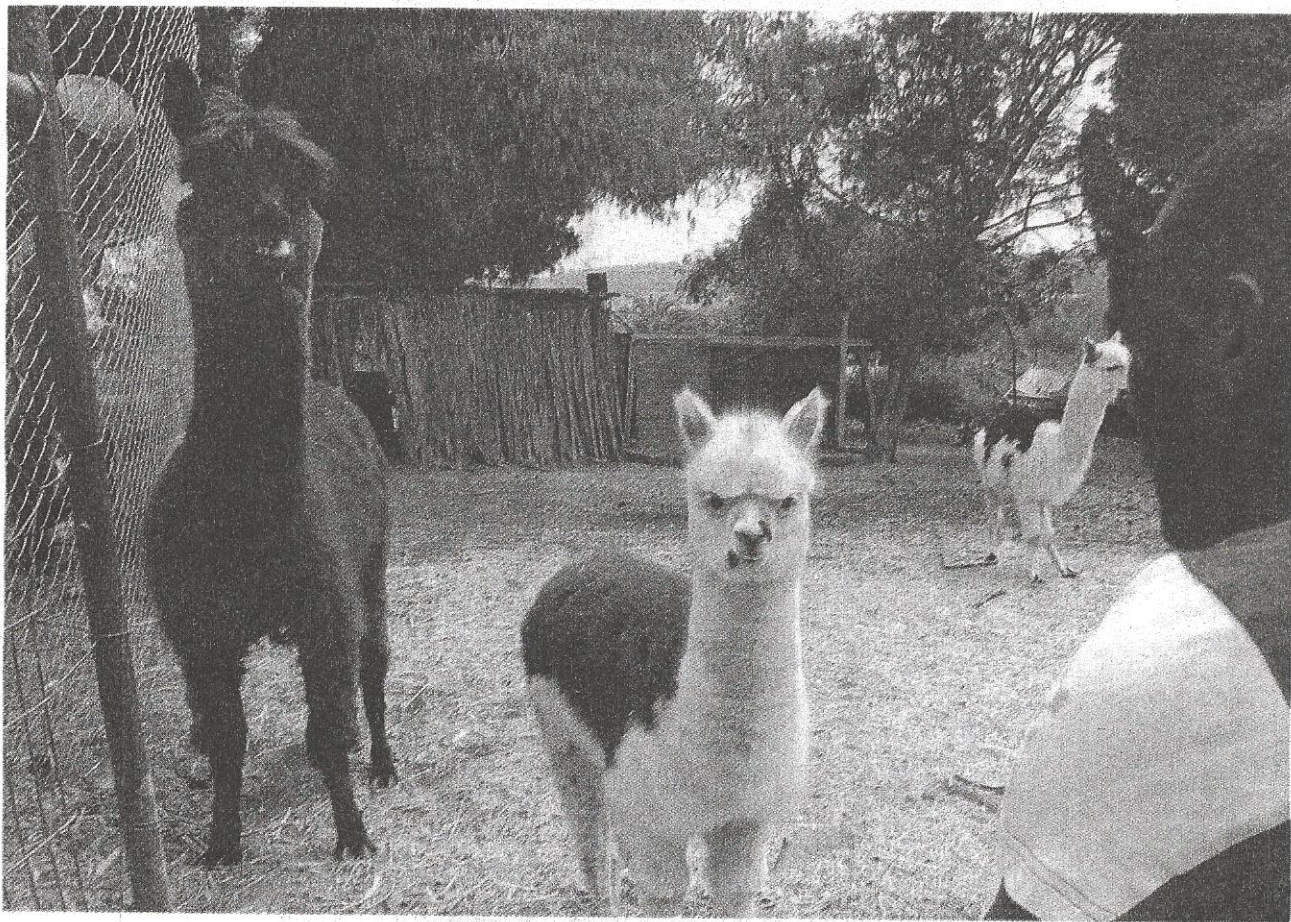


Home, sweet home

Sometimes, a child learns the true meaning of 'home' when his isn't good enough



UNIQUE CONNECTIONS. 'Danny,' a 16-year-old oleh from Ethiopia, agreed to care for the family of alpacas in the park and build them a new home. (Courtesy, Wing of Love)

• By Michele Klein

There's no place like home, where a mother thinks of her child and a father smiles fondly, where love and peace fill the air. Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," says the well-known 19th century song, "Home, sweet home."

But not every child grows up in a sweet home, as recent cases of parental abuse reveal. The Welfare Ministry

reports that in 2007 social workers had to protect children from parental abuse in 3,758 divorce disputes and some 10,000 children overall are at risk from parental abuse. However, this figure does not include victimized children living with one or both unhappy parents who haven't sued for divorce. Severely neglected children, who are routinely locked in or out of home, are victims of parental abuse, and require urgent help no less than those who have been physically harmed. More

often, the father is the abusive parent, but recent discoveries of abusive mothers in Beersheba, Netivot and Jerusalem confirm that not every mother is what psychotherapists call "a good-enough mother." When a home is not good enough, the children may be removed and placed in a foster home, boarding school or hostel.

The mitzva of *shiluah ha-ken*, of sending away a mother bird from her nest before removing her egg or her chick, (Deut. 22:6-7) assumes that even among birds it is

painful for a mother to have her offspring removed from her care. Maimonides believed that the mitzva recognizes that mother animals instinctively love their young (even when they are so disturbed that they are not good enough mothers?), but Nachmanides believed that the Torah's purpose is rather to instill compassion in people, to make us act mercifully. If a mother harms her offspring and shows them no compassion in her care for them, she is evidently not good enough.

'Yuval' is 15 years old, from a Negev town. His mother often forgot about him and he stayed in the street after school, locked out of his own home. His father left long ago and his mother shares her bed with someone else, whom Yuval doesn't care for. There was no food on the cooker waiting for Yuval when the front door did eventually open. He did not wash regularly either. In fact, there was no routine in his life at all until he was picked up by the police with a bloodied knife on him in the



ONLY my father had a pouch like that and could carry me around in it,' says 15-year-old 'Yuval.' (Courtesy, Wing of Love)

Wake of a neighborhood fight. After his arrest, the probation officer visited his home and decided that it was not good enough. Following her recommendation, the juvenile court ruled that he be placed in full-time care and so he arrived at the Wing of Love hostel in Gedera. Here he found a routine, with regular meals, daily showers, and duties. His father now visits him and he occasionally goes home with him for a weekend. During the day, he works in the Wing of Love Wildlife park at Kfar Menachem, where he also cares for the park's wallabies. His arrest was actually a blessing for him, as he is finally getting some much-needed support and attention.

'Danny' is 16 years old and was born in Ethiopia. He arrived in Israel with his parents and seven siblings five years ago. They settled in a city in the North, but Danny didn't like his new home. "I want to return to my country," he said. "I had fun living in the village there, near the cows and horses that my

father cared for."

Danny was angry at his parents and refused to eat with his family. He was not interested in school and hung out in the street, where he soon got into trouble. He sat in jail and his family didn't visit him. Then, one day the probation officer offered him a place in the Wing of Love rehabilitation framework. He came to the park, saw the animals, liked the open spaces that reminded him of his native land, and

here in their pen. I suggest that you build them a new home, where they can be happy. What sort of home do you think will make them feel at home, away from their homeland?"

Danny agreed to care for the family of alpacas in the park and build them a new home. All alone, he fed them and cleaned out their stall. He thought about what sort of home they would like. He remembered the huts in Ethiopia, built out of branch-

gate of the old pen and led the alpacas to their new yard. At first they showed no interest in the new hut. But one day there was a down-pour, and they took shelter there.

From that day on, the alpacas felt at home in the hut he had built and Danny felt proud. Everyone admired his achievement. He continued to care for the alpacas and began to attend classes, ate with the other boys, and made friends. By building a new home for these animals, so far from their natural habitat, Danny was adjusting to his new home in Israel, so far from the village of his birth.

Each hostel boy is responsible for one particular area of the park. While Danny cares for the alpacas, Yuval ensures that the wallabies have the right food, not too much, and not too little either. He keeps their water supply clean and learns what makes these small kangaroos feel secure and at home, far from their Australian homeland. One day he was thrilled to see a baby peeking out of a walla-

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asked to stay. But he was still angry and pined for his village. He refused to eat with the other boys and kept his distance. When provoked, he lashed out violently. The director, Boaz Miller, made him a proposal: "The alpacas in the park come from South America. They aren't happy

es and decided to build such a hut. But first he cleared a space in the park and fixed up a fence to secure the territory. Then he collected the materials he needed for the alpacas' hut. He did not speak much, but got on with his job. Eventually the hut was ready and he opened the

by's pouch. "If only my father had a pouch like that and could carry me around in it!" this large teenager told his counselor, wistfully.

Animals, like humans, have certain basic requirements for a territory to become a good enough home. If their home is inadequate, they can't ask for help; they may become aggressive, or cease to thrive. So too, the unhappy young boys became aggressive, and ceased to thrive. It's a shame that they had to get into trouble before they could get help.

The boys' parents learned new ideas about home-making at a parents' evening at the hostel. Youth counselor Dudu David held up a red page with a house that he had drawn, with the word "bayit" (home) in the center. He then produced 18 large pieces of a huge jigsaw puzzle and spread them out randomly on the floor. Each piece was a different shape, a different color, and had a different word in the center. He asked the boys and their parents to choose a piece of the puzzle and then think about how the word on their piece of puzzle links with their concept of bayit.

Holding up a piece with the word "ahava" (love), one boy said: "Home is where you are loved. At home I am loved and here I feel loved and I feel this is also my home."

The next boy chose "worry" and added: "Home is where family worry about you and care for you. I feel that my counselors and my friends here also worry about me and care for me."

The boy with "friends" commented: "The hostel is where I have friends who help me; at home my friends got me into trouble."

Dudu had chosen many other elements that contribute to the feeling of a sweet home. The words Support, Help, Security, Understanding, Warmth, Giving, Protection, Family, Concern, Closeness, Energy, Sensitivity, Roof, Homeland, and Laughter generated moving declarations from both the boys and their families. The puzzle took only one evening; the real work involves a much bigger effort.

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