

## Do as I Say, And as I Do!

I've seen the embarrassed looks on parents' faces. The ones that wish they could be anywhere but here with their child, young or old, who is throwing the temper tantrum of the century. The child is screaming, crying, often kicking or hitting their parent. What is it about? Perhaps not wanting to get in the car and leave, or not wanting to get out of the car and stay. Sometimes it is because the child simply doesn't want to do anything, maybe from over exhaustion. Whatever it is, I've seen it and experienced it as a teacher, and as my mother can tell you, I was that child at times too. Most children are stubborn by nature and occasionally rebellious. Whether it starts in childhood with a tantrum or as an adolescent or teen with missing curfew, or even just talking back, parents are tested to their limits by their children.

Parents, you are not alone. As far back as the *Torah*, we see incidents of children rebelling against their parents or authority figures. Korach rebels against the nation, wanting to have his moment as leader, and Aaron's sons get into trouble when they take matters into their own hands and offer strange fire to God, causing their death. This issue goes back to one of the fundamental aspects of leadership - parental or otherwise. Adults are meant to teach their children through actions and words what is expected of them. We are supposed to be role models, in Hebrew *doogmaot*, of proper behavior and etiquette.

This week, *parshat Ki Tetzei* shares a number of laws to govern society. We receive laws about war and taking care of hostages, laws about our clothing, laws about family relationships, parents and children, taking care of the poor and so much more. *Ki Tetzei* is actually the *Torah* portion with the most number of *mitzvot* within it, but the recurring theme is the issue of a stubborn and rebellious son.

Here's the situation in chapter 21:18-21:

"If a Man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not listen to them; Then shall his father and his mother lay hold of him, and bring him out to the elders of his city, and to the gate of his place; And they shall say to the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die; so shall you put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."

What starts out as a typical incident - parents asking or telling their child to do something and the child rebelling - turns into a trial by the community and death. That's a significant consequence for your children: do as I say or else!

Have no fear, the Talmud reads these verses and the punishment within them with such a narrow interpretation of what they mean that it could never happen. One way they did this was to let it apply to a case where both father and mother were present and shared a common set of values. But when reading this text, the commentator Ibn Ezra of the Middle Ages picks up on "will not obey." Reading this as implying that the parents tried to teach the child and did not ignore or excuse the child's behavior, he

teaches that the son can be charged only if his parent's behavior has been exemplary; otherwise, they have no right to bring accusations against him.

The bigger lesson is that we have a responsibility to live our lives true to our beliefs and values. When we model this style of living, our children will learn from it. Think about the times you tell your child to eat healthy when you find yourself skipping a meal or needing sugar or caffeine to get through the afternoon. Or when we reprimand children for using technology too much, only to spend our evenings on our various devices. When we espouse one value and then do another, we set ourselves up for a fight. By teaching what we actually believe, we limit these moments of dissonance. That does not mean that the tantrums will suddenly disappear, but when we engage in a relationship with one another that is based on morals and that models appropriate behavior, our children will heed our words and our fights will be for the good of the world, not for 5 more minutes of TV time. The Torah teaches that it's important for parents and teachers alike to remember that behavior management has to start with us. Just as Gandhi encouraged us to "Be the change . . ." let us challenge ourselves to be the good.

ללמוד **To Learn** ללמד **To Teach:** we are all life-long learners. Pick up a book to further your learning, whether on Judaism like Rashi's Daughters, or Jewish Literacy, or on parenting like Blessings of a Skinned Knee, or Blessing of a B-, we can all benefit from further learning.

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** Remember that your children are watching you to gain clues on how to behave, think, believe. Discuss with your children your beliefs, ask them about their own. Spend one night every two weeks talking to each other about what is happening in the world and what it teaches us about how we should act.