

Parshat Bereishit
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Is it my imagination or does it seem harder to be a parent these days than it used to be? I recently read a book titled: "The Price of Privilege – How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are creating a generation of disconnected and unhappy kids". A recent article on teen depression and teen suicide informed us that this was once thought to be an adult only disease but researchers now inform us that it is found significantly amongst teens, and parents are not doing a very good job of identifying and helping their children.

When I grew up I do not remember my parents helping me with my homework. I sat at the kitchen table and worked things out myself. And tutors... - I never had one and I don't remember any of my friends having one, yet today these things are pretty much *de regur* for most kids. Today's parents see themselves as "advocates" for their children. My parents never had this role. If they advocated anything it was a good swift kick in the butt if I didn't straighten up and stop giving Mrs. Kessler such a hard time in 7th period.

So with all of these changes in parenting going on, I thought it was worth a few minutes of our time this morning to talk about the birth of the world's first child, and the mistakes of the world's first parents. Yes, fortunately for us these issues have been preserved in our Torah reading for this Shabbat morning, in *Parshat Bereishit*, which deals with everything from the creation of the universe, to the creation of the first man and woman, to the creation of the first child - and it is this last fact that I wish to focus on today. With all the challenges to parenting that confront our generation; if the Bible has anything to offer on this subject, we are certainly interested.

The Bible states, at the beginning of Chapter 4 of this weeks *parasha*, *v'haadam yada et chava* "Now, the man knew his wife, Eve and she conceived and bore Cain, in Hebrew, *Kayin* and she said, *knaiti ish et adonai* - now this last phrase, Eve's first recorded words upon the occasion of the birth of the world's first child are not only a source of significant interest, but of considerable controversy as well. Commentators disagree exactly as to how to translate them, or understand them. The root verb of both the child's name and the first word in Eve's response is *kof, nun, hey* - *Koneh* - and it means to acquire, to possess, to create. A *kinyan* - in Hebrew is something that you own. *Koneh shamayim v'aaretzi* - which appeared earlier in our reading - is understood to mean that God possesses heaven and earth - it is His! So here too, *kaniti ish* - Eve's first words seem to mean - "I have acquired a child, or I possess a child, or I have created a child. Recite this with a certain sense of wow! - And it appears to be an understandable reaction to the birth of the first child in human history. Now the *et Hashem* - is an interesting addition - Remember, Eve says: *knaiti ish et adonai* - and here it probably means - with the help of God - "I have created a child with the help of God" - so here we have the first documented birth in world history - and even back then the father didn't get much respect - God gets the rest of the credit. But some commentators have understood this *et hashem* - differently -to mean not "with the help of God" - but rather "like God". A modern Jewish commentator, Cassuto understands it this way. As if Eve was saying - "I am now creator like God. God created the first man and now I, Eve, made the second." And following this interpretation, we now understand why she named him *Kayin* - which comes from the root

kof, nun, hey - Koneh - meaning my possession.

Now I suspect that all of us can understand the feelings of the first mother who gave the first child such a name. Eve had gone through nine long months of struggle, fear and expectation. Remember there was no one who had done this before her - no one to tell her that the pains, the discomfort, the morning sickness, were... normal. Then begins the delivery - can you imagine if you didn't know that was normal? And finally, when it is all over, and she is left with a beautiful baby in her arms - well it is not hard for anyone who has had the joy of parenting - to understand the sense of joy and achievement that Eve must have felt as she cried out, "I have created a child!" She was so attached to this infant that was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh that she said, *kaniti ish* - I possess a child! She felt so proud and so powerful at this awesome experience of giving birth, that she said, I too am a creator - I am like God. As an aside, the Bible does not record the first husband's response to the first mother's statement, but I can't imagine he was all that pleased with her sense of what had just happened.

Especially when we see what happened next. Eve was setting herself up for one major disappointment. And in so doing she would not be the last human parent to have unusually high expectations upon the birth of their child. But she was doomed to disappointment and the name that she gave her child turned out to be a cruel misnomer. There is a bitter irony that is not lost on anyone - the child that she thought that she possessed, grew up to have a character and a spirit that was very different from her own. He grew up to be a criminal. He committed the world's first crime when he killed his brother. He lived out his years as an outlaw and a fugitive and she never saw him again after he fled the scene of his crime. This child, whom she triumphantly called, "my possession" ended up being lost to her completely. And each year, as we do now, we read this story the very first Shabbat of the New Year with a sense of irony and sympathy - as we know how things are going to turn out even as Eve does not yet know. We know, sadly, that she should not have called him *kayin* - because as the rabbis will later set forward in a formal legal principle: *ayn kinyan bivanim* - there is no such thing as possession with children. You can buy property and it's yours. You can make something, create something, and it belongs to you. But when you give birth to a child, he is not and she cannot be your possession - period. You cannot possess a life - it is like trying to grab on to a fistful of sand - there is nothing to hold onto. It's there when you grab it, but when you open your fist it is gone and you realize you never really had it in the first place.

The first mother in human history had to learn this in a tragic way, and every other mother, and every other father, ever since, has had to learn it in other ways, not tragic, not necessarily painful, but the lesson must be learned. Because all of us have to learn that our children are not our possessions, they are not given to us to possess, they are granted to us by God, in trust, to raise; and it is part of *His* plan and part of *their* nature for them to grow up and to grow away from us as time goes on. It has always been thus, and it must always be thus. And in this very basic sense, being a parent is no different in 2013 than it was for Adam and Eve. It is the function of the parents to help rear their offspring so that they can take intelligent charge of their own lives, and to develop into independent, self-reliant worthy people, choosing worthy and meaningful values if they are to fulfill their destinies as human beings. And this is a process that begins with the very first day of life. And it accelerates when your child comes home from school and you ask, "What did you do today?" and they reply, "Nothing!" That

nothing is a most significant remark. It is an announcement that there are some aspects of the child's life that are now private, separate and distinct. And it increases during the teen years when the parents ask, "What are you thinking about..." and the child does not answer. And it continues as your child chooses a vocation or a mate and it is a process that continues all the days of the child's life.

What I am suggesting to you is that today's torah reading contains one of life's most important parenting lessons. It helps us distinguish between the mature parent and the immature one. The mature parent understands that it is his or her task to help the child become an independent, healthy human being. And if you succeed in doing this that is your reward. A mature parent requires no more, and desires no more reward than this, the knowledge that he/she has helped his/her child to become a *mentsch*.

And the immature parent is the one who thinks that in addition to this, he/she deserves gratitude, affection, and the right of ownership and possession of the child they brought into the world. The immature parent is the one who says: "After all I did for him, after I sacrificed my life for her, after I sat up nights with him, after I ordered my existence around her - and now he does this! Or, "now she wants to leave me?!" Or, "now he does not pay me back with love and gratitude for all that I have done for him?!" Or "Now he cares more about her than he does about me - after all have done for him?!"

And if these reactions sound a bit silly in the context of my remarks this morning, let me assure you, I hear them all the time - from serious people - and I have to find a way to tell them that I believe, the Torah believes, that they are making a mistake. The torah teaches us this morning that it is a mistake to think that it is possible to say, *kaniti ish* - "I possess a child." And as a result, the immature parent is doomed to disappointment, for no child can ever belong permanently to his parents, and no parent who demands love or loyalty and says, "After all I did for you..." can ever get enough love to satisfy.

And so I share with you on this *Shabbat Bereishit*, a lesson that can be learned from the story of the birth of the world's first child and from the mistake of the world's first mother. Our goal should be to develop children who will be able to lead creative and fulfilling lives; who will be able to express their individuality, their uniqueness, and who will, in the course of time, be able to extend love and guidance to their children.

The Talmud says this, in a very simple, meaningful statement. The Talmud states, "the love of parents is for children, and the love of children is for their children." For the world is so made that each child has his own life to lead, each newborn child has her own soul and task and spirit, and no one, not even a parent, is able to say, *kaniti ish* - I own this child. If we learn this lesson from the experience of Eve, maybe the roller coaster ride we are on won't seem so frightening and maybe we will do what parents have always been called upon to do - to help our children grow up, grow out, and ultimately to grow gracefully away so that they can become, in turn, upright people, self-sustaining adults, and themselves wise parents. So may it be. Amen