

Etymology: The Jewish Uses of Paideia

Herodotus, the famous Greek historian of the 5th century b.c., asserted that “*memory is the reservoir of culture.*” The memory of a culture's elders must be transferred to the memory of their children if the culture is to be maintained into the next generation.

Parental responsibility must include the concept of never teaching wrongdoing to their children. Instead, they must cultivate their souls through instruction. In order to suppress the indigenous sinful nature, objectivity for learning must often be acquired by chastisement.

The parental objective is to cultivate the child's soul to the point that he can enter society with a capacity to function harmoniously with his fellow citizens while in fellowship with God. This is achieved by the rule of law, imposed initially by the parents, developed originally by God, and ultimately maintained by the child's volition. The child whose soul has been ordered by doctrinal principles is easily distinguished from one whose soul is disordered.

Culture, which is the expression of one's moral belief system, clearly distinguishes the educated man from the barbarian.

As the sheep is to the shepherd and the slave is to his master, so the child is to his instructor, the very first of which are his parents. In addition to the Greek use of the word, it is also instructive to understand how the Jews viewed the subject of educating children:

It was Yahwah Elohim who established the principles of culture which the Jewish parent was to pass along to his child on a daily basis.

We have noted in the past that human law is the written chronicle of a given culture's moral beliefs. Consequently, the Mosaic Law became the written chronicle of the moral beliefs to which the nation Israel was to subscribe.

God held parents personally accountable to submit to His mandates as well as the duty of cultivating them into the souls of their children.

God gave Israel its Law by means of the imperative moods of the Torah. From this chronicle of divine policy, He punished noncompliance, rewarded compliance, and by so doing led the positive to prosperity. Thus, the Jews came to understand the Law as “*a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*”

In the same way as God sought to guide Israel through the mandates of the Law, so human fathers are to guide their children by means of doctrine. It is only in this way that, for example in our generation, Judeo-Christian culture can be passed down to the next.

The Hebrew words which are constantly associated with the education of a child are from the same word group. They are both very familiar to us. First of all, the verb *yasar* and its derivative, *mûsar*. They carry with them the concepts of child rearing which incorporate:

Education including training which uses chastisement. Learning which involves the transfer of cultural knowledge.

Development in moral and spiritual thought in order to transform the child into a vessel of honor. Since the tendency is to follow the desires of the sinful nature, this training includes correction by the infliction of pain in order to instruct in truth which develops wisdom.

Instruction in the laws of divine establishment, also enforced by chastisement when necessary.

Underlying all educational efforts is the threat of pain and suffering for noncompliance. This is the subject of many of the Psalms. For example:

Psalm 39:11 - With reproofs [*yakach* - corrective discipline] you do chasten a man [*mûsar*] for iniquity.

Yakach is the word which carries the concept of education and discipline. *Mûsar* is the word for chastisement. Again, we see these two words used in tandem as in Proverbs 3:11 and Proverbs 3:12. *Elephaz* attests to the fact that true happiness is the fruit of divine chastisement.

Job 5:17 - Happy is the man whom God corrects [*yakach*], therefore do not despise the chastisement [*mûsar*] of the Almighty.

We may conclude that if the believer is able to achieve happiness as a result of divine chastisement, then such discipline must be executed from the motivation of unconditional love. Thus, the comparison is made between the discipline of a father to a son and from God to His children.

Deuteronomy 8:5 - Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you [*mûsar* - chastise] just as a man disciplines [*mûsar* - chastise] his son.