



## GUESTLINES › Rabbi Ronald Greenwald

AS RELAYED TO HIS DAUGHTER, CHEVY LAPIN

Mishpacha

# Could This Be a Parent's Wish?

**J**ust recently, I sat around a breakfast table with three *chassidische* fathers who described their children as off the *derech*. And what they said to me was incomprehensible; it sent the chills up my spine. Even as I repeat their words, it takes tremendous emotional energy for me to process them again. "We know parents whose children have strayed from the path of Torah, and we've heard these parents say that they'd prefer to see their children dead rather than watch them transgress the mitzvos."

I was so disturbed by this report that I could not get their words out of my mind. Could it be true? I decided to see whether indeed there are other parents who feel this way.

So I made some phone calls. I contacted therapists in Brooklyn and in Lakewood who service both *chassidische* and *litvishe* families. They confirmed, to my distress, that this terrible mindset does indeed exist.

And the questions still haunt me.

Could a mother or a father really wish this? Is this what it means to be a responsible parent, to wish your child dead? Don't they worry about their children's Olam HaBa? How will they prepare their children to return to Hashem — by wishing them dead? And why? Because the neighbors are talking? Because the children embarrass them?

Can the pain be so great that this is the only solution?

I know that the pain these parents feel is indescribable. Imagine seeing your son's tzitzis lying on the bed, long after he has gone ... of wondering and worrying while sitting at your desk at work, in kollel ... did he wake up this morning? Will she go to school? The fear, the stomach-wrenching fear, at 3 a.m. when she is not home ... and the anger, the feeling of burning injustice ... and the mourning, the heart-stopping feeling of being completely immobile in the face of what your child's precious and pure *neshamah* has become.

Yes, the pain seems to feel like more than you can bear. It takes over your day, coloring all the joy and *nachas* that you may have, until your entire world shrinks to this one child's actions, erasing everyone and everything else.

It's a situation filled with loss. Because when a child

strays, the parents lose so many things: aspirations and expectations, of pride, of peace. And so in many ways, it feels akin to losing a child.

Yet the child still lives! The dreams may be lost, never to be fulfilled, the *nachas* expectations may have to be radically readjusted, yet the child ... the potential ... the greatness of his *neshamah* ... that is still alive! And if you prefer him to be dead, I can attest that this person, this thinking, feeling, angry or passive or depressed person — who is your child — knows of your unspoken wish.

Your attitude is a terrible injustice to your child, and a distortion of your role as a parent. You are sending dreadful, destructive messages to your children, and the results can be catastrophic. Keep in mind that there is more than one type of death. Even if the child won't actually take his life, he may very well kill the last vestige of emotion, pushing the potential for a restored relationship to a point beyond return.

What would it take to help you, dear parent, to accept the great disappointment and humiliation that comes along with a child who has strayed?

It would take honesty and great courage. It would take admitting to weaknesses that every human has, but that must be acknowledged in order for them to be overcome. It would involve taking responsibility for your reactions. For this, one would need to look inside oneself with brutal honesty. Yes, it would take strength and integrity to battle an evil voice that wishes death upon one's own flesh and blood.

Hashem, whose mitzvos and Torah are full of loving-kindness, Who waits generations for us to return to Him, Who sustains and showers us with blessings even when we stray, Who tells us, His children, how He wants us to act toward each other — surely that merciful One has compassion for your child.

Remember, your child's behavior is not about you. There is a bigger Player in the picture. In your fervor to ensure that your child complies with the dictates of Judaism, are you inspired by the One Who commanded your child to observe the mitzvos? Or has your all-consuming fear of society overtaken your awareness of the Creator?

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Rabbi Greenwald, a noted *mechanech*, founded Camp Sternberg in 1965, and has been its director ever since. He is the dean of B'nos Chaya High School in Brooklyn, and is world-famous for his involvement in high-level spy swaps, notably that of Natan Sharansky.