

Ki Tetzei
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Shabbat Shalom. The torah portion I am reading today, *Ki Tetzei*, is very intriguing in that it concerns G-d's instructions on how to live and behave as a proper Jewish person. And even though it was written over 3,000 years ago, the instructions are still alive in today's world. This is important, for me, since Judaism is not just a religion but is a part of me and describes who I am.

There are many aspects to *Ki Tetzei* that I unfortunately do not have time to address. And, even though I am a bar mitzvah today, and I am seen as an adult in the eyes of the Jewish community, some of the subjects in my *Parasha* are not exactly appropriate for me to discuss in front of this congregation. But I invite you to read the *Parasha* at your leisure because it does discuss many interesting topics.

The specific part of the *Parasha* that I am going to discuss today deals with the defiant or rebellious son, also known as "the drunkard and glutton."

In *Parashat Ki Tetzei*, the Torah says: If a man has a wayward and defiant son, who does not heed his father or mother and does not obey them **even** after they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders of his town. Thereupon the elders will investigate whether he is truly a wayward and defiant son, and if they find that he is, then the men of the town will stone him to death, thus sweeping evil from their midst, and all of Israel will hear and be afraid (Deuteronomy 21:14).

You are probably wondering why I'm discussing the wayward and defiant son. **No**, I do not consider myself one and I **hope** my parents don't either. **I** have always been interested in world news and historic events and I have always questioned the nature of people's actions. I hear stories of teenagers who don't have any regard for others' possessions or lives, how some can cheat, steal and

worse, murder. And I question: how can a teenager drive by a neighborhood and gun down innocent people on the street? How can a teenager go into a convenience store and rob, at gun point, for their own satisfaction? *I* question their morals and their lack of respect for society. And I wonder, “where are their parents? Weren’t they taught right from wrong? “

The Torah uses the Hebrew word, *kavode*, meaning “respect” or “honor”. It is a word that even now I struggle with. I know I am to honor my mother and father. I know I am to respect my teachers and my peers, to respect others’ property. But what does that word, respect, truly mean? When we look carefully at the Hebrew word, *kavode*, we realize it is referring to a person that is worthy of our consideration. As an adult, you must earn that honor by your actions. As a child, you must accept as a given that your parents and elders have earned that honor. Even if we don’t always agree, we must understand that our parents, grandparents, teachers and Rabbis have walked the same path we are now walking. It may look a little different; after all, we have cars now! But aside from the addition of cars, we are in a much more technologically advanced society with computers being everyday household items. Times have changed, yet the underlying problems remain the same: cyber bullying is a perfect example. Bullying is bullying, and has been throughout time, it is now just done through a different medium. And we can benefit from listening to how our parents handled bullies.

An interesting part of *Ki Tetzei* discusses how to properly take eggs from a nest and the importance of doing it away from the mother bird. I interpret this as a show of respect to the mother bird. Again, this is mere acceptance that a mother, even a mother bird, is worthy of your consideration for simply being a parent.

According to the Torah, *Ki Tetzei* tells us how parents are required to deal with the rebellious son. Both parents, mother and father, must agree on his defiance before seeking punishment from the elders. It is assumed that they already tried their own disciplinary actions and those did not

work. The Elders of the town make the final decision about the son's punishment, much like our modern court system. It was a system of deterrence, because if the elders agreed, the son was stoned at the city gates, and all of Israel would hear and be afraid. I can't imagine any parent allowing this to happen. In fact, there is considerable doubt that it was ever actually done. In truth, the Rabbis of the Talmud in Sanhedrin on pages 71a and b created so many loop holes and exceptions to the law, that it would be impossible for the elders to convict **anyone** of being the rebellious son. According to a *Baraita*: "There never has been a 'stubborn and rebellious son', and never will be." Why then is it written in the Torah? The Talmud suggests that it is included for the reward of study, but I feel that it is written in the Torah, not only for study, but to scare boys when they are young. This creates a lasting impression. When they are older, this will keep them from committing the extreme acts of violence we see today. Many people, like my parents, and some teachers I know, feel if we reinstate the ancient laws, children would behave a bit better. I assume they are just joking, stoning at the city gates is a bit harsh, but they may have a point. Punishment, or the threat of punishment, has become too relaxed in current times and the deterrence factor is not as apparent as it once was. After all, children may not have known in ancient days that this law was not actually carried through. I know that just reading about the possibility of it makes me take my parents more seriously because I see that this is what G-d had written in the Torah.

I want, like any other teenager, to explore and discover things on my own. However, as much as I do not want to admit it, I have learned from this *Parasha*, that I have a lot to learn from my elders and I should take advantage of their knowledge and experience. I should respect their accomplishments and learn from their failures. I should honor their opinions even though mine may differ. And by doing so, I will not become a truly rebellious son.

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