

Whoever strikes his father or mother... whoever steals/kidnaps a man and sells him... whoever curses his father and mother. (21:15,16,17)

Social murder, which consists of depriving a human being of his personal freedom, is tantamount to actual murder. To kidnap a human being and sell him is a capital offense. To strike a father or mother, to injure one of them, is indicative of an evil person. Last, a child's verbal articulation of his wish to see his parent destroyed is also a capital offense. What kind of person would be so vile as to strike a parent or to stoop so low as to curse a parent? Such a person is so filled with himself that no one else matters. A kidnapper cares not about another person's freedom. He has no respect for another human being. He is G-dless, because a person who acknowledges G-d likewise acknowledges and appreciates G-d's handiwork. What is greater among Hashem's creations than man? Every person has within him a Heavenly component. It is this Heavenly component within the person that we are to respect. A person who does not view another human being as G-d's creation, as an extension of the Divine, will likely have no respect for his parents either. He will strike and curse them, as if they were nothing.

Such an abominable person is not born. He develops and grows into his nefarious nature. Certainly, something was wrong with his upbringing. This is indicated by the extreme hatred that he manifests for his parents. Only a G-dless person, who does not acknowledge the Divine, is capable of such egregious behavior. Someone who has never been taught about the Divine component inherent in man will grow up G-dless, and he will be capable of carrying out the most evil acts against others – even against his own parents.

How does such a metamorphosis occur within a human being? Better yet – how does a human being descend to such depths of depravity as to evince a behavior that would – and should – repulse an animal? Perhaps this will explain the insanity that prevails today among extremists in the world, individuals who declare their adherence to a Heavenly code, but who act as if G-d does not exist.

In his commentary to the Torah, **Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, wonders why the Torah inserts the laws concerning a kidnapper in between the laws regarding a son who strikes a parent or curses them. He cites the *Talmud Kiddushin* 30a, which states, "As long as your hand is upon your child's neck, you should discipline him." The *Talmud* posits that a parent may discipline a child only up to a certain age. Once children reach the age when they no longer accept parental instruction and reprimand, the parents should not "push it." They should acknowledge the fact that their son or daughter is beyond the disciplinary stage. At this point, parents should not attempt to dictate their rules to their children, nor should they discipline them.

Parents who do not follow these guidelines, those who insist on dominating the lives of their children, treating them basically like their "possessions," like captives, by stifling their desire for

selfhood, freedom, and self-expression, may be viewed as “kidnappers.” As such, these parents play an active role in effecting their children’s descent into a life filled with venom. We must take great pains not to overeducate our children, to snuff out their creativity, to quell their abilities to grow at “their” own rate and potential. Parents who are guilty of such suppression are no different than a kidnapper who quashes another human being’s personal freedom. He is like a murderer! Such a parent causes resentment, hatred and rebellion to the point that a child might, at one point, lose himself or herself to such an extent that he or she will lash out to hit or curse a parent. This is why kidnapping is inserted between striking and cursing.

What is a father’s -- or, for that matter, a mother’s -- role, in raising a child? This is a loaded question, because there are many answers – some classical and objective, while others are subjective, given by fathers who want to justify the way they have raised their children. These answers might be incorrect, specifically due to their lack of objectivity. There are also the responses presented by fathers who base their answers either on a utopian situation, or, the opposite, a difficult child from a difficult home. Their response will be subjective and, thus, not reflect a realistic opinion.

After giving the question some thought, I realize that every answer is subjective in some way. Nonetheless, I would like to suggest the following. At the end of *Sefer Bereishis*, the Torah relates Yosef’s liberation from the Egyptian dungeon and his conversation with Pharaoh, in which Pharaoh appoints Yosef as viceroy over the entire country. Pharaoh said to Yosef (*Bereishis* 41:39,40), “See! I have placed you in charge of all the land of Egypt.” This *pasuk* seems to reiterate everything that Pharaoh had up until now said to Yosef. Why does Pharaoh repeat himself? What is this *pasuk* teaching us?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, offers us a powerful insight into human nature. Even the finest human being feels the need to remind someone whom he has benefited that he is his benefactor – that without him the beneficiary would never have attained such success. We crave attention, because we are basically selfish (my explanation). Indeed, posits Rav Sholom, the more one can remove himself and stay in the background, the less one reminds a person of a favor he had done for him in the past, the more he is unlike the average human being – and the closer he is to being angel-like. He supports this premise with an interesting statement made by Manoach, Shimshon’s father, concerning the Angel that foretold his birth.

In *Shoftim* 13, the *Navi* relates that an angel appeared to Manoach and his wife to presage the birth of Shimshon. The angel came twice: once to speak to both Manoach and his wife; and a second appearance for the benefit of Manoach alone. The *Navi* writes (13:21), “The Angel of Hashem did not continue anymore to appear to Manoach and his wife; then Manoach realized that he was an Angel of Hashem.” What was the proof? The fact that he did not return to remind the once childless couple that he had been the one who heralded the birth of their son. A human being would have asked, “So, how is my baby – you know – the one that I told you about?” An angel does not remind a person of the debt he owes him, because he is not involved for himself. An

angel is selfless. People normally are not.

Between the level of angel and the level of human being is a large divide. Pharaoh manifests the low end of the totem pole; the angel represents the extreme high end. Pharaoh is an egotist who wants attention; the angel is on a mission and follows Hashem's directive, without personal benefit. I think a good parent is angel-like. Parents do not think of themselves; their whole lives are devoted completely to their children – or at least this is how it should be. Their children take precedence over everything else. Parents are (or should be) happy to sit in the background and watch their children grow – without reminding them how they should act. In that way, the children will be acutely aware of their parents' contribution toward their development – without the parents having to remind them of the fact constantly.