

Dear Chavraya,

I spoke with a friend this afternoon whose daughter's Bas Mitzvah is this Shabbos. At the end of the conversation, I wished her and her family much joy on this Shabbos and continuing *nachas*. Spoken most often with Yiddish or Ashkenazic pronunciation, the word derives from the Hebrew word *nachat*, meaning satisfaction, pleasure, contentment, or also quietude, tranquility, calm. We generally use the word as I did with my friend, as a blessing, a hope, a prayer that as parents, dotting relatives, or teachers we should derive pleasure from our children and students.

In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Yitro*, Yitro, Moses' father-in-law brings Moses wife and two sons and comes to visit his son-in law encamped with Israel in the desert. Yitro is a Midianite priest and must have felt some excitement at the thought of seeing his son-in-law the rabbi at work. Undoubtedly, he felt *nachas* as he went out in the morning after a big feast the night before. From morning until evening, the people brought their needs to Moses, a crowd always surrounding him. Yitro was able to look beyond his own *nachas*, though, and look critically at what he saw. He may understandably have delighted in seeing the importance of the younger leader to his people. More than that, however, he was concerned for Moses' wellbeing, and, we might hope, for that of his daughter and grandchildren. He tells Moses that what he is doing is not good, that both he and the people will become weary and be worn down. Yitro offers practical advice, suggesting a plan toward decentralized leadership, through which Moses will work with a team of leaders and not try to do it all alone. The true *nachas* now will be felt not only by Yitro, but by Moses himself, and the other leaders, even the whole community as they see the fruits of this plan manifest in a stronger and deeper community.

Of all the things to have difficulty with, that which we most want, *nachas fun kinder/pleasure from our children*, from a clearly identifiable place in my career as a rabbi, I have felt a moment's hesitation before wishing someone *nachas*, as I felt this afternoon when speaking with my friend. It comes from a painful memory of a very difficult funeral at which I officiated many years ago in Victoria, British Columbia. It was the funeral of a young woman who had committed suicide. She had grown up in both Canada and Israel. Her shattered parents had come from Israel to Victoria. They had already lost one daughter, of all things in this day, in childbirth. As we left the cemetery, the grief palpable, a well-meaning member of the community, himself a Holocaust survivor, said to the parents, "may you have *nachas* from your other children." I cringed, wanting to grab the words and strew them about the graves, sure that the young woman herself whom we had just

buried had also given her parent *nachas*. I will never forget the words of the bereaved mother, as she turned to the man who had meant to comfort. Not hurt or angered by the words, she shook her head so sadly and said, "*nachas*, all I want is for them to live."

It is for this reason that the word *nachas* tends to stick in my throat. Even when offered at a most fitting time, as in relation to a Bas Mitzvah, I cannot say the word *nachas* and not think of that tearful mother. With this year's reading of the portion that bears his name, I have come to see in Yitro's manner, however, a deeper dimension to what is generally understood by *nachas*. While we of course want to derive pleasure from our children and their accomplishments, true *nachas* should not ultimately be about the pleasure we derive from our children's lives, but about the pleasure that they derive from their own lives and accomplishments. That is where the two sets of meaning of the word *nachas* come together, satisfaction, pleasure, contentment, quietude, tranquility, calm. Most of all may our children find tranquility in the nature of their own lives. Perhaps, from time to time we will be able to offer carefully considered advice, as Yitro did, not for the sake of our own needs fulfilled through our children, but for the sake of their own fulfillment. As they live and become, at peace, content within themselves, that is *nachas*, theirs and ours.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor