



# A Love Unbound by Logic

## Q & A

*I am an elderly widowed Holocaust survivor who is not in good health. My son, who is over 50 years old, is alienated from me and gives me the silent treatment. He claims to be religious, but when numerous Rabbanim tried speaking to him, he gave them a deaf ear. I feel that he wants to get his inheritance while I am still alive.*

*I realize that I cannot change him but wonder what perspective I should have as a mother who has long struggled with his conduct, both as a child and an adult. Any input would be greatly appreciated. Please withhold my name.*

This anguished letter – which included additional details that were removed to protect the anonymity of the questioner – was painful to read. Though it is impossible to pass judgment in any dispute without verifying the details and speaking to all sides, the scenario described reflects a frightening reality: The affliction known as “parental alienation” is real and devastating.

My heart breaks for the plight of the mother, as well as all the other parents who find themselves in a similar situation. It hurts even more for the son and all those like him. While we have no inkling of the greatness of the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av va'eim*, it is clear from *Chazal* that properly giving honor to and caring for our parents is a ticket to enormous spiritual heights and an extremely lofty place in *Gan Eden*. These children are spiritually self-destructing and they subconsciously, if not consciously, live with enormous feelings of guilt over their behavior.

At the same time, it is said that a Jewish father or mother can be angry at a child but can never stop loving him or her.

When Avraham Avinu threw Yishmael out of his house, after being told to do so by Hashem, he gave

his son bread and water, but not gold and silver – because he “hated him” over his evil behavior (*Midrash Rabbah, Shemos 1:1*).

When the *Ribbono shel Olam* instructed Avraham Avinu to bring his son as an offering, he responded, “I have two sons.” When Hashem replied, “Your only one,” Avraham Avinu answered that each of his sons was an only son of his mother.

“Whom you love,” Hashem told him.

“I love both of them,” Avraham Avinu replied. In other words, he loved Yishmael just as much as he loved Yitzchak!

How do we reconcile these two teachings of *Chazal*?

In *Sichos Mussar*, Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz, *zt”l*, explains that for a lesser mortal, someone who has personal desires and *negios*, hating and loving are an inherent contradiction. Avraham Avinu had no personal *negios*; his entire essence was subjugated to the *retzon Hashem*. He was able to hate Yishmael for his conduct, while loving him for being his son.

As I reread the letter from this mother, a most tragic episode in *Tanach* came to mind.

Avshalom had done the unthinkable: He staged a rebellion against his own father, Dovid Hamelech, and forced him to flee for his life, barefoot.

Yet when Dovid Hamelech heard that the rebellion had been crushed and Avshalom killed in battle, he was heartbroken. Trembling and weeping, he declared, “My son Avshalom, my son, my son Avshalom, would [that] I have died in your stead. Avshalom, my son, my son” (*Shmuel II 19:1*).

*Chazal* (*Sotah 10b*) teach us that with the eightfold mention of “my son” in this *passuk*, Dovid Hamelech extricated him from seven levels of *Gehinnom* and brought him to *Gan Eden*!

It is told that Harav Chaim Shmuelevitz went to Yad Avshalom to beseech mercy for *Klal Yisrael*. For the incredible love that Dovid exhibited to a son who had so grievously hurt him – and even sought to kill him

— continues to arouse mercy from our Father in *Shamayim* toward His sons, even when they are not at their best conduct...

Similarly, my wife's grandfather, the Chernobyler Rav, Harav Chaim Twersky, *zt"l*, would often share the following story:

It was in the middle of *shalosh seudos*, the high point of Shabbos. The holy Rebbe, Reb Aharon of Chernobyl, was sitting at *tisch*, all eyes upon him. The Chassidim were all well aware that it was possible to learn an important lesson from their Rebbe's every action. Suddenly, from the Rebbe's private residence, which was adjacent to the large room where the *tisch* was taking place, came the cries of a small infant. To the astonishment of his Chassidim, the Rebbe rose from his seat and quickly rushed to the crib in order to calm the baby.

The Chassidim were baffled. "Rebbe," they inquired, "there was no shortage of individuals available to take care of the infant. The baby's mother was sitting not far from the crib, as were numerous other family members. Why did the Rebbe interrupt the *tisch* to take care of the baby?"

The Rebbe's response was as striking as it was powerful. "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* watches the way we treat our children and then treats us in the same manner..."

This doesn't mean that a parent has to accept a child's misconduct, or be oblivious to a lack of *derech erez* or *kibbud horim*. The letter writer has every right to feel deeply hurt. In some circumstances, an open heart-to-heart talk is a feasible option. In many other situations, refraining from expressing one's feelings is a wiser and more productive route.

Never underestimate the power of the *tefillos* of a mother. Continue to *daven* every day that he should mend his ways, and make it clear to him that the door is always open for a no-strings-attached reconciliation. And make sure to tell the *Ribono shel Olam*, "Despite all that I have endured, I still love my son dearly. In that merit, I plead that You reveal, in a way that we can all see and comprehend, Your love for Your children, even when we are wayward..."

Rabbi Heschel is a son of the Kopyczynitzer Rebbe, Harav Moshe Mordechai, *zy"o*. A writer and public speaker on inspirational topics, he is a longtime *chizuk* columnist for *Iryon*.

Questions can be submitted via email to [aheschel@hamodia.com](mailto:aheschel@hamodia.com) or by calling 718.853.9094 ext. 254 and leaving a voicemail.

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