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What is Wrong with Parents?, 1946.

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WHAT IS WRONG WITH PARENTS?

WRHS

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple



On
Sunday morning, November 24, 1946

For our people the supreme reward of a good life was held to be a blessed family life. You may recall that magnificent short 128th Psalm:

"How happy is everyone who reveres the Lord
Who walks in His ways
Of the toil of your hands you shall eat
Happy and prosperous you shall be
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
In the interior of your house
Your children like young olive-trees
Around your table.
For, lo, thus shall the man be blessed
Who reveres the Lord."

It is within the home that life's deepest satisfactions are to be found. It is within the home that the young man, the young woman is made or marred. It is from the home that man derives his fundamental advantages and his fundamental handicaps. It is there that the basic pattern of the individual and the basic pattern of a people are woven. This microcosm, this little world reflective of the great world which contains such fundamental human relationships our people sought in every way to protect, to enrich and to deepen in spiritual content.

Our people evolved a noble code of conduct for all those who go to make up a home -- husband, wife, parent, child -- a high discipline of mutual respect and devotion, of obligation and of privileges. This code, this discipline made of the Jewish home a paragon of life, homelife, Jewish family life through the ages came to be regarded as a pattern worthy of emulation. And for our own people, the home became not merely the nourishing ground of our individual spiritual lives, but it became the refuge of the persecuted spirit of the people. For throughout the ages, life about the Jewish people tended to do all that it could to disfigure and to degrade the life of the Jewish people, to humiliate it by every form of outer restriction, by ghettos and mean occupations. In spite of it all, the spirit of our people was never degraded or disfigured because our people always had a world of its own quite apart from the environment about it wherein dignity and the nobility of the individual and the fine associations and their disciplines of human existence were kept alive within the home. They were free men, free women, conscious of their worth and dignity.

Much is written in our literature, in our religious and ethical literature about the home, about the respect of parents and the love of parents. Already in the Ten Commandments you find a Commandment touching honor and respect due to parents. There is a great deal in our literature on how to make married life -- the life of husband and wife, gracious and ennobling and blessed.

There is much about the obligation of children to parents, and much also is written about the duties of parents to children. Family life is always regarded as a cooperative enterprise whose success depended on the sharing of responsibilities. Each member of the household was expected to make his contribution and every one was entitled to sharing in the satisfactions of home life, to share in the burdens and to share in the rewards. No one in the home possesses absolute rights. No one was granted unqualified rights. Absolute rights never contribute to the success of a cooperative enterprise. No one had the right to expect priority in the home at all times. There were times, there are times when the needs of one member of the household become paramount and then love and sound judgment must dictate when that takes place and for how long that must continue and then that priority must yield to that of others within the family circle.

No life within the home was looked upon merely as an end in itself and no life as merely a means towards some other end. Each life was both a means and an end in itself. In other words, the home was an evolving fellowship of free human beings of different ages, of different experiences, some strong, some weak, and some stronger at times than others, and some weaker than others at times, the status changing as the years go by, all having needs and all having responsibilities and each one called upon to pull his full weight.

If things go wrong in a home, the major responsibility of course though not the exclusive one, must in the last analysis rest with parents -- father, mother or both. It does not follow of course that if children turn out badly it is always the fault of the parents. Life is not as simple as all that. Many other influences go into the

composite make-up of a child's life. The home is not only environment in which a child grows, but in the street, on the play-ground, in the church, in the school. Many other hands, sometimes invisible hands help to mold the life and character of a child. And the friends, schoolmates, teachers, relatives, the invisible hands of ancestors long since dead, the books one reads, the plays one sees -- all these mold and determine to a degree the life of every growing child. But after all is said and done, the home is the most constant of all the child's environments and the parents are the closest to the child during the formative years and are the most continuous and incessant influence in the child's life. If things do go wrong, the responsibility is largely that of the ~~child~~ parents, as is the heart-ache.

Now most parents, normal folk possessed of good common sense, do a good job of home building -- not perfect, for perfection is not of this world. And the average home is a good clean wholesome place for people to live in, and a happy place for young people to live in and to grow up in.

But there are many exceptions, many sad and tragic exceptions. There are many many homes which are tense, troubled and unhappy homes, homes where misunderstanding, recriminations, even hate are to be found, homes which very often reach a breaking point, where the home is disintegrating. There are millions of such homes in our country today. And those who live in these homes come to wither spiritually. And the children who grow up in such homes carry with them into life some psychic scars, psychic trauma for the rest of their days.

Our people stress three duties which parents owe their children:

First to rear them in the ways of righteous living. The first and most important thing is to rear them in the ways of righteous living. They called it "God-fearing."

Secondly, to educate them and to enable them to earn an honest living.

Third, to help them to set up a home of their own if possible.

Now the first responsibility of parents called for a careful upbuilding by precept and example. It was of course accepted as a matter of axiom that all that could be done for the physical welfare of their child should be done -- physical care, the proper food, fresh air, sunshine, recreation -- to the degree that it was possible. That was taken for granted. But much more was required. The child learns early the most valuable lessons of life and he learns them by imitation and by suggestion. And it is the parents whom the child imitates first and most and to whose suggestions the child responds the most. Thus, if in their relationship to one another, mother and father, and in their relation to the child or children in the home, the parents give the example through a thousand and one ways of honesty, courage, tolerance, of refinement, impartiality, of fair judgment and of reverence for them -- ~~that~~ things that should be revered in life, the child will unconsciously in his life imitate these qualities and so develop the pattern of righteous living.

Parents must practice what they wish their children to be. And this is the supreme challenge to parenthood. It was a wise man who said: "Children have more need of models than of"

You teach your child by the kind of life you yourself live in the home every hour in the day. And you can't fool children. This is the first thing parents must do to fulfill the obligations of rearing children in the way of righteous living. They themselves must lead righteous lives in the fullest sense of that word. The parents must in training their children for responsibility, social life, exercise a reasonable amount of discipline over the lives of their children. Children are not fully developed personalities and one need not be afraid of interfering with their self-expression. The child's life will be enhanced and not thwarted by positive guidance, not dictatorial guidance, but intelligent kindly positive, by deliberate guidance.

It is folly to over-indulge a child out of fear of repressing him. A child

must remember that he is destined to live in a community not on a desert island. There are rules which govern society, rules which he must learn to observe, to obey -- the respect of the rights of other people -- team work -- give and take -- the law of human sacrifice. And unless a child learns these things and learns to practice them, that child as it grows up will be hurt -- and badly hurt.

You are not helping or protecting the child by catering to its every whim for fear of repressing something individual in the child. Parents must not abdicate that responsibility or relinquish it. Parents in training the child for righteous living, for living in a social community -- fundamentally parents should allow the child to grow up, not prolong his childhood. They should not prolong his dependence. They should not shelter him too long. They must teach him to assume responsibility because he is growing up in a competitive hard/world where he will have to make his own decisions, fight his own battles or he will go under. You can kill a child with kindness by killing his initiative, his self-reliance. Men are matured by responsibility, by pain. You should not shelter your child against life's experiences.

I came across a rather challenging book recently called, "Their Mothers' Sons" -- The Psychiatrist Examines an American Problem -- by Dr. Edward A. Strecker. Dr. Strecker came up against this problem forcibly as a psychiatrist in the army. This is what challenged him to think through the problem: "There are some 500,000 men who tried to evade service of their country -- draft dodgers who resorted to any device, however shameful, even to the wearing of female clothing. Not so with the majority of the 1,825,000 men who were rejected at induction for various neuropsychiatric causes. Not so with a large proportion of the 600,000 more that had to be discharged from the service for similar reasons. Most of these men could not face the prospects of an exacting and unsure military life."

"Why did the desire for self-preservation defeat one group of men, to their discredit, and not the other? The answer in ninety percent of the cases can be given

in one word, immaturity. The majority of the men who failed, like the majority of the men who fail for the same reasons in ordinary life, were immature."

"What constitutes maturity? In conversation most of us mean a man is mature when he is grown up. Webster defines it simply as the state or quality of being mature; ripeness, full development, but it is much more than that. It is a complex mixture of personality qualities. It is the ability to see a job through, no matter what. It is the inherent desire always to give more than is asked for or required in any given situation. It is the quality of dependability that makes other people say, "He's a reliable person." It is independence of thought and action. Maturity represents the capacity to cooperate, to work with others, to work in an organization and to work under authority. The mature person is pliable and can alter his own desires according to time, persons, and circumstances. He is tolerant, he is patient, he is adaptable -- he is human. Maturity is the mark of good morale in the individual."

"Maturity," says the doctor, "is not an inborn trait; it is not hereditary. It is the result of early background, environment, training and unselfish parental love."

"Conversely, immaturity is caused by the lack of a good intelligent foundation in this business of living. It is not difficult to find basic reasons for immaturity. Often it is merely necessary to retrace the life of an immature person. Given the opportunity of having known when he was eight to twelve years old, any one of the men who failed in his opportunity to serve in the armed forces because of neuropsychiatric tendencies, and particularly, of having known his mother, a competent psychiatrist could have forecast with reasonable accuracy the boy's future immaturity. In the vast majority of case histories, a "mom" is at fault."

The author proceeds to define the word "mom" as against mother.

"The future social behavior of a child has its beginning and is patterned in the conflicting sensations and emotions that arise from the early relationship between

the mother and child. For the child, the mother is not only the great Dispenser of pleasure and love and the great Protectress, but also the source of pain, the ruthless Thwarters and Frustrators. So the dilemma of the mother is likewise the dilemma of the child. It is a delicately balanced conflict of clinging and rejecting and, depending on which way the balance is tipped, the child either learns to meet successfully the larger give-and-take aspects of mature living, or he doesn't. If the give-and-take capacity is not developed, the child will fail to adjust himself to his own life and to society. As a result, the child never grows up. He remains emotionally immature."

Weaning is as much a part of motherhood as is nursing. Taking away from a child is as important as giving to it. Rejecting and emancipating a child are as significant as clinging to it. Furthermore, these seemingly contradictory phases of motherhood belong to each other both in nature and in sequence."

"What happens to the child whose mother not only has failed to sever the emotional apron strings but often has not even loosened them? His natural gregarious instincts lead him to seek social relations with his fellow man. But, because he has only learned to take, he sooner or later is rebuffed. He becomes a bystander in the game of life -- a sad, disillusioned and envious spectator. He cannot be a lone wolf, living apart from his fellow man. Few men succeed in doing that and the least of all. Psychologically, it would mean his eventual emotional annihilation."

And finally, "What constitutes a mom? How does she differ from a mother? Fundamentally, a mom is not a mother. Mom is a maternal parent who fails to prepare her offspring emotionally for living a productive adult life on an adult social plane. A mom does not untie the emotional apron string -- the Silver Cord -- which binds her children to her."

"A mom will take advantage of this natural mother urge to hold her child or children to her. The real mother fights the urge and lovingly does everything in her power to make her children stand on their own feet. She prepares them for an

adult life. The mothers of men and women capable of facing life maturely are not apt to be the traditional mom type. More likely mom is sweet, doting, "self-sacrificing." But the obverse of this cast, the capable stern, self-contained domineering mom is not uncommon."

"Theoretically, a mom is a woman whose maternal behavior is motivated by the seeking of emotional recompense for the buffets which life has dealt her own ego. In her relationship with her children, every deed and almost every breath are designed unconsciously but exclusively to absorb her children emotionally and to bind them to her securely. In order to achieve this purpose she must stamp a pattern of immature behavior in her children. Such a pattern is entirely inconsistent with even a minimum degree of adequacy and satisfaction and completely excludes the possibility of living life in an adult manner. With such a rigid criteria, probably there are not many bona fide moms, although I have known a few women who have almost succeeded in reaching the summits of momism."

"The mature mother uses the emotional ingredients sparingly and wisely. Her major purpose is to produce a proper balance of give and take in her children, so that they may attain full-statured personal and social maturity and lead reasonably constructive and happy lives. The immature and insatiable mom, on the other hand, uses the ingredients lavishly and unwisely, chiefly to bind her children with emotional coils. Being immature herself, she breeds immaturity in her children and, by and large, they are doomed to lives of personal and social insufficiency and unhappiness."

"In her dealings with her children, the real mother mixes logic with her love and at every step attempts to lead her children into thinking for themselves. In matters requiring judgment in selection, whether it be clothes or opinions, the mother knows her children need guidance but in decreasing amounts and with the objective of increasing self-decision."

"The mother permits her children considerable latitude of thought and behavior, but she realizes that the only time the "musts" and "must nots" of the world of adults can be learned is during childhood. It is obvious that there must be "musts" and "must nots." Not only must children brush their teeth, keep dental appointments, bathe, and do many unpleasant things, but also there are many alluring things they must not do."

I wish I had the time to quote more of this very stimulating and illuminating book which is a good guide for mothers and parents generally in the home. Love without smothering.

The second responsibility of parents is that of educating them and helping them to an honorable career. Education is the best investment next to training children for righteous living that parents can make for their children -- education not merely for public career, but education for life. Parents should give a child the best counsel in the choice of a career. Some parents are afraid to discuss with their children the choice of careers for fear of unduly influencing them. There should be no such fear. There are parents who would like to see their own unfulfilled promises come to fulfillment in the lives of their children. Some would like to force a career on a child for which the child is unqualified. Some parents are over ambitious for their children. They assume talents far beyond reality. Nevertheless it is wise and proper for parents to discuss careers with their children and to guide them though not to determine for them.

But whatever the career the child comes to choose in life, he should be made aware that that is only part of life, that the real business of life is to build up a well rounded personality whatever the business career chosen. We are far more than that. We are human beings, with many aptitudes and interests which ought not to be constricted into one channel only. Children should be encouraged to appreciate cultural things -- good books, good music, to share in good works, in the tasks of

good citizenship, to grow up as fine men and women regardless of their profession. No one can guarantee success in any given profession especially in this world today... One thing that we can determine with reasonable sureness--that is the investment which we make in the cultivation of hearts and minds and souls...

And thirdly, parents should help children as far as they can to set up a home of their as early as they can. Let children marry early in life. Parents should enable them to do so. It is far wiser to assist children to set up their homes in early life than to leave them money when you are dead. These are the principle responsibilities which in the wisdom of our people, parents owe their children.

Children owe much to their parents. Because of their youth, children don't realize it. Some do. Most of them do. Some don't. Some children live in a home like miserable exploiters demanding everything, giving nothing in return. Some fond parents indulge their children in this rapacity, in this shameless exploitation to the hurt of their children and to the hurt of themselves. The greatest contribution which parents can make to the life of children is the investment which they make in their hearts and minds -- the greatest gifts which they can give to their children is the gift of themselves. Some parents are too busy for that. Some fathers are too busy to give of themselves. They are busy with their business and are too busy to give of themselves part of their life's experience. Mother may be busy elsewhere -- perhaps trying to run the world, the community. It is a great mistake.

Three people, or three being, the Rabbis say, have a share in the life of an individual -- God, father and mother. Therefore, right after the first three Commandments which have to do with God comes the commandment which has to do with father and mother. Our people has always tried to impress upon the parents that in relation to the son and daughter, the parent stands almost as the emissary of God. In fact the whole conception of the home is that of the "Mikdash Miyat" -- the small sanctuary. We have lost a little of that today. Life has become much secularized

and to some degree very cheap. Our religion sought to surround the home with something of sanctity regardless of how humble the home was or how unadorned the walls. That didn't matter. When the father would come home on a Friday evening to his humble dwelling place there was his family -- his wife, his children. When he stepped across the threshold he was able to say "welcome into my home." He invited God to come to dwell in his humble home.

Now there are many such homes in the world today. They are the blessed oases, the blessed islands in a rather hard and ruthless world. Everyone can build such a home, but it takes a lot of common sense and a lot of give and take and a lot of love and attention to build that kind of a home. It can be done and when it is done, ~~there~~ it is very much like this very beautiful Psalm 128:

"How happy is everyone who reveres the Lord
Who walks in his ways
Of the toil of your hands you shall eat
Happy and prosperous you shall be
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
In the interior of your house
Your children like young olive-trees
Around your Table.
For, lo, Thus shall the man be blessed
Who reveres the Lord."



1) Reward of a good life - a blessed family life. (1)

Psalm 128 - (Read)

It is within home - life deepest satisfactions - found

It is within home - that man is made or unmade -

It is from the home that man derives his fund.

advantages - handicaps -

It is there - basic pattern of the mind - & of a people
is written.

This ancient comes - this little world of such foundation.

human relationships - our people sought in

every way to protect - enrich.

It evolved a noble code of conduct for all who
go to make up a home - husband - wife - parent
and children - a high discipline of mutual respect
and devotion - which became the paragon of home
life everywhere - Jewish family life through the
centuries was regarded by all as a pattern
worthy of emulation.

Refuge of the persecuted spirit - disfigure, degrade -
challenge.

2) Much is written in our rel. & ethical liter. -
respect & love of parents - 10 Com.

12

to children.

whose success depended —

Each nest conducted - each in

the deeds, & in the rewards -

— Horse has absolute rights — unqualified —
— & has them at all times

- nose has absolute rights - no group
- nose should claim respect - priority at all times

- There are times when the words, the one or the
- Love ~~and~~ and ~~and~~ and

- There are times when the needs, the one or the other are paramount - we ~~will~~ and ~~shall~~ must dictate when the how long the other

other are paramount - The law
must dictate when the law says
that ~~must~~ conditions prevail - Then they
must yield to the claims of others within the
law.

Each life is both a mass and an end.

- Each life is both a mass and an individual
- It is an ^{experience} fellowship of ~~life~~ ^{life} ~~that all~~ ^{each} ~~and each~~ ^{other} ~~needed dependent upon~~ ^{and} ~~various & fluctuating degrees~~ ^{each must} ~~pull his weight.~~

4). If things go wrong in a home - the major resp. ~~must~~ ^{is} not exclusive, must in the last analysis rest with the parents - father, mother or both.

It does not follow that if children turn out badly, it is always fault of parents. It is not as simple as all that - Other influences go into complete make-up of child's life & behavior - The home is not the only environment in which a child grows up - Street - play-ground - the school - church -

Other hands, sometimes quite unknown, help to mold - friend, school-mate, teacher, ^{relations which we have} the ^{teacher} ~~the~~ ^{the} world - friends, the play, the road, books on reads, the flag, the sea,

But the home is the most constant of all environments and the parents the closest to the child during his formative years - & the continuing - incessant

✗ If things go wrong - there's ^{great} ~~major~~ resp - parental heart-ache.

5). Most parents, ^{normal} ~~persecuted~~ of good common sense, & make a good job of it - not a perfect job - & care And the average home is a good, wholesome, fairly happy place for young ones to live in - But there are many exceptions - sad tragic ones

sees, shrilled, unhappy howl - reach a breaking point -
misunderstanding, exploitation, uselessness, even hate -
Then who has in them within spr - & children who
grow up in them carry psychic scars away

6/ Our people stressed 3 duties which parents owed their
children.

(1) To rear them in the way of righteousness living -

(2) To educate them & ~~set them~~ enable them to earn an
honest livelihood.

(3) To help them set up a home, their own.

7/ The first called for a careful upbringing by precept and

example:

~~There are~~ It was of course accepted as an axiom
that all that could & need to be done for the physical
protection & health of child should be done - Fresh air -
sunshine - cleanliness - proper food & exercise.

Play - recreation.

But more, much more was required.

A child learns early the most valuable lesson
of life by imitation & suggestion.

And it is the parent - whom the child imitates first 15
and most, & to whom suggestions he responds most

Thus, if in their relat. to one another & to the child
the parents give the example of honesty, courage, tolerance
~~reformist, impartiality, - reverence & obedience~~
~~for self, for others~~ / child will imitate them & imitate
and so develop the pattern for righteous living.

Parents must practice what they wish their children

to be. - That is their supreme challenge!

"Children have more need of models than of critics"

(a) In training their children for resp. social life

a reasonable discipline is indispensable.

- Children are not fully developed personalities and
we need not be afraid of interfering with their self-expression
- their individuality is enhanced, not thwarted by
positive guidance.

- It is folly to over-indulge the child out of
fear of offending him.

- The child must learn that he is destined to
live in a society - not a desert island - rules
of social life - respect others - team work - cooperation

- Parents must not take an abdicatory, relinquish
responsibility

- (b) - must allow him to grow up!
- not prolong his childhood! - his dependence! ^{shelter him} to grow!
- assume responsibility - hard ~~and~~ competition and
- "Kill with Kindness!" - initiation, self-reliance
- mature through struggle & pain.

(c) Book - p 18

- 8) Educate them - help them to an honorable career -
Education is best investment
for them & an best counsel in choice / career

But no dictation!

World like to see an unprepared person in an children

But not free a career for which child is not qualified

Whatever career - only part of man - life story

Well-rounded lives - appears a good book

- enjoy part music

- share in ~~active~~ tasks of good
citizenship

9). Help them set up a Home, then run!

Let them marry early—

Wiser > loan them money when you are dead.



How happy is everyone who reveres the Lord
Who walks in his ways
Of the toil of your hands you shall eat
Happy and prosperous you shall be
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
In the interior of your house
Your children like young olive-trees
Around your Table.
For, lo, Thus shall the man be blessed
Who reveres the Lord.

