with all the important lessons that we need to live our lives to the fullest. These few verses about the wayward son are replete with valuable lessons to parents on how to raise their children. This is what is meant by, “**To learn from it and derive reward.**” If we learn the lessons from the wayward child of how to raise our children correctly, we will fulfill our roles as parents in teaching them how to earn their places in the World to Come.

Looking very carefully at the choice of words in these few verses, our Sages learned some interesting lessons from them. Significantly, these lessons all relate to the parents of the wayward child.

*18) If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother, and they discipline him, but he does not hearken to them; 19) then his father and mother shall **grasp** him and **take** him out to the elders of his city, at the city gate. 20) They **shall say** to the elders of his city, “**This son of ours** is wayward and rebellious; he does **not listen to our voice**, he is a glutton and a drunkard.”*

Many conditions are required before a child can be killed as a rebellious child. The Mishna says (Sanhedrin8:4):

משנה מסכת סנהדרין פרק ח

הָיָה אֶחָד מֵהֶם גָּדָם אוֹ חֲגֵר אוֹ אֵלֶם אוֹ סוּמָא אוֹ חֲרָשׁ, אֵינּוּ נֹעֲשֶׂה בֶן סוֹרֵר וּמוֹרֵה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים כ"א) וְתַפְּשׁוּ בּוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ, וְלֹא גִדְּמִין. וְהוֹצִיאוּ אֹתוֹ, וְלֹא חֲגָרִין. וְאָמְרוּ, וְלֹא אֵלְמִין. בְּנֵנוּ זֶה, וְלֹא סוּמִין. אֵינְנוּ שְׂמַע בְּקִלְנוּ, וְלֹא חֲרָשִׁין

If one of the parents was missing a hand or was lame, or was mute, blind or deaf, the son cannot be judged and killed as a rebellious child.

Although these seemingly unusual laws, which derive directly from the verses, must be taken literally, we can also learn a lesson from them.

“Then his father and mother shall grasp him.” *Neither parent can be missing a hand.* (Since they must grab him) Metaphorically speaking, this may refer to the parents’ educational style. They were *“hands off”* parents. They did not feel it was right to micromanage their son, and, instead, gave him a lot of freedom, which is why he went astray. He felt that his parents didn’t care about what he did, so he did what he wanted to do. A child needs parents to raise him. If even one of the parents was, so to speak, *“missing a hand”* and not deeply involved in his upbringing, it is not fair to blame the child for his difficult behavior. It’s not his fault; it’s his parents’ fault for not giving him proper guidance.

This wording (“grasp him”) may also hint to his parents not hugging or showing affection to their child. Children crave affection. An occasional (or more frequent!) hug offers a powerful way for parents to show their child that they love and cherish him.

“And take him out to the elders of his city.” *Neither parent can be missing a foot.* (Since they have to “take him”.) Metaphorically, again, if a parent is missing a foot, he cannot follow his child to see where he is going and to be sure that he is only going to appropriate places. He cannot chase his child when he needs to speak with him. In the same way, if parents liberally permitted their child to go where he wanted, they cannot blame the child for his behavior. It is their fault for allowing him to go places where he could hang out with undesirable people and learn from their actions.

This may also hint to the idea of taking walks and talking with our children, which provides bonding time and an opportunity to grow close.

“They shall say to the elders of his city.” *If either parent is mute,* the child cannot be killed as a rebellious child. This is simple to understand. If a parent cannot speak with his child to explain to him what is right and wrong, how can the child be blamed for not knowing? He was never told! If his parents were able to speak, but they never spoke to him to teach him proper Jewish values, proper conduct, maybe a constructive criticism here or there, and, most of all, love and compassion for him, it is no wonder the boy has strayed and become rebellious. Once again, we cannot blame him; the blame, again, would lie with the parents.

“This son of ours.” (Implying that they can see him). *If one of the parents was blind,* the child cannot receive the status of a rebellious child. Hence, even if parents “see” very well, yet turn a blind eye to their child’s development, once again, we cannot blame the child for not correcting his ways. Nobody told him that he was doing anything wrong, so he thought that he was doing okay.

“He does not listen to our voice” (Implying that they can hear). - *If either parent is deaf* the child cannot be killed as a wayward son. This is because if they couldn’t hear the child’s pleas or his problems, he is not to be blamed. Parents must always listen carefully to what their children are saying. If they detect foreign ideas, improper expressions, or ideas coming out of their children’s mouths, they must question the source of those inappropriate words. Parents must always be ready to listen to their child when something is bothering him and he needs

someone to speak to. Because parents must always be ready to answer their children's questions, they have the correct answers and the information that they need to go to the next level in their child's growth. If the parents were "deaf" to their child and told him "I don't have time now," when he needed to speak to them, it is not his fault that he turned out the way that he did. He called out for help, but no one heard his voice.

The Gemara says further: **our voice**

רבי יהודה אומר אם לא היתה אמו שוה לאביו בקול ובמראה ובקומה
אינו נעשה בן סורר ומורה

Rabbi Yehuda says: If his mother was not equal to his father with the same voice, appearance, and stature, their son is ineligible to be a rebellious son.

How is it possible that a man and a woman have the same voice and appearance? A man is distinctly a man and a woman is distinctly a woman.

This can also be interpreted metaphorically. It is saying that father and mother must be on the same page as far as their values and morals are concerned and that they must both be speaking with "one voice" about what is good and what is bad. If they have different ideas about these crucial matters, the child will grow up confused without a secure foundation of values to build upon. This may be why he has become rebellious; he is confused and without clear understanding of right and wrong.

Similarly, parents must be consistent in how they dress and how they appear to others. A husband can't dress according to one type of lifestyle and the wife another. They must live compatibly in the same lifestyle. If they appear different in the eyes of others, there is something wrong and, once again, the child is not to be blamed.

Reviewing the above criteria of what exempts a child from being a "rebellious child," we see a comprehensive list of what parents are not supposed to do.

On the other hand, parents whose goal in having children is to bring them to the World to Come will likely not make any of these mistakes. Because their focus is on the child and what he needs to achieve a life that will bring him to the future world, they will be involved in his education, vigilant about where he goes, with whom he associates, and will be sensitive to the things that he says. They will give him a clear message about why he is in this world and help him to overcome any challenges that he encounters.

May Hashem help us all to fulfill all the conditions to be perfect parents and raise wholesome, healthy Jewish children.