

“Letting Our Children Fail”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Why do we hear so little of Moses' sons in the Bible? One theory suggests that Moses left them in Midian during the time of the Exodus, fearing for their safety. As a result, they missed the opportunity to stand at Sinai. Not having received the Torah with Israel, they felt themselves inadequate to follow their father in leadership.

The message is clear: without slavery, no Sinai. In modern terms we might say to parents, you must let your children face hardship and even fail if you would have them succeed. Parents who constantly hover, never letting children feel the sting of failure, leave them ill-equipped to live in a world in which failure is constant. The ability to transcend failure marks a developed character.

Always spread a net beneath your child and he will never learn to fall. If she never learns to fall, then one day when you are not there to pick her up, she will not know how to raise herself. As Thomas Merton wisely wrote: “The truth many people never understand, until it is too late, is that the more you try to avoid suffering the more you suffer because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you in proportion to your fear of being hurt.”

Living in a privileged world, we begin to think that there must be no pain. This is foolish and shallow, and in the end betrays the goal it sets for itself. A life unaccustomed to dealing with pain is certain to be a painful life. A life of difficulties met with resolve and love is a life of meaning and beauty.

We should not abandon our children to pain, but neither should we always shield them from it.