



From the desk of  
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

## Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Parashat Bo

HAMELECH

### Chinuch Starts at Once

Continuing our discussion of successful *shalom bayit*, a most significant aspect is the mutual stand and approach to *chinuch habonim*, childrearing.

One of the great essentials in *chinuch* is being a good role model. "Do as I say, not as I do," just doesn't work! When the child sees how his parents *daven*, learn, say *berachot* and perform all the other *mitzvot*, he will naturally follow suit. Similarly, when he sees how his two parents treat each other respectfully in speech and in deed, each lending a helping hand and yielding to the other person's preference, this creates an everlasting imprint upon the young child's soul. He is growing up in a healthy atmosphere. It is imperative to begin this type of conduct in the home long before children are born, because in adults as well, habit turns ritual.

Another point to ponder is the importance of starting young. *Chinuch* is for children at as tender an age as possible. Many feel that when children are young, it is better to leave them alone and let them do what they want. Also regarding Torah and mitzvah observance, prayer and character development – some people feel that there is no need to pressure the child. They feel that he should be allowed to do whatever he wants, since when he grows up he will understand the value of Torah, mitzvot, prayer, and refined *midot* anyways. We are therefore witness to a recent phenomenon that parents do

not concern themselves about taking their children to pray in the *beit hakesset*. They excuse themselves by saying that the child is tired, feeling that one mustn't be overly demanding on young children, and not guide them too much. Meanwhile, the child goes on to misbehave, damage property, injure others, or *chas ve'shalom*, sully his mouth by uttering inappropriate words.

Those who raise their children in such a fashion are making a very big mistake. On the contrary, it is specifically when children are young that a parent can instill in them love of Torah, *tefilah*, mitzvot, and upstanding *midot*. This is because when children are young, they are impressionable and excited by everything. One can easily accustom them to observing all of our sacred practices. They then grow up with a solid foundation in Torah and Heavenly fear, which will continue to grow year after year. On the other hand, if they are allowed to do whatever they please, they grow accustomed to bad behavior, and it is upon that rotten foundation that they continue to grow.

### Why Take Kids?

When we analyze the *parasha*, we will notice the following sequence of events. First, Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh, requesting him to allow the Jews to leave and warning him that if he would not, Egypt would be struck by the plague



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of locusts. Pharaoh did not listen. He sent them away. But Pharaoh's ministers and servants got involved and said to him, "Do you not already know that Egypt is lost?" They therefore told him to send the *anashim* [אנשים]. At that point, there was probably a discussion between Pharaoh and his men as to whether or not they should allow the Jews to leave for three days, as Moshe requested, so that they could serve Hashem.

It seems reasonable that Pharaoh and his men agreed that if the Jews' intention was to flee and not return to Egypt, then it was definitely not worthwhile to free them. For despite the Egyptians' present suffering, the loss incurred by losing 600,000 slaves would be far too great. However, if they wished to leave for three days and then return, it was worthwhile to send them instead of suffering further.

The perspective of Pharaoh, his ministers, and servants was that serving Hashem was only for the adult population and not the children. So the ministers came up with a plan. They told Pharaoh to "Send away the *anashim* [אנשים]." In *Tanach*, the word *anashim* is generally a reference to the important individuals amongst the people. In other words, they were permitting only the adult men to go and serve Hashem, while the children and wives would stay behind as collateral, assuring the men's return. Pharaoh asked Moshe who is going. When Moshe answered that **everyone** was to leave Egypt, Pharaoh and his staff understood that they truly intended to flee.

Therefore, Pharaoh said (10:10), "It is not so; only the men should go." Rashi explains that Pharaoh was saying that the Jews wished to serve Hashem and offer sacrificial offerings, and this only pertains to the adult males, but not to the children and women. Therefore, when Moshe and Aharon did not agree, he sent them away, since Pharaoh and his men had decided that the Jews' intention was really to flee and not to serve Hashem.

### Who and who?

We can add the words of the *Kometz Mincha*, who explains Pharaoh's perspective according to the following Midrash. The Midrash states that when Pharaoh asked, "*Mi va'mi haholchim* [מי ומי ההולכים], Who will be going?" he was hinting that one day the Jews would say, "*mi va mi*," as in, "**Mi** yaaleh behar Hashem, Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, *u'mi yakum bimkom kadsho*, and who will stand in his holy place, *neki kapayim u'bar levav*, one with clean hands and a pure heart." Pharaoh was saying that the *pasuk* itself implies that the only ones who were qualified to serve Hashem were those who could stand on the mountain of Hashem with clean hands and a pure heart. Therefore, how could they now want the youths, babies, and women to go serve Hashem? They therefore concluded that their true intention was to flee.

However, Moshe Rabbeinu's perspective on *chinuch* was the Torah's perspective. On the contrary, when detailing to Pharaoh who was to



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leave Egypt, he even mentioned the youth before the elderly, saying (10:9), "with our youths and our elderly." As the saying goes, "If there are no kids, there will be no goats." The main guarantee to the continuation of the Jewish Nation is the younger generation. In order for them to grow up and be educated in the way of the Torah, they should see how we serve Hashem and observe mitzvot when they are still young, and then they will learn to do so as well. It will become ingrained in them, and they will automatically grow up following along the path of Torah and Heavenly fear. However, if we wait until they grow up, it will be too late to educate them in the Torah way. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu included the children as well, for the Divine service of the Jewish Nation must also include the children.

Therefore, the primary mitzva of relating what transpired in Egypt on Pesach night is fulfilled with the children, as the *pasuk* states, "So that you should relate to your children and grandchildren." Furthermore, all the miracles and wonders of the Exodus were to implant the belief of Hashem's Divine Providence, as well as belief in Torah and mitzvot, into subsequent generations. Without this, the Jewish Nation would have disappeared through their sojourns in exile.

We see, then, that there was a dispute between Pharaoh and his men and Moshe Rabbeinu regarding the proper approach in *chinuch*. Pharaoh's perspective, as well as that of his ministers and servants, was that *avodat Hashem* is

not relevant to women and children. On the contrary, they must be given leeway to do as they please, and only when they are older will they serve Hashem. However, Moshe and Aharon's perspective was the opposite. Their opinion was that *avodat Hashem* begins specifically when the children are younger, for "if there are no kids, there will be no elderly goats." The proper way to educate Jews, is specifically when the child is young. This way he will grow on a foundation of Torah and Heavenly fear, and will become accustomed to living accordingly from a very young age.

### Loss of a Lifetime

In *Iggrot Ve'mamarim* (*siman* 25), the Chafetz Chayim writes that there is an absolute requirement for a father to teach his son to go according to Hashem's desired path. This requirement is delineated in two of the sections of *Keriat Shema*. Teaching children is included in the category of accepting the yoke of Heaven and mitzvot. The Chafetz Chaim writes that every father must educate his son in Torah and mitzvot when he is still a child, until they become second nature. This is as the *pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 22:6), "*Chanoach lenaar al pi darko gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenu*, Teach your child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not veer from it." If a father is lax in this requirement, he should not think that it is only a temporary problem. Rather, it will cause damage that will remain throughout the child's entire life. The



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father should also know that whatever mitzvot his son performs when he gets older and whatever positive attributes he displays are also testaments to the *chinuch* his father gave him when he was younger.

### Setting a Personal Example

One of the most important aspects of *chinuch* is to set a personal example. Once, a Jew approached the Kotzker Rebbe, asking for a blessing that his son should study Torah. The Kotzker replied, "If you are requesting a blessing that your son will study Torah, then it is guaranteed that he will also come to request a blessing that **his** son should study Torah, for he will **also** not have studied Torah. Rather, if **you** will learn Torah, then your son will see how a Jewish home looks. He will then understand that is how a Jewish home is supposed to look, and he will also study Torah. But if you only ask for a blessing that he should learn, this is what will happen: your son will see you return home from work and immediately go to relax or read a newspaper, as opposed to learning Torah. He will then do the same thing when he becomes a father. We can now understand what the *pasuk* is teaching us when it states (*Devarim* 6:7), "Ve'shinantam le'vanecha ve'dibarta bam, And you should teach your children and speak about it [- the Torah]." For the *pasuk* should seemingly state first that you should speak about Torah i.e., study it, and only **then** teach your children – why

is the order reversed? Rather, it teaches us that if you want your children to study Torah, you must first serve as personal example – **you** study Torah and then your children will study it!"

Suka (56b) teaches that you can learn a whole lot about parents from how their children speak. A child is usually repeating what he heard at home.

### Cute Little Kids

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein made the following observation. In Parashat Bereishit (3:24), *Keruvim* are indentified as *Malachei Chavalah* "dispatchers of harm." But in Parashat Terumah, they are holy angels which adorn the Aron.

The Chevroner Rosh HaYeshivah explained: *Keruvim* bear the face of children. And what are children? They could be angelic or they could be *malachei chavalah*! What determines the difference? Where they are! If they adorn the Aron inside of the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, they are indeed angelic. But if they have been kicked out of Gan Eden and handed a sword, they will be destructive forces of evil.

His message is that we must do our utmost to provide a positive spiritual environment for our youth so that they will grow into the *nachat*-givers they can become. Not just for our own gratification, but as a fulfillment of our mission, transmitting our rich heritage to the next generation.





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### Chinuch Began in Yerushalayim

Now, it used to be that children were educated at home. But there came a point in time when Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla noticed the growing number of orphans, combined with fathers who were just not capable of educating their own children. So the first *chadarim* were established in Yerushalayim. Why Yerushalayim? This was Yerushalayim of old, with the *Beit Hamikdash* standing in all its glory, the Kohanim racing ecstatically doing the *avodah*, the Leviim in song, with the top *Talmidei Chachomim* of the generation on premises. All of this was sure not to escape the attention of many a curious pair of young eyes. "For from Zion shall go forth Torah." The children absorbed these great sights of *kedushah* which engendered fervor and devotion in their development in Torah and Yirat Shomayim. (See Tosafot to Bava Batra 21a)

### Sage Advice: Do it Yourself!

A number of years ago, I asked the Steipler what *Mussar Sefer* to learn with my children at the Shabbat table. The Steipler corrected me. He said that reading *Mussar* out of a *Sefer* may just prove counterproductive, especially if you point out flaws. A much better idea is to put down the *seforim* and act as you wish your children to act. Do you want them to say a Brocha nicely – slowly and clearly? Don't tell them to do it. Do it yourself! Do you want them to speak respectfully to each other and to their parents? So make sure

that you speak respectfully to them and to your spouse!

Do you want them to eat like a *mentch*, not gobbling down the food gluttonously or taking more than their fair share? So be sure to act that way, eating in a dignified matter, showing care and concern that all present receive ample portions.

### Start Young

We also spoke about starting out young and not neglecting nor postponing *chinuch* for an older age. Let us bring some sources.

Shlomo Hamelech said (Mishlei 22:6): Educate a youth according to his way; also as he ages, he will not depart from it. Sefer Hassidim (10) declares: What a person does when he is young will be incredibly difficult for him to change in his older years.

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter once noticed a granddaughter of his exhibiting selfishness at a very tender age. Not wishing this to develop into a habit, he made a point of giving her treats to distribute to others, so that she would become a "giver" and think about others.

### You Can Do It!

Our Sages teach us to start *chinuch* for each mitzvah at the earliest opportunity. (Suka 42a) When your son knows how to shake, give him a *lulav*. When he knows how to dress himself, get him *tsitsit*. When he is old enough to treat *tefillin*



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properly, get him a pair. When he begins to speak, teach him *Shema Yisroel* and *Torah tziva*.

These are all examples enumerated by the Sages of the Talmud. The common thread is: Seize the moment. Do not wait until he gets older and used to doing anything differently. If he *could* do a mitsvah, then he *should* do that mitsvah. That is the sole criterion.

Ben Ish Hai (Vol. I, Toldot #10) says to wash Netilat Yodayim each morning even for babies. The Steipler Gaon suggested it too, even before the *brit* (Teshuvot VeHanhagot II:490).

### Get in the Habit

Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Gabirol said it like this: Intellect is a gift, discipline – an acquisition, and habit – a monarch. He continued to say that all character traits which become apparent in one's adult years were there as a child as well.

Kil Yakar (beginning of Bechukotai) explains how we are to "go in the statutes of Hashem." This means, he says, to get used to going to the *Beit Medrash* at a set time, again and again, until it becomes second nature.

Beit Yosef (114) suggests saying "Mashiv HaRuach Umorid Hageshem" ninety times in a row as this will accustom one, at the beginning of the winter, to *daven* appropriately and not forget that special insertion.

Rabbeinu Bechaye (Intro. to Parashat Shemot) explains why it is so important to train children while they are young and impressionable. First of

all, until *Bar Mitzvah* age, he only has a *yetzer horah*, so he needs parental direction. Otherwise he is fully following his animalistic drives. Setting him on a proper path when he is young is setting him up for a lifetime of thought-out, controlled actions.

The Alter of Kelm said that a child, while lacking intellect, has a certain degree of innocence and purity. This must be harnessed and utilized as fertile planting ground for development of positive character traits. The more intellect a child acquires, he respectively loses his inborn "innocence" and naivete. His heart hardens and he becomes less impressionable. So it is of utmost importance not to lose out on the tremendous opportunity of making a lasting mark while the child is yet young.

### A Man is a Tree

In Tehillim (144:12), Dovid Hamelech compares children to saplings, raised in their youth. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that one can take a young sapling and guide it to grow straight. Once it grows crooked, it hardens and becomes unbendable. So too with people. When they are young, it is much easier to direct them to proper conduct. Once they age clinging to bad habits, it is very difficult to wean them off.

### Torah Lullaby

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai listed his top *talmidim* and added a word or two of praise. Of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya he said, "Praised is his mother who bore him."



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What was so great about his mother? She had the foresight, she had the vision. Before his birth she made the rounds of all the study halls of her city and begged the *Talmidei Chachomim* do daven for her son to be a Torah scholar. And once he was born, she made sure that his crib had a *makom kavua* in the *Beit Medrash* so that his ears would hear only Torah! What a mother!

Sefer Hassidim (238) implores parents to make sure not to let their babies hear *goyish* songs to calm them or put them to sleep. Apparently, he understood how harmful this would be to the baby's soul. On the other hand, providing a positive audio-visual environment, even for a baby, can give a great boost in the right direction. I know of a family who would reward their older children for reciting Tehillim and Mishnayot in the presence of their baby brother or sister!

### Positively Young

In summary, we discussed two main points in *chinuch*: a) positive role model and b) starting from a young age. We have learned how many of the younger generation err by paving a new path for themselves, thinking that *chinuch* begins when the child has grown up and can choose on his own to observe the Torah. They therefore allow their children not to pray in the *beit haknesset* or to recite *birkat hamazon*. They do not instruct them to recite *berachot* before eating. The same thing applies to the children's behavior: parents allow their children to destroy, damage, dirty and ruin. They assuage themselves by thinking that

when they grow up, the children will understand that it is wrong. However, the Torah and its Sages teach us that this is massive mistake. For the *pasuk* states, "*Chanoch lenaar al pi darko*, Teach the child according to his way" – in other words *chinuch* begins when they are **children**. Only then can there be an assurance that "even when he grows old, he will not veer from it." However, if we, *chas ve'shalom*, allow the child to grow up doing whatever he wants, it will cause him to be instilled with bad habits and behaviors that he will have grown accustomed to. This is as the Chafetz Chayim wrote in his letter, that the loss incurred by acting in such a manner, is one that lasts a lifetime and can never be repaired.

These same parents seem to understand that when it comes to health and physical safety, they exercise caution, also and even more so when the child is small. They must act no differently concerning his spiritual well-being! Therefore, we must place our utmost focus on properly teaching our children. Of course, we must do it in a pleasant manner; but to whatever extent they grow up loving the Torah, through receiving prizes and the like, doing mitzvot and acting properly become like second nature to them. This is the way that we will merit that our children are firmly rooted in the House of Hashem and blossom into Torah greats. *Amen ve'amen*.

**Shabbat Shalom,**  
**Rav Mordechai Malka**