

A young Jewish man who had made it big on Wall St. was in the habit of giving his dad expensive, unique Fathers Day gifts. One year it was a yacht. The year before it was an entire signed record collection of famed Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt. But this year he felt he had outdone himself: He purchased a rare talking bird that could speak five languages and sing "My Yiddishe Mama" while standing on one foot. The talented bird cost \$100,000, but the son felt it was worth every penny. This would be a Fathers Day gift his dad would never forget!

A week after Father's Day he called his father.
"Dad, how did you like the bird?"

His father responded, "What a bird! It was delicious!"

This Sunday is Father's Day. The fathers among us might receive nice gifts from our children -- maybe even a talking, singing bird. However, each of us, sons and daughters alike, have received many special gifts from our father.

The relationship of fathers to their children is highlighted in Parshas Korach.

Today's Torah reading lists the various gifts given to the Kohain. Among them we find the five shekalim (silver coins) that a father gives the Kohain for the redemption of his firstborn. At the ceremony of *Pidyon HaBen*, the redemption of the firstborn, the Kohain asks the father a curious question.

"*Mai ba'is t'fay?*" - "Which do you prefer? Would you rather keep the five shekalim or take the child?"

At first glance, this appears to be a ludicrous question.

-- No father would choose the money over his son.

-- The implication that the father has the option of leaving his son with the Kohain in exchange for keeping the money is contrary to halacha (Jewish law): The Torah *requires* a father to redeem his son.

-- The child can't become the property of the Kohain. If, theoretically, the father would refuse to redeem his child, the Kohain would have no claim to the child.

How are we to understand, then, the Kohain's question of: "Which do you prefer -- your money or your son?"

We'll return to answer this puzzling question. But before doing so let's focus on something we can all appreciate: Nothing can replace a father's love for his children.

When you think of your father, what images come to mind? Think about your father for a few moments. Remember him. If you want to be brave, close your eyes, and see what image comes to mind. Look for an image of your father -- an image as you know him, as you remember him, or for those of you who

didn't have a chance to know your father very well, as you imagine him being. Now....remember, and imagine you and your father interacting. What images come to mind?

Like you, on Father's Day my father, z"l, is very much on my mind.

I see him taking me, as a child of about 4 or 5, to Indian Boundary Park in Chicago. The park once had a small zoo that began with a single black bear. He'd take me there often, and we'd always stop to buy 'beer nuts' that my father would let me throw to the bear.

I'm about 6 or 7, and I see my father getting up early in the morning -- it's freezing outside, and there's snow on the ground. He's going to drive a delivery truck for a bakery, which is one of the jobs he had.

I'm 16 or 17 and I see my father at an anti Neo-Nazi rally outside the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. My father brought me along, and I see him and other Jewish men doing some things to make sure that the Neo-Nazis don't return.

I'm in my late 20's, and I see my father at my wedding in Israel.

I'm sure your images of your father are similar to those of mine. Our fathers were protective, nurturing, and inspirational.

Fathers have long been neglected in research and scientific studies in the areas of child and family psychology. But recent work is identifying numerous ways they affect the development of young children and teenagers.

-- Dr. Kathryn Kerns, a professor of psychological sciences at Kent State U. in Ohio, is one of a growing number of researchers creating new tests and techniques that have documented 'The Father Factor'; specifically, how fathers are invaluable in instilling confidence and encouraging their children.

-- In an article in *Scientific American* titled "*Do Fathers Matter? What Science is Telling Us about the Parent We've Overlooked*", studies show that when a nurturing father is present in the life of his children there are positive effects on the reproductive development of his daughters. Additionally, research shows the father's positive impact on the cultivation of empathy in both his daughters and sons.

-- In David Blankenhorn's book 'Fatherless America', the author suggests that there are really 'two Americas' -- not Blue vs. Red, Rich vs. Poor, White vs. Minority. Rather, an America with people who have a father, and an America with people who don't. Half of the children growing up today in America are doing so without the presence of a father. This idea echos the powerful observation made by Margaret Mead and others: The supreme test of any civilization is whether it can socialize men by teaching them to be fathers. Blankenhorn says that among the invaluable contributions of fathers, they are 'Sponsors': They transmit important values -- particularly, belief in G-d.

Martin Priest (real name: Emanuel Nureck), star of the *The Plot Against Harry*, counts his father as one of his life's great blessings. His father was a pattern maker in the garment industry. Said Priest, "When I used to say 'Pop, can I have \$10?' he'd give me 5. Once I said, 'Pop, I need 500 bucks.' Next day, on my bureau was \$500."

"So I said to him, 'Pop, I don't get it. I say give me 10, you give me 5. I say 500, it's on the bureau. Why?"

"Dad replied, 'Listen, if you need 10 or 5, that's for nonsense. If you need 500, you must be in trouble, and that's what a father is for?"

The importance of fathers is vastly underestimated and undervalued. What is a father for?

Fathers: Let me share with you from a Jewish perspective five crucial things your children need from you.

Zeides and grandfathers: What I'm about to say applies to you, as well!

Ladies: The following is for you to appreciate about your fathers and husbands, as well as a reminder of the ways in which we men need to be encouraged.

(with thanks to *Sara Debbie Gutfreund*)

1. **A role model.** Children look up to their fathers and yearn to be like them from their earliest years. Sons will watch how they work and speak and play sports. Daughters will often choose spouses who reflect their father's values. Every conversation and interaction that your child witnesses may become part of what they try to imitate. A father's connection and feeling towards Judaism create a foundation for his children's spiritual lives. Make sure your life embodies the traits and ideals that you want your children to reflect.
2. **A listening ear.** Children need their fathers to listen to them. When you stop what you are doing to give your child attention, he knows that you not only love him but are interested in his life. Fathers who can listen without immediately jumping in to problem solve create crucial space for their children's feelings. They teach their kids that it's okay to feel angry or sad or defeated, and that they won't be judged for their failures. The Torah tells us "Do not harden your heart or close your hand." (Deut. 15:7) Being open to others emotionally and listening to them is harder and often more important than giving anything else because it requires us to give of our own hearts.
3. **A coach.** Sometimes you need someone in your life to tell you when your shot is off. Or you're not trying hard enough in school. Or you're driving the wrong way down a one way street. Fathers can be amazing coaches. They can tell their kids the truth when they need to hear it and encourage them to keep reaching for their goals. There is no limit for a child whose father coaches him and believes in him every step of the way.
4. **A comforter.** The most comforting words a child can hear are: "It's going to be okay." Those words spoken from a father mean everything because Dad knows how to fix your bike. How to catch the huge spider in the kitchen. How to build a campfire and how to put it out. He knows when things are going to be okay and when they aren't. Fathers can give their children hope and courage and strength. Sometimes it only takes those five words: it's going to be okay.
5. **A source of wisdom.** Fathers can see what makes their children shine and what brings them down. They can help them choose the right friends, the right classes, the right spouses. And teaching a child Torah can help pave the way by bringing eternal wisdom and ideas into the picture. Learning together creates a strong, deep bond between fathers and children as they share and explore questions and answers about life itself.

To return to our question about the *Pidyon Haben*: Why does the Kohain say to the father, "What do you prefer, your money or your child?"

The Kohain is bringing to the attention of the young father the following unfortunate occurrence: Often, men go through life choosing their money over their children. We continually rationalize working late and other types of behavior which keep us away from our children or create a loss of opportunity to positively influence them.

"As you are about to embark upon the privileged journey of raising this child," the Kohain says, "What will be your first priority? Your child -- or anything else?"

The Torah challenges fathers to be best possible fathers that they can be.

In conclusion, we have seen that new research suggests what Judaism has always known: A father's love and acceptance is invaluable to the emotional, social, and spiritual development of his children.

So Dads: Don't ignore 'The Father Factor'

Dads: Life's not the breath you take, the breathing in and out
That gets you through the day, that's not what it's all about
You just might miss the point trying to win the race
Life's not the breaths you take but the moments that take your breath away.

What should take your breath away? Your children.

Dads: Remember the 'Father Factor': Be a role model. Be a listening ear. Be a coach. Be a comforter. Be a source of wisdom.

And have a wonderful Fathers Day.