

A Thought for Shabbat

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Shabbat Shalom

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In this week's Torah portion, *Ki Tetze*, the Torah speaks of a behaviorally challenged child. "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 out to the elders of his town at the public place of his community (Deut. 21:18-19)."

Child rearing is tough business. If you were one of the elders, what would you advise these parents to do? Should they use an iron fist to lay down the law? Should they use a velvet hand so as not to upset the child, but yet express their disappointment? Should they ignore him? Should they do all of the above?

First and foremost our tradition encourages us to love our children even when we don't like them or their behavior. Often times children act out towards their parents because they know deep down they will still be loved. We would do well to keep this idea intact.

A story is told of a man whose son was out of control. The man went to see his rabbi and asked, "What am I to do? I love my son, but I am beside myself and out of energy."

The rabbi answer, "Love him even more."

Whatever discipline we employ with our children, it ought to come from a place of love; not anger, disappointment, lack of other ideas or revenge.

If I were one of the elders, I would tell the parents not to take their children's behavior problems as personal assaults. Too often we fall into the trap of sparring with them and this leaves both child and parent bruised. When we do this, we become less affective at solving the problem or ameliorating the situation. We need to be on top of our game as parents - always creative and one step ahead of our children. Discipline will mean something when thoughtful steps are taken and not reactionary ones.

When our children have gone wayward and are defiant, we should consider the following:

1. Love them more
2. Discipline from a place of love
3. Don't take it personally