

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah portion this week parshas Noach, tells of the shameful incident of Noach. Two of Noach's sons Shem and Yefes seek to minimize the shame of their father. Noach's third son Cham, however, takes advantage of his father's drunken state and violates him in the ugliest way. When Noach wakes up from his stupor to realize what Cham did, he curses Cham saying that he and his descendants are destined to be slaves. Noach then blesses Shem and Yefes for their honoring of him. Sufficed to say, that the Jewish nation descends from Shem - read Semitic.

We see from here the greatness of the mitzvah of honoring one's parents. Because, it is through one act of the mitzvah of honoring one's parents that generations were affected for better or worse. The following inspirational true story illustrates the special relationship which Jewish parents have with their children and the blessings which emanate from such relationships.

The middle-aged woman entered the dining room and let the sights and sounds wash over her. About thirty boys clustered around a long dining-room table, singing a slow, harmonious song. Some of them had their eyes squeezed shut, as if to block out anything but the heavenly sound they were creating together. They swayed to the tune, their young hearts clearly swept up in the moment. "

So this is a Shabbaton," the woman thought. "My Shmuel will love it." Her 10-year-old son, Shmuel, stood by her side, and indeed, his eyes were locked upon the scene in front of him. All he wanted was a place at the table.

After a few moments, the woman caught the eye of Rabbi Nissel, a Rabbi from Eretz Yisrael who had been invited specifically to help teach and inspire this group of NCSY boys.

The woman approached the rabbi with Shmuel at her side and said, "Rabbi, I would like to introduce you to my son, Shmuel. Please watch over him. He is a great boy who loves to learn, and this is the first time he has ever been to a Shabbaton."

Then, the mother turned and left the house. The Rabbi looked at his young charge, who did not seem at all uneasy about having been placed in this situation. "Well, Shmuel, there's a seat for you right here," he said. "I'm sorry you missed the Friday night davening and meal, but you'll be here for the rest of Shabbos, and I'm sure you'll have a great time."

Shmuel needed no convincing. He smiled a broad, utterly happy smile and joined in with the song the boys were then singing. When the others danced, he danced. When they davened, he davened. When they sat soaking up Rabbi Nissel's shiur, he sat among them, his eyes bright with interest.

"So this is Shabbos," Shmuel thought to himself. It was his new, most precious possession, and he knew he would never let go of it. Launched so powerfully into religious life, it wasn't long before Shmuel began his career as a yeshivah student. His was an odd situation — a child of non-religious parents who nonetheless wholeheartedly supported his Torah learning and nurtured his success in every way.

Rabbi Nissel played his part as well, keeping in touch with this special boy and encouraging his remarkable growth. The years passed and Shmuel made steady progress, never turning back to the non-religious life he had left behind. When he finished high school, he traveled to Eretz Yisrael to learn at a yeshivah there, once again finding inspiration and success. So impressed were the rebbeim by his dedication and enthusiasm that, at the age of 21, he was offered a fine shidduch with a young woman from Bnei Brak.

Once again, Shmuel's path in life proved to be smooth and pleasant; a short time later, the couple was engaged. A few days later, the elated chassan was walking down a Yerushalayim street when he encountered his friend and mentor Rabbi Nissel.

"Mazel tov, mazel tov!" the rabbi greeted him. "I heard the great news!" The two spoke for a few minutes, discussing Shmuel's current learning situation and his plans for the future. As Shmuel spoke, Rabbi Nissel observed his young friend as if he had never met him before. Standing there before him was a young man who was every inch the yeshivah bochur in his dress, his expressions, his conversation. No one could see anywhere a hint of the uninitiated 10-year-old who had been led by his mother to the Shabbos table so many years ago.

"Tell me something, Shmuel," Rabbi Nissel at last interrupted. "I've wanted to ask you this for many years. I'm looking at you and I see that you have grown into a fine bochur, but I've always wondered how it happened. I mean, you grew up in a home that was completely non-observant, and yet here you are today. Why did your mother even go along with all of this?"

"Rav Nissel, there is a story behind my being religious today, but now is not the time for me to discuss it," Shmuel answered. "But I would like you to come to my sheva berachos, and that is when I plan on telling everyone my story."

"B'ezras Hashem, I'll be there!" Rabbi Nissel responded. Two months later, he was indeed there, at Shmuel's sheva berachos, when the chassan rose to speak. With friends and family gathered together, he revealed his remarkable story.

"When my parents married, they were not religious people," he began. "They really didn't know much about Judaism. There was no Shabbos or Yom Tov or kashrus in their home. Only on Yom Kippur did they attend services. But they had a difficult challenge that finally opened my mother to the idea of praying. The problem was that after five years of marriage, they still had not been blessed with a child. Both of them wanted a family, and they were heartbroken when it seemed it would never happen. "My mother started going to shul on Shabbos, hoping that if she prayed more, Hashem would grant her a child.

One week, as she sat there in shul, the rabbi spoke about Chanah and Elkanah who, after many years, had not been able to have children. She heard how Chanah had prayed and prayed, all to no avail. And then, Chanah did something different. She not only prayed from the bottom of her heart, but Chanah vowed that if her prayer were answered with the birth of a son, she would dedicate his life to serving Hashem. Finally, Chanah was granted a son, Shmuel HaNavi.

"As my mother sat there absorbing this story, she realized that she had the same problem as Chanah. She began to cry, and then she vowed right then and there that if Hashem would grant her a child, she, like Chanah, would dedicate his life to serving Him.

"I was born that year, and I was named Shmuel. My mother wanted to fulfill her vow, and she felt that the way to do it was to raise me as a religious Jew. However, since my parents had no knowledge in this area, they never quite knew how to make it happen. Finally, when I was 10, my mother found out about the NCSY Shabbaton and brought me there the way Chanah had brought Shmuel to Eli the Kohen. She has encouraged me every step of the way, and baruch Hashem, my parents have also become religious over the years. Now, as I start a new phase of life, I pray only that I will be able to fulfill my mother's promise and live a life that is truly dedicated to serving Hashem." (p.212 Stories for the Jewish Heart II, R. Binyomin Pruzansky) **Good Shabbos Everyone.**