

Passing on Our Heritage

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On the Occasion of the *Bat Mitzvah* of Eliana Hambleton

Eliana, your *d'rash* dealing with the passing on of heritage was excellent. You began with David instructing his son Solomon on how to live a godly life and how to be a godly king of Israel. The most important thing that David taught Solomon is found in 1 Kings 2:3-4, in which David said:

"Observe the charge of ADONAI your God to go in his ways and keep his regulations, mitzvot, rulings and instructions in accordance with what is written in the Torah of Moshe; so that you will succeed in all you do and wherever you go. If you do, ADONAI will fulfill what he promised me when he said, 'If your children pay attention to how they live, conducting themselves before me honestly with all their heart and being, you will never lack a man on the throne of Isra'el.'"

You then went on to speak about the *Torah* portion you read to us, Genesis 49:8-14, in which Jacob blessed his sons before he died, and you expressed your own prayer and expectation that God will give to you and your future husband, children who will want to follow after both of your examples. You were right in saying that your children will want to follow you, because that is God's design – that children will want to be like their parents and do what they see their parents do. I believe that is the reason Proverbs 22:6 reads:

"Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it."

The examples of David and Jacob are different from each other. Jacob's blessings were prophetic in that they foretold the future for each of his children and grandchildren. David's charge to Solomon was instructive; but it was more than that, because Solomon understood his father, not only by his father's words, but also by what he knew about his father's life. David did some bad things in his life, but his example to Solomon was one of his having become a humble and repentant servant of the Lord. Had that not been so, it would not have mattered what David said, or how often he said it; Solomon would have received it as empty hypocritical preaching.

When Proverbs exhorts us to *"Train a child in the way he [should] go;"* it is not just addressing the words we use. It is exhorting us to exemplify what we teach so that by observing us, our children will have good role models to follow. Wasn't that what God Himself did by sending His son Yeshua to earth in the form of a natural man for us to observe and follow?

The Bible contains many passages telling us that we learn though following the example of those who teach us. Here are four Scriptures that describe Yeshua being an example to us:

Mark 1:17 *"Yeshua said to them, "Come, follow me, and I will make you into fishers for men!"*

Luke 6:40 "A talmid is not above his rabbi; but each one, when he is fully trained, will be like his rabbi."

1 Peter 2:21 "Indeed, this is what you were called to; because the Messiah too suffered, on your behalf, leaving an example so that you should follow in his steps."

1 John 2:5b-6 "This is how we are sure that we are united with him. A person who claims to be continuing in union with him ought to conduct his life the way he did."

And here are several Scriptures that describe Paul setting an example to those for whom he had pastoral responsibility:

First Paul to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 4:16b "Therefore I urge you to imitate me."

1 Corinthians 11:1 "..try to imitate me, even as I myself try to imitate the Messiah."

Next, Paul to the Philippians:

Philippians 3:17 "Brothers, join in imitating me, and pay attention to those who live according to the pattern we have set for you."

Philippians 4:9a "Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and seen me doing;"

Next, Paul to Timothy:

1 Timothy 4:12b ".. on the contrary, set the believers an example in your speech, behavior, love, trust and purity."

Next, Paul to Titus:

Titus 2:7a ".. in everything set them an example yourself by doing what is good."

And finally, Peter to believers in the diaspora:

1 Peter 5:2-3 ".. shepherd the flock of God that is in your care, exercising oversight not out of constraint, but willingly, as God wants; and not out of a desire for dishonest gain, but with enthusiasm; also not as machers domineering over those in your care, but as people who become examples to the flock."

With so much biblical evidence, one would think that, among believers, the importance of our teaching our children through setting an example would be self-evident, and that there would have been no reason for Eliana to give her *d'rash*, or for me to give this message. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and I will tell you why. It is because many of us who became believers were

not believers in our earlier lives, and would never have considered giving a *Bat* or *Bar Mitzvah d'rash* of the kind we heard today. Eliana has not even entered high school, yet she is looking ahead to when she will have children (twelve I think she wants), and is already planning for how she and her husband will be an example to them. That kind of forward thinking will surely influence who she marries, and it will bode well for the success of her future family.

When I became a *Bar Mitzvah*, marriage, and children, and God were the furthest things from my mind, as I'm sure they were for many of you. Then later on, for those of you who were the way I was when I got married, being godly examples for our children was not on our radar screens and, when we did become believers (many of us late in life), our focus was mostly on God's salvation, and not on our responsibility to convey covenantal biblical values to our children. Also, many of us were slow to become disciples and, although we instructed our children in what we believed was right, our children often saw behind our rhetoric, into our own lives that were not in right biblical order. The result was that many of our children only partially absorbed what we had to say, and were therefore left vulnerable to worldly influences.

Now why am I making such a point of this? There are several reasons. First, some of you who are listening to this message are of an age to be contemplating having children, or are already in the midst of raising them. For you, the timing of this message is perfect because you will have the opportunity to have a maximum of influence. Others of you are older, as I am, and although you are praying for your children, you are thinking that you have missed your opportunity. Well, let me tell you that with God it is never too late, and despite our age and our children's age, our children will always be looking at their moms' and dads' lives, and be affected by them one way or another. It is never too late for us to repent in areas where we need to repent and, believe me, when we do, our children, no matter how old they are or we are – they will be watching. For us oldies especially, what we are seen doing speaks much louder than what we are heard saying.

Now some of you young men and women who are still in your teens, and are hearing this message, may be thinking: "My future marriage and having children are so far off – isn't this premature for me to be considering?" No it isn't! And for you, I cannot overemphasize the importance of taking Eliana's *Bat Mitzvah d'rash* to heart because these, your teen years, are the ideal time of your life to prepare for the kind of influence you are going to have on your future family and on others. In fact, you may have already discovered that your young age enables you to be influential right now. Children look up to you and want to follow your example. And, you may not realize it, but adults who need to improve in areas of their lives and see that you, as young as you are, already "have it together" – those adults cannot help but think: "If that youngster can do it, so can I."

So far, I have spoken only about passing on "personal" values to our children, and about the importance of our life-example in successfully doing it. The personal values to which I am referring are love, faith, morality, and biblical knowledge. But there is something else in God's plan that He wants us to pass on, and that is "covenant" or, more precisely, "covenant identity." If we are Jews who do not yet know Yeshua as our Messiah, our covenant identity through Abraham has yet to be fulfilled. If we are Gentiles and do not yet know Yeshua, our covenant identity has yet to be established. If we are believers in Yeshua (whether we are Jews or Gentiles), each of us has a covenant identity attained through our faith, along with related

covenant responsibilities that God wants us to pass on to our children. These responsibilities are (1) to proclaim the Good News of Yeshua to all; (2) to serve others as there is a need and as we are led by the Holy Spirit; and (3) to pass the covenant and its responsibilities down to our children.

If we are Jews, our Covenant history begins with Genesis 17:4-7:

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.

The next Jewish encounter with covenant takes us to the time of Moses, where God makes a follow-up covenant with the Children of Israel, to whom God refers as "a kingdom of priests:" We read this in Exodus 19:5-6:

" Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart.' These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el."

Then, we read in Jeremiah 31: 33-34 (Hebrew: 32-33) that God said He will make a New Covenant with the Jewish People because they breached the previous covenant – not the Abrahamic Covenant, but the one we call the Mosaic Covenant. And when the New Covenant came into existence through Yeshua, the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:1-2:

"Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.

And in Romans 11: 26b-27, he wrote:

"As the Tanakh says, "Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov and this will be my covenant with them,... when I take away their sins.""

Now those are the covenants that God made with the Jewish people directly, but remember that God intended for Israel to be a priestly nation to the nations of the world. So God extended His influence through the Jewish People to the Gentiles, by allowing them, through faith in Messiah, to be grafted into an "olive tree" symbolic of Israel, thereby becoming joint heirs (or family members) with their Messianic Jewish brother and sister believers. We read about this in Romans 11:17-25.

So let's now look at what the Bible has to say about this Gentile covenant identity that is acquired through faith, and let's look first at Ephesians 2:11-13 and 19-22:

"Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth- called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised- at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood." ... "So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord. Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!"

Now, let's look at 1 Peter 2:4-5 and 9-10 in which Peter speaks to the body of believers as a whole:

"As you come to him, the living stone, rejected by people but chosen by God and precious to him, you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be cohanim set apart for God to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to him through Yeshua the Messiah." ... "But you are a chosen people, the King's cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; before, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

I have read so many Scriptures to you that perhaps, by this time, you have lost track of what they have to do with the subject of this message, which is "Passing on Our Heritage" to our children. So, I will review. The first point I want to leave with you is that all Jews have a covenant identity through Abraham that they are born into and that is passed on generationally, but which is spiritually incomplete until they come to know Yeshua. The second point I want to leave with you is that all of us who are believers in Yeshua – Jews and Gentiles alike – have a common covenant identity and heritage in the Lord, through our faith, that God wants us to pass on to our children. It not only includes personal attributes such as love, faith, morality, and biblical knowledge, but it also includes the covenant identities and responsibilities themselves, which are (1) to proclaim the Good News of Yeshua to all; (2) to serve others as there is a need and as we are led by the Holy Spirit; and (3) to pass our covenant identity (including these responsibilities) down to our children as their heritage received from God through us. The final point I want to leave with you is that the surest way for us to pass on our God-given covenant heritage to our children, is for us to live it out ourselves, so that we are visible examples of godliness that our children can observe and follow.

Eliana, I'm not sure that I added much to what you already shared, but I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important subject. We at Ohev Yisrael pray God's blessings upon you and your family as you embark on your adventure of living, for a time, in a country that is known to be less than friendly to Israel. May the Lord preserve you and your family in safety, and return all of you to us in His perfect timing.

B'shem Yeshua.