



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א

נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



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Parashat Bo

A Dispute Over How to Educate the Youth

Questions:

1- Our *parasha* (10:7) teaches us that when Moshe and Aharon warned Pharaoh about the upcoming plague of locusts, he ignored them and sent them away. How, then, did Pharaoh's servants succeed in convincing him to call Moshe and Aharon to come back? 2 – Furthermore, once Pharaoh's servants brought them back (10:8), how could Pharaoh actually send them away again (10:10)? 3- How could Pharaoh respond to Moshe that only the men should leave Egypt (10:11); Moshe had explicitly said that the youth should also be allowed to go (10:9)?

A Common Error

If we think about the way of the world in present times, we will see that many feel that when children are young, it is better to leave them alone and let them do what they want. All the more so, regarding Torah and mitzvah observance, prayer and character development – 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 haknesset*. They apologetically 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 the 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 very foundation that they continue to grow.

Pharaoh and Moshe's Dispute Over the Proper *Chinuch* Perspective

Now we can begin to answer the questions that we posed above. I will begin by mentioning something that I wrote as a *bachur yeshiva*, more than 30 years ago. When we analyze the *parasha*, we will notice the sequence of events: first, Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh, requesting him to allow the Jews to leave and warning him that if he did not, Egypt would be struck by the plague of locusts. Yet Pharaoh did not listen and sent them away. But this time, 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], which we will soon explain. What happened was as follows: Understandably, at that point, there was probably a discussion between Pharaoh and his men: they discussed whether or not they should allow the Jews to leave for three days, as Moshe requested, so that they could serve Hashem. I would like to suggest that there was a firm agreement between Pharaoh and his men 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 only to temporarily leave for three days and then return, it was certainly worthwhile to send them, as opposed to suffering further. Even so, the perspective of Pharaoh, his ministers, and



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servants was that serving Hashem was only for the adult population and not the children. So, trying to decide whether the Jews really intended to return or not, 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 go serve Hashem, while the children and wives would stay behind as collateral, assuring the men's return. Pharaoh was persuaded and he suggested it to Moshe. Yet 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.

The Allusion of the *Kometz Mincha*

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 rise in his holy place, *neki kapayim u'bari 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 really to flee. However, Moshe Rabbeinu's perspective on *chinuch* was the Torah's perspective. On the contrary, when detailing to Pharaoh who was to leave Egypt, he even mentioned the youth before the elderly, saying (10:9), "with our youths and our elderly." He explained by saying that "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 then 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 been decimated 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 similar to that of Western civilization, who feel 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



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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.

A Loss Which Lasts 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*. This is because teaching children is included in the category of his accepting the yoke of Heaven and mitzvot upon himself. He writes that every father must gradually educate his son in Torah and mitzvot when he is still a child, until he becomes habituated to them and they become like second nature. This is as the *pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 22:6), "*Chanoch 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 even slightly 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 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!"

Words of Mussar

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 hakeneset* or to recite *birkat hamazon*. They totally 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



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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. 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