

"And you shall tell your son on that day saying: It is because of this that Hashem did for me when I went forth from Egypt. And it shall be for you a sign upon your hand... In order that the law of Hashem may be in your mouth." (13,8,9,10)

We may wonder why, particularly in the chapter dealing with consecrating the first-born, the "children" would question our spiritual practice. Indeed, there were other *mitzvos* which they could have found enigmatic. *Horav Nissan Alpert, z.l.*, offers a homiletic appreciation of this *pasuk*. The "children" questioned the need for the first-born to be consecrated from birth, to be immediately inducted in Hashem's service. Would it not have been more appropriate for them first to mature both emotionally and spiritually before choosing to serve Hashem? The response to this question is "*It shall be for you a sign upon your hand.*" As *Rashi* explains, this refers to the left hand which is weak.

Horav Alpert applies this concept as an analogy to the young child who is still spiritually weak and deficient. The educative process should begin when the child's mind is impressionable. This is the *Torah's* message. The spiritual development of a Jewish child begins immediately at birth and is an ongoing process which continues throughout his whole life. This process is a sublime endeavor in which parents are involved by consecrating their children, inducting them into a noble heritage, and charging them with carrying out Hashem's mandate. To paraphrase *Horav S. R. Hirsh, z.l.*, "*A youngster must have learned the ABC's of the moral life at home before the school begins to guide him to the primer and the blackboard of theoretical knowledge, which is much easier to acquire.*"

A child is born with a multiplicity of strengths and weaknesses, tendencies and aspirations, proclivities and impulses, which are already integrally etched into his little mind and heart. Any one of these attributes can develop either into a tower of life and happiness or into an abyss of curse and ruin. It depends greatly upon the moral training and guidance he receives at home and later on at school.

The most fortunate children are those whose parents care about their own spiritual and moral development. The respect we show for our own spiritual and moral concerns serves as the most effective incentive for our children to aspire to reach higher goals.