

## The One About Being Lost At Home

You may have already heard my little brother's sob story. He has been going around town telling everyone. But I need you to know that there are two sides to this story. You see, he's been telling everyone about how he was lost and now he is found. He makes it sound like the feel good story of the year. But he never mentions that he's the one at fault here. He lost himself on purpose. He's always been irresponsible. He has never followed the rules. He always thought he was too good for this town and for us, his family. He just knew that he could run off to a far away place and live a life of fame and fortune - without any regard for anyone else.

He probably didn't tell you this part of the story, but it all started when he demanded that my father give him his part of his inheritance. And you know, of course, my father is very much alive. And so this rude demand that my father give him his share of the family farm before he died was ridiculous. It was just like telling my father, "you are dead to me." And if he wasn't going to stick around and take care of my father, it could put the whole family at risk of having to live in poverty. I'm appalled at my brother's disrespect.

My father and my mother tried talking some sense into my brother, but he is just so self-absorbed. They reminded him of all the things they had taught him -- all the things the rabbis had taught him about honoring his father and mother. But he wouldn't listen. So, my father divided off his share of the land, my brother sold it, and then he took off with the cash. We heard that he had gone to the city a long way away. We heard that he was partying and living in ways that I thought were disgusting. My mom even wrote him a letter and told him his dissolute living was going to land him jail or even worse. But he didn't care -- he didn't care what anyone thought about him. He had absolutely no regard for how his behavior was harming him or embarrassing us.

We heard that he was squandering the money that he got from selling his part of the family farm

-- we got word that he had blown all of it on partying

----every single penny of my father's hard earned wealth was gone.

He hadn't even gotten a job to support himself..... until a famine hit. We heard that a lot of crops and livestock were dying in the far away land and that people were going hungry. So my brother got a job with a farmer taking care of a herd of pigs. The worst job ever -- it went against everything we had learned from the Rabbis -- you see we were taught that pigs were unclean animals and we weren't supposed to eat them or touch their carcasses. Wow! My brother had really fallen as low as he possibly could to be a servant to unclean pigs.

Throughout all this uproar with him, I continued to do what I always do. I get up every morning at the crack of dawn and work my fingers to the bone on the farm. You see without my younger brother around to do his part, his share of the work fell onto me. I work and work and work. That is all I do. Although my father is a faithful man, he doesn't seem to realize that the Sabbath laws apply to me. If my brother had stayed home the way he was supposed to, maybe I could have had some kind of life of my own. You see I have always been "the good son," the rule follower, the reliable one. Dad counts on me, and I can't let him down. He would really be in trouble if I weren't around to do what I do. He's lucky to have me for sure.

So, one night I came in from another long day working in the fields. And from a long way off, I heard music coming from the open windows of the house. I heard laughing and

talking. And it sounded like people were dancing! I could smell the wonderful smell of meat being cooked on the grill -- not a smell I've smelled in a really long time. As I got closer, I realized a party was going on -- a party that I knew nothing about. And it seemed that everyone was there, the whole town it seemed --- except for me -- because I had been out working the fields for hours on my own, even after dark.

Just then I saw one of my father's farm hands walking by. So I hollered out, "What the heck is going on?" And you are not going to believe this. He said: "Your brother is back, and your father has slaughtered his fattest calf to celebrate because his son is back safe and sound." He had the nerve to be chomping on a juicy rib bone as he walked off into the dark.

To be honest about it, with every single step I took toward the house I got angrier and angrier. And when I got close enough I could hear my brother's voice - he was laughing and talking. Everyone seemed to be really happy he was home. I was about ready to punch my brother in the face by the time I got up to the house. But just before I was about to burst into the party, my father opened the door! I guess he could tell I was furious because he blocked me from getting into the door and begged me to sit down on a bench outside under the open window. And he began to tell me the "good" news that my brother who was lost had come home. He had been "found." My dad said that such a great occurrence warranted a big celebration, and he invited me to come join in.

And that's when I let loose on my dad. I reminded him how I had stayed behind and done the right thing - working the way I was expected to -- even taking on my brother's duties --trying to keep the farm going. I told him everything I had been thinking in my head -- I told him how I had been home all along and never got even so much as a thank you, and certainly not a party to celebrate me. I told my father, he didn't even care enough about me to slaughter that skinny old goat he keeps around and throw me a party with a couple of my friends. I demanded to know why my father **insisted** on celebrating the one who had done nothing but cause the whole family a lot of pain and heartache.

And here's what my Father said:

Child, you have always been so loyal to me, so obedient and so respectful. You have taken your responsibilities in life so seriously. You have stayed on the straight and narrow -- you have never caused me a moment of trouble. You have always represented this family well. But, I think it's possible to be lost even though you are still at home. Although your outward actions are impeccable, your heart is far away from me.

Child, you are very angry. You are hurt - wounded it seems. In fact, I can see that you've let this situation turn you into a bitter person. You are jealous of your brother and judgmental, your unforgiveness is destroying you, and your pride is going to be your downfall.

Don't you know that I love you unconditionally? Don't you know that I love you solely because you are my child?

I don't love you because of all the work you do for me.

You do not have to earn my love.

Won't you listen to me? I just love you!

And don't you know that my love is not limited? This is not a competition between you and your brother. I can love you both more than you will ever understand. My love for your brother does not reduce my love for you!

I guess he could tell I was confused because then he said this:

Think about it like this. Consider a shepherd who has 100 sheep and imagine if one of them gets lost, and the shepherd leaves the 99 to go find that one lost sheep. Don't you think the shepherd is going to be overjoyed and celebrate when he finds the one lost sheep?? But on the other hand, do you think he loves the 99 any less? Of course not! The shepherd wants all of the sheep to be safe and sound -- he cares for every single sheep.

OR think about it like this. Do you remember when the neighbor lady lost one of her silver coins last week? She searched and searched and searched until she finally found it. She didn't give up----- because that coin was valuable to her. Do you think the other coins she had were any less valuable because she was excited to find the lost one? Of course not!

You see you are valuable to me. I care for you. You are beloved. You are my child. And ....so.....is.....your brother.

The difference between you and your brother is that your brother returned home with humility. You, my child, have stayed home but your pride has kept you far away from enjoying my love. You see my love is limitless. But your heart must be open to receive my love. And when we are really living in a loving relationship, **all** of life is truly a huge celebration. Every day is a celebration!

I can't force my love on you. I can't force you to let go of all the unforgiveness and jealousy and anger that you seem to have. But I hope you will begin to understand how much I love you regardless of how hard you work or how good you strive to be. I appreciate all the good things you do. You do the work I have given you so well -- with dedication. But what if you did that work with joy and love in your heart instead of bitterness? You see, your outward behavior is not what is most important to me. The condition of your heart is my greatest concern. I also hope you will begin to understand that my greatest joy will be when you learn to love your brother in the same way that I love you.

The choice to receive my love is yours. The choice to share this same kind of love is yours, too. Why don't you come into the party and welcome your brother home?

And then my father grabbed my hands, looked me in the eye, kissed my forehead, and said:

"Child, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Won't you come on in and celebrate with us?

And my father walked back into the party.

So, here I sit. The choice is mine.