

What Makes a Favorite?

Someone recently told me about his foray into keeping kosher. It was quite the experience, he said. But why did he cherish such a difficult task?

Going Kosher

I was recently talking to a couple from our community who are both in their second marriage. The husband told me that there was one issue which his wife brought up very early in their relationship; on their second date, she informed him that she keeps kosher, and that for her, it's a dealbreaker. She didn't want to waste their time, so she raised the issue right away.

He comes from a Reform background, and in his home, they didn't observe kosher laws at all. He was familiar with the concept, but didn't really understand what it meant. He thought that keeping kosher entailed eating gefilte fish and kneidlach, or something of that sort. He's a very nice and easy going person, so he agreed to her conditions, and they eventually got married. But that's when the kosher story really began.

She took him on a guided tour of the supermarket to teach him what OU and OK symbols mean and how to identify kosher ingredients. But the real challenge was in the kitchen. Suddenly, he discovered that a kosher kitchen has two sets of dishes, one for dairy and one for meat. In addition to being confusing, it's also expensive, and what's more, he loves cooking and is the main cook in the home.

His wife became his kitchen security team, making sure he doesn't put the dairy fork in the meat sink and making sure that he keeps everything in the right place. He had to learn how to cook all over again; all of his favorite recipes needed to be tweaked with kosher substitutes, and on and on.

He 'endured' the 'suffering' in silence, and with time, he began to grow accustomed to the new reality. He began to 'think' in a kosher way, and the pressure began to abate. He finally felt confident in his kosher abilities.

And then Passover arrived!

He was caught completely off-guard. He grew up with a Passover Seder of eating matzah, drinking wine, charoset, and a bit of maror; he never imagined the balagan of a kosher Passover. Again, his chametz dishes were not suitable; and if that was something he could wrap his head around, he now lost all his favorite ingredients again and had to learn everything from scratch—and that's not even counting schlepping new dishes - both meat and dairy and not being able to access his favorite specialty cooking utensils.

As he was talking about Passover, I saw that even though they've been married for eight years, he still hasn't fully recovered from the trauma.

Despite that, however, he declared that Passover was his favorite holiday...

In truth, he's not the only one who says that. It's a strange phenomenon—the hardest and most expensive holiday is

Passover, and yet, for many Jews it's their favorite holiday! What exactly is going on?

Chassidus says that "A person cares about the loss of his handiwork, because he invested his wisdom and talents into it—therefore he will mourn its loss" (See Toras Menachem v. 66 p. 116). The more you invest and work on something, the more connected you become to it. So, the fact that people put effort and money into a mitzvah like Pesach, means that they will especially cherish it.

Before they left, I wished them with a smile, "Have a kosher and *happy* Passover."

Child or Father?

This brings us to this week's Torah portion.

The entire saga of Joseph, starting from his brothers' initial visit to Egypt, revolves entirely around Benjamin. Strangely, right from the outset, they disclosed to Joseph that they had a younger brother back home. Joseph immediately seized on this piece of information and insisted that the only way to prove they weren't spies was to bring Benjamin with them.

In their subsequent return to Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph decided to frame Benjamin, placing his personal goblet in Benjamin's bag and sending his steward to search his belongings. When—lo and behold—the goblet was found, he used it as a pretext to punish Benjamin by making him a slave in Egypt, while the rest would return to Canaan.

And so, our Parsha begins with Judah stepping forward to save

the situation. He explains to Joseph that leaving behind “the child, the little one” is simply not an option because his father holds a deep affection for him. “He cannot leave his father; if he were to leave, his father would die.”

Now, consider this: how old was this “little boy”? Benjamin was already thirty-one years old, a father of ten children! (see Rashi on Bereishis 43:30).

This prompts the question: What argument would be more compelling to save him from slavery? Mentioning that he has an elderly father who adores him or highlighting that he is a father of ten dependent children? Why didn't Judah employ the latter argument, emphasizing that Benjamin must be released as he is a father of ten children?

The Key Difference

There's a familiar saying that a parent can care for ten children, but ten children cannot care for one parent. Why does this hold true? It's because parents love their children with an “unconditional love”; regardless of circumstances, a parent's love for their children remains steadfast. Conversely, children's love for their parents is “conditional.” In the Mishnah's words, it is “love conditional on something; if that something is nullified, the love is nullified.” However, parents have an enduring love for their children, “love not dependent on something,” which the Mishnah says, “is never nullified.”

Chassidus explains that this distinction arises from the fact that the physical world mirrors the spiritual world. Just as our Heavenly Father loves us unconditionally, so do we love our

children in the same way. Conversely, the conditional nature of children's love for their parents mirrors the conditional love we, as children, have for our Heavenly Father.

Another explanation comes from a prominent Chassidic Rebbe in Poland: "All people, from Adam onward, form a long chain where the characteristics of fathers are inherited by their children. Adam had no human father, and therefore, he had no inclination to sacrifice himself for a father. Consequently, this trait was not passed on to future generations. However, Adam had children, and he loved them as a father does. This trait was therefore inherited by future generations."

But I would suggest that for the same reason that Jews have a special affection for Passover, parents love their children. We all understand the considerable effort it takes to raise a child—beginning with the challenges of pregnancy and childbirth for the mother, followed by sleepless nights tending to a baby's needs, dealing with earaches, teething, and so on. As children grow, new challenges emerge, and the more parents invest in their children, the more deeply connected and loving they become. In fact, the child who demands the most attention, for whatever reason, is the one that parents tend to form the strongest bond with.

However, children invest almost nothing in their parents in comparison.

So, Judah grasped that Benjamin's children would overcome whatever adversity befell their father. Ultimately, they would recover and move forward with their lives. In contrast, Jacob—if

his son did not return, even at the age of 31, he would not be able to handle it. To him, he was still a “young child.”

Youngest or Oldest

Every Jew is a child of the Almighty. Now, the Torah has two distinct terms that G-d uses to describe the people of Israel: in Exodus (4:22), G-d tells Moses, “Israel, My firstborn son,” and in the book of Hosea (11:1), reflecting on the time in Egypt, it says, “When Israel was a lad, I loved him, and out of Egypt, I called My son.”

What is preferable—to be the firstborn in the family or the youngest? I think most would opt for the latter. The eldest often faces high expectations to bring honor to the family and serve as a role model for younger siblings. The youngest child is not burdened with such expectations and receives love and warmth simply for being themselves; the parents have *nachas* just from watching him.

Similarly, in our relationship with the Almighty, if we adopt the mannerism of an older child—questioning, debating, and occasionally disagreeing—we are met with expectations and receive love based on our conduct and achievements. On the other hand, if we adopt the attitude of a younger child—relying on our Heavenly Father, trusting that He will care for us and fulfill our needs—we will experience a similar relationship with our Divine Parent.

The Rebbe often cited the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching that “Every Jew is as cherished by the Almighty as an only child born to parents in their old age.” Through our unwavering trust in G-d,

we evoke in Him a love akin to that of a youngest child—unconditional and boundless.