

Perfecting Ourselves on Our Paths of Life

By Jim Myers

In the Jewish world of Jesus, a person's entire life prepared them for the time they would become a parent. The fate of the nation depended on parents mentoring and teaching their children about the path God. Jesus hinted at that path in Matthew 5:48.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Did he think his followers could become perfect like God is perfect? Actually he did not say that, but as we have seen a number of times in the past, his original message got lost as his Hebrew words were translated into Greek, Latin and then into English. He was hinting at Psalm 101:2. Below is a common English translation:

*I will behave wisely in a perfect way.
Oh, when will You come to me?
I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.*

Those are the words of King David, but it became the standard for his subjects to follow. The way to perfection starts with the improvement of one's deeds. They should be performed with innocence and faith, and they should be motivated solely by the desire to please God. In time, a person's external actions influence his internal thoughts and attitudes, and the Holy Spirit of the perfect God will settle in his or her heart. Then his mind is illuminated by Divine light.¹ Now let's reconstruct what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:48.

*Be perfecting yourself as you walk on your path,
even as your Father's way in Heaven is perfect.*

It is through a person's external actions of doing what God taught that his or her internal thoughts and attitudes change, and the Holy Spirit settles in his or her heart. As time passes the path of the individual moves closer and closer to the path of God. Jesus said the same thing in different words in Matthew 6:10:

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This brings us back to parenting. For more than two thousand years, Jewish parents have taught their children the words recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-7a:

*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God. The Lord is one!
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.
These words, which I command you today,
shall be in your heart.
You shall teach them diligently to your children*

Before parents can teach their children, they must have the words in their hearts. Let me repeat what I said above:

A person's external actions influence his internal thoughts and attitudes, and the Holy Spirit of the perfect God will settle in his or her heart.

A child's parents had been perfecting themselves from the time their parents taught them! That is what prepares them to do what Deuteronomy 6:7b-9 commands:

***You shall talk of them** when you sit in your house,
when you walk by the way, when you lie down,
and when you rise up.*

***You shall bind them** as a sign on your hand,
and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*

***You shall write them** on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Newborns are met by parents who belong to a nation of people who are talking about the same words, binding the same words to bodies, and writing the same words on their houses and gates. *Therefore, as children mature, they are immersed in cultures of shared values and beliefs that determine the paths they will walk on in life.*

Today, science has discovered and tells us the same thing:

*Who you are emerges from everything you've interacted with:
your environment, all of your experiences, your friends,
your enemies, your culture, your belief system, your era — all of it.*²

We have the advantage of being aware of those facts and the ability to make choices about who and what we and our children interact with.

¹ *Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*; Commentary by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer; © 1997 Mesorah Publications, Ltd., Brooklyn NY; p. 1220.

² *Livewired: The Inside Story of the Ever-Changing Brain* by David Eagleman © 2020, Pantheon Books, New York, NY; p. 245.