

God Depends On Parents!

“Tomorrow’s world is born in what we teach our children today. The break down or the healing of a society begins with the natural order of parents and children – if the “order” of parents breakdown – the whole society will become chaos.” Those are the words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.¹ Why did he say them? The answer is he was a great scholar of Judaism, history and science. He understood how important parenting is from the Jewish culture and Hebrew Bible, from the events of history and from science about the development of humans physically and psychologically.

Today I will discuss what the Hebrew Scriptures say about parenting. This is how important parenting is -- *God placed the fate of the Jewish people in the hands of the parents.* Let’s begin with the definition of parent in the ancient world of the Jewish Scriptures.

One becomes a parent through the act of creating a new life, thereby one assumes the divine obligation for caring for it as God commands.

The newborn plays no role in being created or in whose hands it will experience life for many years. In the Jewish culture guarding, protecting and caring for children are the highest priorities for all members of the society.

For more than 2,500 years the ancestors of the Jewish people have read, prayed and recited the words recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Let’s begin by reading the most well-known words in the Jewish culture. They are found in verse 4. Remember, Hebrew is read from right to left. The first word “*shema*,” and it means “*hear and pay close attention to what follows.*”

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד!

Sh’ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad!

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One!

The *Shema* is one of only two prayers that are specifically commanded in Torah. *It is the oldest fixed daily prayer in Judaism, recited morning and night since ancient times.*² It is also the central element in the *Jewish deathbed confessional prayer* called the *Viddui*, which ends with the word *Echad* (*one*). “*Echad*” is to be the last word uttered “*with the last breath.*”³ Now let’s read the next line (Deuteronomy 6:5):

*You shall love the Lord **your** God with all **your** heart, with all **your** soul, and with all **your** strength.*

This is a commandment to every individual of the People of Israel – “*You shall love Yahweh your God.*” This sounds very strange to American, because “*love*” has a wide range of meanings -- “*all of them linked to what one feels.*”

● *At one end of the American scale is “an intense feeling of deep affection for a specific person.”*

- At the other end of the scale are “feelings linked to things people like” – ice cream, movies, new purchases, a Facebook post, etc.

In Hebrew, “**love is an action**, not a **feeling**. It would be more culturally accurate to translate the commandment this way:

*You shall **do loving acts** for the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

Maybe a better translation for Americans is this:

*Love the Lord your God with
everything you are and everything you have!*

“Love with all your heart” has been interpreted in many ways in the history of the Jewish culture, but the one below seems to express the ancient meaning.

*It's so much easier to love God when things are good. If we are healthy and prospering, we can praise God without thinking too much about it. But when our lives take difficult and unexpected twists, when hope seems to fade and our frustrations mount, we also need to find a way to express that love. This particular interpretation took on great meaning for many Jews after the Holocaust. How could we find the strength to love God when millions of fellow Jews were murdered? The answer many gave was another question. Seeing how much horror human beings can inflict on one another, how can we not turn to God? **It is in the most difficult times that the love of God can help us realize we are more than biological animals.** We are human beings created in God's image.⁴*

Now let's read the next line (Deuteronomy 6:6):

These words, which I command you today, shall be in your heart.

The first loving act is “**keep these words in your heart.**” This is **a continual process**, not a ritual or a one-time act.

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¹ *Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks © 2015; Schocken Books, New York, NY; p. 26, 36.

² <https://www.jewfaq.org/shemaref.htm>

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/viddui-the-deathbed-confession/>

⁴ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/veahavta-and-you-shall-love/>