

So that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt... that you may know that I am Hashem. (10:2)

The Revelation of the Divine Presence witnessed by the Jewish People in Egypt was unparalleled. They saw how Hashem manipulated the “laws of nature” to serve the needs of His People, as he meted out justice to the evil Egyptians. This year of Revelation led up to their liberation from Egypt, followed by the Splitting of the Red Sea, which was the precursor to the seminal event in Jewish history: the Giving of the Torah. It would all be for naught, however, had it not been transmitted to future generations. The Torah invokes us to relate this experience to our sons and grandsons. The **Baal Shem Tov HaKadosh** explains why *Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, relating the story of the Exodus, is incumbent upon the grandfather, as well as the father.

The *Baal Shem Tov* says that herein lies a new perspective on the critical importance and the overriding responsibility one has towards the *chinuch*, education, of his children. The Torah intimates that the command concerning the successful passage of the torch of Torah from father to son is dependent upon the father's sense of responsibility. A father must not simply educate his son – one generation; rather, he must see to it that the *chinuch* he imbues in his son will carry on to the next generation as well. He must see his grandson's “face” in his son's image. If he teaches for only one generation, the chances are that if it even lasts that generation, it surely will not last much longer. We measure successful *chinuch* by its enduring nature, its ability to transcend and survive the test of time and challenge. When a father teaches his son, just as when a *rebbe* teaches his *talmid*, student, he must realize that before him stands not just one child, but the future potential of generations. If he imparts the lesson with feeling, love and inspiration, it will endure the test of time.

How does one teach in this manner? How does one ensure that his lesson will be successfully infused in his son/*talmid* for generations to come? Perhaps we can explain it utilizing the following novel approach towards *mitzvah* observance. In his *Michtav MeiEliyahu*, **Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl**, distinguishes between two concepts which each describe the essence of *mitzvos* vis-à-vis man. We find that *mitzvos* are referred to as *chaim*, life: *Ki heim chayeinu*, “For they are our life.” In other sources, however, we find that *mitzvos* are called *levushim*, garments. He explains that these two terms apply to the manner and attitude with which one performs the *mitzvos*.

One can perform *mitzvos* with *pnimius*, an inwardness of the heart, with feeling, with dedication, struggling to overcome the wiles and challenges presented by the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, and with *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. This is the meaning of “life” vis-à-vis *mitzvos*, since it adds to the personality of the one who executes the *mitzvah*, a degree of sanctity which had not previously been there. To “live” means to supply a need which the ego feels and struggles to fulfill – and this need is fulfilled in such a case.

There is another manner of *mitzvah* performance – regrettably, one to which many of us adhere. It is the result of the way we have been raised: *K'mitzvas anashim melumdah*, as human commands learned by rote, or, to put it simply, complacency. This is the type of *mitzvah* which is called *levush*, “apparel.” We cannot dismiss this approach; although it lacks inwardness, it can still contain considerable educational value by maintaining one’s spiritual status quo, by preventing him from descending to a lower spiritual plateau. One who is surrounded by *mitzvos* possesses a certain *tris*, shield, against the *yetzer hora*, even if his performance is only extrinsic and superficial. Thus, *mitzvos* are referred to as “apparel,” since clothing provides a covering over the body, a safeguard against the environment. There is *kedushah*, holiness, in every *mitzvah* endeavor – even if performed for extrinsic motives.

The *Michtav MeiEliyahu* delves deeper in explaining the distinction between these approaches to *mitzvah* observance, emphasizing the long-term effect of each. We explore two ways to perform *mitzvos*. One’s attitude towards *mitzvah* performance affects his relationship with that *mitzvah*. One can transmit “life” to the next generation. If the role of a *mitzvah* is only on the “apparel” level, however, the father is hard-pressed to transfer this *mitzvah* to his son. After all, no “apparel” comes in “one size fits all.” My jacket will fit my body – not my son’s body!

I think that herein lies the secret to transmitting our Jewish heritage from generation to generation. If a father wants to transmit his *mitzvah* experience to his son in such a manner that he will eventually transmit it to his son (the grandson), it is necessary that the father/grandfather maintain the proper attitude/approach towards *mitzvah* performance. If the *mitzvah* is “life” to him, then he will be able to imbue this life-source in his son and grandson. If, however, it is only an activity that he carries out superficially, without feeling or devotion, the chances are that his son will observe this and not take the *mitzvah* to heart. He certainly will not feel it incumbent upon himself to transmit it to his son.

Perhaps the key to *Sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, “relating the story of the Exodus,” is to be found at the end of the *pasuk*: *V’yidaatem ki Ani Hashem*, “That you may know that I am Hashem.” What does “knowing” have to do with the *mitzvah* of transmitting the story to one’s son and grandson? Perhaps *yediah*, knowledge, defines our attitude. The word *yediah*, which is normally translated as knowledge, is also defined as turning particular attention to a subject, ie, to care deeply, to love someone. Hashem says (*Bereishis* 18:19), *Ki yidativ*, concerning Avraham Avinu, “For I have turned My particular attention to him/I have loved him.” To “know” something/someone is to care deeply about him. Hashem wants *Klal Yisrael* to have such a deep awareness of what took place in Egypt that this awareness will catalyze within them a deep sense of love for Hashem. When one performs a *mitzvah* on the *yediah* level, it will be transmitted to the third generation.

After all is said and done, the Torah is underscoring the need for parents to inculcate their children with love for Hashem and a deep desire to carry out His *mitzvos*. This infusion must be strong enough to carry on for generations. To the parent who comments, “I can only do so much; the rest is up to the school,” I conclude with the timeless words of **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, “If there is one

lesson that Judaism teaches about the family, it is this: There can be no substitute for the mother and father in producing a Jewish child and in ensuring Jewish continuity. The best of schools cannot achieve what even the average parent can achieve when it comes to Jewish education.”

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, quotes *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, who explains the *Rama's* addendum to the *Shulchan Aruch*. The *Mechaber* (author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Horav Yosef Karo, zl*) writes that, when a boy reaches the age of *bar-mitzvah* and receives his first *Aliyah*, is called up to the Torah, his father recites the *Baruch Shepitrani*, blessing Hashem for absolving him from the punishment for the deeds of this person – namely, his son. The *Mechaber* is of the opinion that the blessing is made *b'Shem u'Malchus*, using Hashem's Name. From now on, once the boy has entered adulthood, the boy is responsible for himself. He is no longer the father's headache. His son is now an adult.

The *Rama* agrees that a *brachah* is recited – only without including Hashem's Name. Hence, the father says, *Baruch Shepitrani meiansho shelzeh*. Why is this? *Rav Elya* explains that a parent is freed from responsibility for his child's deeds – only in such a case that the father has given his son proper correct *chinuch*, Torah education, prior to his becoming a *bar mitzvah*.

If he has given his son the proper *chinuch* and later the child decides (on his own) to reject it, the father is not responsible. The *Rama* feels that no one can truly assert that he has given his son the complete proper *chinuch*. Issues always arise during a child's formative years which can necessitate augmenting a child's *chinuch*. Some parents take action; others do not. We may have the right intention, but this does not necessarily catalyze the right results. If a father cannot stand up and say with all certainty that he has given his son the right *chinuch*, then he cannot make the *brachah* with Hashem's Name, because it might be a *brachah l'vatalah*, in vain.

One thing is certain. As parents, we can and should see to it that we serve as the proper role models for our children. If we do this, if we make every effort to set the proper standard for our children to emulate, we will merit to derive Torah *nachas* from our children.