

He (Pharaoh) said to them, “Which ones are going...” Moshe said, “With our youngsters and with our elders we will go... because it is a festival of Hashem for us.” (10:8,9)

Pharaoh finally showed a crack in his armor. He was prepared to allow some Jews to leave, and he was willing to negotiate concerning who may leave and who must remain. Moshe *Rabbeinu* replied that he had no room for negotiation, no juncture for compromise. They were all leaving. Pharaoh countered, saying that he would allow the adult men to go. Moshe said it was insufficient, “We will go with everyone – from our youngsters to our elders.” They were at an impasse, with Moshe insisting on including the young children and even feeble elders, and Pharaoh contending that this dispensation was only available to the able-bodied men.

Clearly, the debate between Moshe and Pharaoh epitomizes the varied approaches to education and the wide chasm that existed between the Torah perspective and the pagan viewpoint expressed by Pharaoh – which has found purchase even in contemporary society. Pharaoh was of the opinion that service to the Almighty belonged in the domain of the male adults. Children had no place in the ritual service. Moshe argued that we Jews see everyone as a worthy member of the nation. Children who do not commence their Torah education at a young age will be hard-pressed to adhere to it when they get older. Furthermore, for the Jew, religion is a way of life. It sustains him. Children require religion at the earliest opportunity. It is their lifeline.

Horav Aizik Ausband, zl, explains the idea behind Moshe’s rejoinder, *Ki chag Hashem lanu*; “It is a festival of Hashem for us,” and its message to Pharaoh. Why *lanu*, for us? It would have sufficed to say that it is a holiday. He explains that parents do not take their children to a wedding of a close friend. They have no place there. If it is a family wedding, however, all family members are invited and expected to attend. This is what Moshe intimated to Pharaoh. *Maamad Har Sinai*, the Revelation at *Har Sinai* where we received the Torah, was no simple experience. It was a family wedding during which we were wed to the Torah. This was personal and, thus, mandatory requirement for all family members.

Torah *chinuch* begins as soon as a child is able to respond to instructions. For some, this begins at birth. The *Chazon Ish, zl*, related that from his very birth, his mother insisted on washing *netillas yadayim*, his hands, in the morning when he woke up. It was her deepest desire that, from his earliest infancy, he grow *b’kedushah u’b’taharah*, with sanctity and purity. This idea is supported by the *Ben Ish Chai*, who encouraged mothers to wash their infants’ hands. The *Brisker Rav, zl*, stated that for both boys and girls, Jewish education begins with washing their hands. In this manner, they are eventually inculcated with the notion that distancing oneself from *tumah*, ritual contamination, is a requisite for a Torah Jew.

It is related that when *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl*, was but a child of two-years-old, his father, the venerable *Steipler Gaon, zl*, would call him over and say, “*Nu*, jump up on the chair and tell me the

names of each *meseches*, tractate, in *Shas*, the *Talmud*.” The lad jumped up on the chair, and, in a sing song voice, to a tune that the *Steipler* sang to him when he put him to bed at night, he rattled off all of the *mesechtos*. As he said the last one (*Uktzin*), he added, “And now give me the candy!” My postscript: When a child is raised with such *chavivus*, love, for Torah; when he sees from his earliest moments of cogency what his parents value, it is no wonder that he attained such extraordinary proficiency in those *mesechtos*.

The *Ponovezher Rav*, *zl*, related an inspiring story concerning *Rebbetzin Meita Schlesinger*, a”h, wife of *Horav Yechiel Michel Schlesinger*, founder and *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Kol Torah*. When the *Rav* was yet a young man, he founded a *Kollel* (in Lithuania) for young Torah scholars who would dedicate their entire days and nights to Torah study. These were not ordinary young scholars. They were the cream of the *yeshivah* world who would one day go on to become *rabbanim* and *roshei yeshivah*. The idea of *kollel* was then a novelty, but, the *Ponovezher Rav* was no ordinary *gadol*. His innovative nature spurred many of his projects. His dedication to Hashem and love of Torah and *am Yisrael* are what catalyzed the merit for achieving Hashem's blessing.

One night, the *Rav* took a walk and noticed a young woman with a young child walking back and forth outside the *kollel*. Every once in a while, she would stop next to a window and listen to the sound of Torah emanating from the *kollel*. This went on for an hour. This (what appeared to be) strange behavior prompted the *Rav* to ask about this woman. Who was she? Perhaps she was in need of assistance? He walked over to her and asked, “Who are you, and why are you walking back and forth with your little boy by the *kollel*?”

The woman replied, “I am the wife of *Rav Yechiel Michel Schlesinger*, who sits by that window learning. I come here at night because my husband leaves the house early in the morning and returns late at night. We hardly see each other during the course of the day. My greatest pleasure is to stand outside ‘his’ window and listen to him learning. Also, I want my young son to hear and absorb the sounds of Torah.”

That little boy grew up to be *Horav Moshe Yehudah Schlesinger*, *Shlita*, who has served as *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Kol Torah* for over fifty years. As a background to the story, *Rebbetzin* Schlesinger hailed from an aristocratic family in Hamburg, Germany. She could have chosen to live a life of luxury and entitlement. She instead chose Torah, because her greatest love was reserved for Torah. She sought a husband who was like-minded. They left Germany for Lithuania where her husband would achieve his greatest success in Torah. Aware of all this, the *Rav* told the woman who was inspired by the *kol*, sound, of Torah study, “One day, your husband will establish a *yeshivah*. I will advise him to name it *Kol Torah* in your honor. In 1939, *Rav Yechiel Michel* left Europe together with his wife and their young family and emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*, where he founded *Yeshivas Kol Torah* – a fitting tribute to the dedication to, and love of, Torah that was the hallmark of his home.