

The sons of Korach did not die. (26:11)

Chazal teach that *Bra mizaki abba*; “A son (children) brings merit to his father (forebears).” If so, why did the *teshuvah*, repentance, committed by Korach’s sons not serve as a merit to save him from spiritual infamy? *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, offers a powerful insight. The idea that a son’s *mitzvos*, *z’chusim*, merits, can somehow mitigate a father’s punishment applies only as long as the father has not become deficient in the principles/foundations of *emunah*, faith. A *kofer*, apostate, heretic, who has denied the existence of his Father in Heaven, who has repudiated Hashem, Our Father, Our King, cannot be availed the merits generated by his son’s good deeds. It is *middah k’neged middah*, measure for measure. He severed his affiliation with his Father in Heaven; likewise, his son’s merits cannot be considered on his behalf. If one has reneged his Father, why should he benefit from the merits that come with fatherhood? Korach denied Hashem. As such, he broke with the Heavenly Family. His payback is a lacuna in his own father/son relationship and the resultant benefits.

We can extrapolate from the words of the *Mashgiach* that one who as severed his relationship with his Father in Heaven can expect no less from his physical son. While the physical relationship may exist, the spiritual benefits follow one’s spiritual relationship. What about a father who has abandoned his children, who has terminated his father/son relationship? Will he be protected by his son’s merits? I would assume that the father who does not act like a father to his son should be no different than the father who has reneged against his Father. It is a reciprocal relationship. One receives the benefits when he values the relationship. No relationship – no benefits.

If the above would be true, the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av v’eim*, honoring one’s father and mother, would not apply concerning an abusive or derelict parent. Yet, it does. This means that it is not about one’s feelings, if one loves or not, if his father/mother treats him appropriately. It is about honor, even when a person does not deserve that honor. We honor flawed people. Why should our parent be any different than some fellow on the street whom we, as Jews, are supposed to treat with respect? Hashem commands us to overlook the abuse, ignore the dereliction of duty, turn our cheek concerning the lack of reciprocity and, instead, show love rather than antagonism. The “worst” that will happen is that one’s children who are watching will become better children – better people.

I could go on writing, but that is not the focus of this *dvar Torah*. I think the best summation would be: parents are also people. Some are more perfect than others. Some have much to carry on their shoulders. Some are themselves the products of troubled childhoods, dysfunctional families. We are not here to judge, and perhaps not even to love. The Torah commands us to “honor.” That is our obligation. The rest is up to us.