

Raising Good Kids

Category: Holidays, Pesach

What is the source of crimes? What bearing does that have on the Passover story?

Ronald Reagan's Shooter

Good Yom Tov!

On March 30, 1981, U.S. President Ronald Reagan stepped out of the Hilton hotel in Washington, D.C. when three shots were suddenly fired at him. To his great fortune, the shooter did not succeed in his assassination attempt but “only” shot Reagan in the chest.

The entire world was shocked at the news, especially American citizens, for whom the incident brought them back to the difficult days of the Kennedy assassination.

A few days later, at a farbrengen in honor of the 11th of Nissan, his birthday, the Rebbe addressed the shooting incident. First, he expressed wishes for a speedy recovery to President Reagan. The Rebbe then took note of the identity of the shooter: John Hinckley, Jr., son of one of America's wealthiest men, businessman John Warnock Hinckley.

The Rebbe said that it's become acceptable to claim that the root cause of such actions among the young up-and-coming generation is that they are poor, and the fact that they are poor causes them to be bitter, stoking in them a feeling of revenge—resulting in them carrying out criminal acts.

The conventional wisdom, the Rebbe pointed out, is that kids from rich families are the ones who go to college, and from whose ranks come the best and the leaders of society—while the criminals come from beleaguered neighborhoods and destroy society.

But what happened with Reagan, the Rebbe noted, is that a “spoiled” child, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, was precisely the one who tried to assassinate the leader of the world's leading superpower.

This wasn't the only time in history in which troubles came specifically from the ranks of the affluent.

On September 11, all the suicide terrorists who hijacked the planes and flew them into those buildings to kill thousands were not of poor Muslim families who acted out of despair. Rather, they were sophisticated young men who spoke English, had graduated from expensive colleges and lived in Western countries. These were the 9/11 terrorists.

More recently, the Muslims who joined ISIS were not always people growing up in poor villages in Yemen or Iraq. Rather, they were often young people who grew up in Western Europe, got a Western education and lived the good life. It is specifically these people who've become the lowliest murderers of all. Case in point? "Jihadi John," the Daesh terrorist who was born and raised in London into a respected family and who completed a degree in computing—and who ended up cutting hostages' heads off on videos broadcast to the whole world.

The Spoiled Generation

In that same talk, the Rebbe went on to say that Judaism has an entirely different view.

Judaism holds that poverty does not produce crime—on the contrary, the Talmud says, "Watch out for children of the poor, for from them comes forth Torah" (Tractate Nedarim 81a). In other words, the Talmud tells us that it is specifically those who come from a background of poverty who try harder to attain impressive achievements.

We see this in American Jewish history, where the children of the immigrant generation, who had grown up in homes stricken by poverty and saw how their parents worked hard to support their families—it was specifically they who had the motivation to make the effort and become the most diligent college students.

The third generation, which began with us (or perhaps our parents), are those who were born to successful parents and raised with silver spoons in our mouths, and as a general rule, we don't have the same motivation as our first-generation American-born parents. In our generation, the list of top students in our schools didn't necessarily show a lot of Jewish names—but 40-50 years ago, especially in

New York, the majority of those lists had names like Goldberg, Friedman and Weiss. (Today, those lists primarily feature names of immigrants from India and Asia. Why? Because our kids generally are not hungry for success, and so they don't try.)

We find this same concept in the Tanach.

At the end of King David's life, when he was already old and not well, his son Adoniya decided to rebel against him and declare himself king.

While King David was lying in his bed of woes, Adoniya decided that it was time to seize the kingdom. He forged a relationship with the major players in the king's court, recruiting the general of the army, Yoav ben Tzeruya, and one of the leaders of the Kohanim, Evyasar the Kohein and "all his brothers the sons of the king" and the people of Judah.

In short, Adoniya got all the movers and shakers of the Kingdom of Judah to join him, and he held a coronation ceremony.

Now Batsheva, the mother of Solomon (the future King Solomon) who had gotten a promise from David that Solomon would be the one who would rule after him, went to King David and told him what was happening in the court of the kingdom. She reminded him of the promise he had given her regarding Solomon; David indeed stood by his word and within the same day, crowned Solomon as king.

Solomon at the time was but a lad of 12, but he was anointed as king and seated on his father's throne.

When Adoniya heard the news, he fled and begged for mercy from Solomon to not be executed.

But here the Tanach comes along and reveals to us what had caused Adoniya to display the chutzpah to crown himself as king during the lifetime of his father, and without permission.

In the first Book of Melachim (Kings), Chapter 1, Verse 6, we are told: "And his father had not angered him all his days saying, 'Why have you done so?' And he too was of very handsome appearance, and she bore him after Absalom."

In plain English, Adoniya's father David had never caused him to feel down. He

ever educated him. He grew up like a spoiled prince who got everything he wanted. He never heard the word “no.” And so he thought that he had everything coming to him—so it’s no wonder that he did what he did. (See at length Sichos Kodesh 5741, Vol. 3 pg. 7, et al.)

The Midrash (Tanchuma, start of Sefer Shmos) adds to that, saying that this is also the reason why Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, grew up to be a “wild donkey of a man”—because Abraham had spoiled him and never told him, “no.” For the same reason, he set out for a bad lifestyle when he became a young adult—because his father had loved him so much that he gave him everything he wanted.

And that brings us to the holiday of Passover.

Why Didn't Moses Warn Them

When we study the story of the Exodus from Egypt, we discover something strange. Seemingly, Moshe Rabbeinu should have prepped the people about the desert before they left—so that they would know that it was “the great and fearsome desert: snakes, vipers and scorpions, and thirst in which there is no water” (Deuteronomy 8:15).

Moshe himself had been in the desert already. He had met with G-d at the Burning Bush in the desert, and had pastured the sheep of Jethro “after the desert” (Exodus 3:1). He knew exactly what was waiting for them in the desert—and if he had specifically wanted to give them good news, he could have told them that they were going “to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).

But what Moses chose to say to the Jewish Nation at the moment of the Exodus from Egypt was, “And when you come into the Land... and when your sons say to you, ‘What is this service for you?’, you shall say, ‘It is the Passover offering for G-d.’” Later, Moses again says, “And you shall tell to your son,” and then again, “And when your son will ask you, ‘What is this?’”

No less than three times in Bo does Moses exhort the Jewish Nation about educating their children.

Why was Moses so worried about children's education? What was he concerned about?

The Spoiled Jews

Perhaps, as long as the Jewish Nation was in Egypt, poor and in slavery, Moses did not worry about Jewish kids going off on the wrong path—because it is specifically “from children of the poor comes forth Torah.”

Poor kids don't have the privileges of being spoiled—if they get caught up with breaking the law, no one's going to come save them. Their parents have no connections and no money to hire good lawyers.

But “when you come into the Land,” where you will be in “a land flowing with milk and honey” where life is good and the kids can grow up in the “Goldene Medina,” Moses was worried that the spoiled kids who'd grow up in the Land of Israel would eventually start rebelling against their parents and start asking questions like, “What is this service?” They would be the ones who would have the chutzpah to laugh at their parents.

So Moses got up and exhorted the Jewish Nation. You should know, he told them, the great challenge of the generation that will enter the Land will not be the economy or national security. Instead, the greatest challenge will be education. And so Moses found it proper to exhort them about that, even before they had even left Egypt.

The Sacrifice

We also see the importance of education in the central mitzvah of the Passover holiday as it existed during the Temple Eras. During those times, the primary mitzvah of the holiday was the “Korban Pesach,” the Passover Sacrifice: Every family would make the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem, and there they would join with other families and offer up the Paschal Lamb together. And then, for the Seder night, they would all gather together and eat the meat of the sacrificed lamb together.

But the Torah lays down a very clear condition about the Korban Pesach: “No estranged one may partake of it” (Exodus 12:43). Anyone who wanted to join a

family, or group of families, sacrificing and then eating the Passover lamb had to first be circumcised: “And should a proselyte reside with you, he shall make a Passover sacrifice to the L-rd. All his males shall be circumcised, and then he may approach to make it, and he will be like the native of the land, but no uncircumcised male may partake of it” (Exodus 13:48). Otherwise, the convert is forbidden to eat of the Passover sacrifice meat.

The Rebbe notes something very interesting.

The halacha states that if there is a male member of the family who is not circumcised, his father cannot offer up the Passover sacrifice. Even though the father himself and the rest of his sons are circumcised under Jewish law, if one member of the family is not, it disqualifies the entire family from celebrating the Passover holiday by the letter of the law.

This teaches us that we have a responsibility not just to our Judaism but also our children’s Judaism (michtav klali, 11 Nissan, 5730; Hagaddah Shel Pesach Im Likutei Ta’amim, Vol. 2, pg. 626).

And so, my friends, the Passover sacrifice teaches us a very important lesson: Let it be that we rise to the task that the holiday of Passover places upon us, and raise an upright generation that is able to continue the chain of generations of the Jewish Nation.

Good Yom Tov!