

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parsha Mishpatim Perspectives on Parenting

One of the most challenging jobs that many of us are privileged to have is that of being a father or mother. We are in the position to care for and educate our children and we try to ensure that they receive the best possible education inside and outside our homes. There are some perplexing verses in our parsha which don't seem to belong next to one another and bear studying. The Torah states three laws, two of which are related and one that seems very much out of place. "One who hits his parents will be put to death. One who kidnaps and sells the victim will be put to death. One who curses his parents will be put to death" (Exodus 21:15-7).

Question

The early commentators are perplexed by the order of these three verses. Why does the Torah begin by discussing the laws of respecting one's parents and interrupt right in the middle with something that seems to break the flow. Why not just finish the laws of transgressions against one's parents (hitting and cursing) instead of interrupting them with the laws of a kidnapper? (See Ramban who asks this). There are many answers offered.

Answer

One of the most powerful answers that I have heard is from Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908- 1995) zt"l who puts the verses in perspective. He states that the Torah is hinting to a very important lesson in chinuch, Jewish education. Parents care tremendously about their children's success and well-being.



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their children's success and well-being. Sometimes this causes them to develop an overly protective and controlling approach towards their child. The child detects this and harbors much resentment. The goal of parenting is to be a guide for the child while allowing him to develop in his or her own special and unique way. Children must be granted a healthy amount of autonomy so that they can learn to trust and make their own decisions. This is the correct way to help a child believe in himself and to empower him to strive towards becoming the most effective person he can be.

The verses above are hinting to us that the cause for children to God-forbid begin hitting (first verse) or cursing their parents (last verse) is precisely because of their feeling as if they are kidnapped (the middle verse) by their own parents! If a child feels trapped and abducted by his parents he may lash out in these inappropriate ways.

Summary

The Torah is stressing to us the importance of allowing our children to develop according to their own individualistic strengths with the proper balance of guidance, encouragement, love and most importantly, independence and self-discovery. This way there will be mutual love, peace and success in the household!

Shabbat Shalom!

