

## If a person will sin: if he accepted a demand for an oath, and he is a witness – either he saw or he knew. (5:1)

I recently came across a story related by a father, telling about a traumatic experience that he and his family had undergone with one of their teenage sons. A young boy, fifteen years old, had slowly begun to drift away from his attachment to Torah. At first, it was gravitation to the frivolities of the outside world. He continued with his usual good *middos*, character traits, never offending another student, always showing respect for his *rebbeim*, his good natured smile always manifest on his face. Yet, this was not enough to maintain his tenure in the *yeshivah* where he was a student. He would either adhere to Torah and *mitzvos*, or else, regrettably, if he was not prepared to accept these conditions, he would be asked to leave. The latter occurred.

When a *yeshivah* is compelled to ask a student to go elsewhere, it does not only leave a mark on the boy – it destroys his entire family! The ramifications inherent in such a decision are often devastating; thus, no decent *yeshivah* takes this decision lightly. Sometimes, however, it must be done. The boy's father could not handle it. He asked himself, "I have taught hundreds of students and have had an influence on many more. Yet, I could not reach my own son!" At one point, he decided that the dereliction of commitment to Torah had gone too far. He asked his son to leave their home. In addition, the father quit his job. How could he serve as an example to others, if, in fact, he had "failed" at home?

This attitude is, of course, the reaction of one who is depressed. The greatest and most successful educators have had issues at home. It does not impugn their integrity as educators. The son had a problem. The father must address it – end of subject. This father, however, could not deal with it. Luckily, his friends and colleagues did not allow him to follow through with his intentions. They convinced him to stay. This did not, however, resolve the conundrum that was eating away at him. "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?" He presented his case to Hashem, praying fervently for an answer: "Hashem! Please, why?"

The father customarily read from the *Sipurei Chasidim*, Chassidic Tales, to his younger children, during *Seudah Shlishis*. He came across an episode related by the *Vorkover*, *Horav Yitzchak, zl*. The *Rebbe* suffered greatly from his wife, who went out of her way to make his life miserable. He suffered in silence. When he saw, however, that he was not the only one who was on the receiving end of his wife's abuse (apparently, the servants were also being traumatized), he reacted. He traveled to his *Rebbe*, the holy **Horav David zl, m'Lelov**, and poured out his painful story. The *Rebbe* listened carefully, then said, "What do you think? Why do you not determine on your own the correct response to this problem?"

The *Vorkovar* was in a quandary. Apparently, his *Rebbe* felt that he should arrive at the correct understanding of what was transpiring in his life – on his own. After a while, he came across a commentary which cited the **Baal Shem Tov**: "One who causes a spiritual blemish in the

dimension of action will suffer in his material assets of animals and slaves. One who causes a taint in the dimension of speech will suffer from his wife or other people who will make his life miserable. One who causes a flaw in the dimension of thought will undergo suffering as a result of his children. If one succeeds in correcting the flaws in these three areas: action, speech and thought – everything will transform into good.” The *Vorkover* now understood what his *Rebbe* meant when he said that it was dependent upon him. He had erred in his service to Hashem. As a result, he was undergoing this form of penance.

This is what is meant by the *pasuk* cited at the beginning of this thesis: “If a person will sin: if he accepted a demand for an oath.” If a man sins – he will hear *kol alah*, which may loosely be translated as, “The sounds of cursing/imprecation” from his wife. The *Vorkover* took the hint. The holy *Vorkover* was not a sinner, but, relative to his exalted spiritual level, he was being called to task.

Getting back to our educator and his challenging son. He now realized that he – the father – was at fault. His son was not the symptom of a disjointed relationship between father and son. No. It had nothing to do with that. It was Hashem’s message to the father that something was lacking in his personal behavior. If he would clear it up, his son would be fine. Thus, the father’s distancing his son from him was counterproductive. It would produce negative results and hardly serve as a solution to the problem. The father’s relationship *vis-à-vis* his son changed drastically. He pulled him as close as possible – without stifling him. Over a period of time, it worked, as the boy realized that he was loved, he had a place at home, at school, and within the Jewish community.

Interestingly, when the boy saw that his family and the Jewish community still accepted him, when he realized that he was not a pariah, he slowly began to gravitate back. At first, it was a return to his old social relationships. Then, his return became more profound; he began observing Torah and *mitzvos* – once again. The father realized that the only way to deal with a child that has turned away is with an overabundance of love and understanding, never giving up hope and always keeping the “light on” for him or her to find the way back.