

Cham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. (9:22)

Noach's other two sons, Shem and Yafes, remained outside the tent out of respect for their father. They had no desire to take part in their father's degradation. Not so Cham, who boldly entered the tent and emerged later to relate the scene that he had witnessed. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* comments on the depravity of Cham. He himself was a father who should have set an example for his own children. He should have felt different about debasing his father, knowing fully well the impression this would leave on his own children. No, he took pleasure in observing and relating his father's abuse. This was Cham, a man who neither cared for his father nor was concerned about the impact his abuse would have upon his own children.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, remarks that by emphasizing the words, "*avi Canaan*," "the father of Canaan," the *Torah* focuses on the degenerate population of Canaan and the reason for their perversion. The source of their corruption was their ancestor, Cham. *Klal Yisrael* was involved with two nations, both descendants of Cham: Egypt and Canaan. In Egypt, *Klal Yisrael* were exposed to social decadence. Canaan was a nation replete with moral decay. *Klal Yisrael* witnessed the downfall of both these nations. The *Torah* alludes to the genesis of their depravity - the relationship between Cham and his father. The breakdown of the ancestral home, reflected in the lack of respect of a son for his father, was manifest in the total social and moral decay of all descendants.

Our world is built upon the relationship between child and parent. When children find something of value to respect in their parents, such as their moral rectitude, their spiritual being, their kindness and goodwill, they develop in a healthy manner. When all they can venerate is the physical aspect of their parents, when they no longer feel a sense of decency in respecting their parents, then the relationship has been terminated. They receive no legacy from the past to pass on to the future. They have nothing to transmit but stories of moral decay. This is what *Klal Yisrael* saw when they came to Canaan. They were told, "Do you know why this nation fell to such a nadir of depravity?" It all began with their grandfather, Cham, who committed the first act of disrespect. It fermented into a way of life. These are the consequences of a single immoral act.