

The Purpose of Grandparenthood (Mishpatim)

Everyone needs to have access both to grandparents and grandchildren in order to be a full human being. -Margaret Mead

The nation of Israel has received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. The Bible starts by enumerating a long list of additional commandments. Then God gives what amounts to a pep talk to the nation of Israel, how He will send his angel ahead of them and destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, to make way for the incoming masses of Israelites.

Amid descriptions of enemy destruction and land conquest, God states:

“You shall worship God, your God, and He shall bless your bread and your water, and I shall remove illness from your midst. There shall be no woman who loses her young or is infertile in your land; I shall fill the number of your days.” (Exodus 23:25-26)

Instead of paraphrasing or interpreting Rabbi Ovadia Sforino (1475-1549) as usual, I’ll just quote him, as his wording is so intriguing (translation courtesy of Artscroll English Sforino translated by Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz – highly recommended):

“The number of your days I will fulfill: You will live to the (full) measure of oil which is in your lamp of God (the soul of man), i.e., the vitality (or natural force) rooted (in man) from birth. The reverse of this mostly occurs when man dies from (various) illnesses before his basic vitality has ceased. This occurs due to wrong choices (made in life) or due to fate (literally, ‘the order of the planets’) and the elements (literally, ‘foundations’). Now when a man’s numbers of days are fulfilled, he will in most cases see children born to his children and he will be able to teach them, as it says: “Make them known to your children and your children’s children” (Deuteronomy 4:9). (In this fashion) the affairs of (new) generations will be remedied in the lifetime of their elders, as we are told happened with Levi, Kehath and Amram (the ancestors of Moses).”

Sforino then directs us to earlier comments about the great-grandfather, grandfather and father of Moses, who all led exceedingly long lives.

“The longevity of these men enabled them to influence their grandsons as well as their sons. The choice fruit of these spiritual plantings were Moses and Aaron. They are the end result of the many years of education and guidance contributed by Levi, Kehath and Amram, and they are worthy to be chosen as leaders and spokesmen.”

May grandparents have the continuing opportunity to teach and guide their grandchildren, and may parents be able to facilitate these special opportunities.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memory of Nina Epstein z"l. May her family be comforted amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Apropos the topic, a grandson was born to us this week, son to Adina and Netanel Spitz.

Mazal Tov!

In a stark contrast, my son called me with the happy news during the streaming of Nina's funeral. Mourning and joy seemed to be mixed more often these days.