



Toras Imecha
PESACH BOOKLET



THE FOUR SONS IN EACH OF US

כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה

Let's look at the four sons at the Seder. We've all known about them for years; the wise son, evil son, a simple son, and the son who doesn't know how to ask. My father explains at each seder that these aren't four distinct people sitting around some family's seder; rather these are characteristics that make up each of us sitting at all seders. We all have a bit of each type of child in us, and different people have different percentages of each of the four sons in their makeup. Why is this important to us now?

Within many families, regardless of whether the parents initiate this or not, the children see themselves in defined and labeled ways. "I'm the studious one. She's the funny one. He's the responsible one. She's the creative one." Maybe also with negative terms: "I'm the lazy one. He's the rebellious one. She's the messy one." The Jewish approach is to reject such labels. There aren't four different sons; each human being has aspects of all types! Sometimes I study, sometimes I laze around. Sometimes I act responsibly and sometimes I make messes. The Torah viewpoint is nuanced, and we have different specific responses given to each of the four sons because at different times we all need one or another of those answers. Sometimes we need a metaphorical punch in the teeth and sometimes we need someone else to take the lead and guide us through an issue we don't even recognize as problematic on our own. Each of us and each of our children are individuals made up of many components and qualities, and we can recognize and celebrate our nuances instead of defining and confining ourselves or others into narrow boxes.

I'd like to suggest that Pesach is a good time to look at our children and at ourselves with this viewpoint in mind. Often on Pesach we spend time with our extended families, and when adult siblings get together, sometimes a funny thing happens. Occasionally we find ourselves playing out our narrow roles that we assigned ourselves and our siblings years ago. It can be so frustrating to feel that you're a mature adult who's grown out of her childhood roles, and then you go back to your childhood home and find yourself reacting to each other the same way you did 10 years ago! Yes, you may have seen yourself or been seen as a certain way back then, but now we can put on the lenses of the Haggadah to appreciate that we aren't one way or another. Labels don't fit people! We are nuanced composites of many different attributes, that shine or glare in different ways at different times.

When we can appreciate the four sons in each of us and the four sons in each of our children and extended family members, we can let go of our old rigid confining ideas, and truly move into the freedom, cheirus of Pesach.

Nissan 5779 | April 2019

Dear friends,

Thank you so much for listening to Toras Imecha and joining me on this journey of growth and inspiration. I get such chizuk from preparing and sharing daily thoughts with you, and from your kind and powerful responses.

I hope you will find this compilation of Pesach thoughts uplifting and impactful over Yom Tov. As always, I share my daily thoughts with you for you to take what you like and ignore the rest. I believe Hashem gave each of us the insight and wisdom we need to raise our individual families and it is very possible that some of my reflections may not be right for you and your families. If there is anything you find helpful or inspiring, I am gratified.

I am very grateful to Sara Weingot for editing, and to Shira Gryll for designing and assembling this beautiful booklet. This was hardly the easiest season for them to volunteer their time, and I appreciate their efforts that made this possible.

HAVE A CHAG KASHER V'SAMEACH!

Warmly,

Rebecca Masinter

<https://anchor.fm/torasimecha>
chat.whatsapp.com/HQgSphHpAFxLBAAdNCOwjdO

SIBLING RIVALRY

אַרְמִי אוֹבֵד אָבִי

During Maggid we recount our national history and right at the beginning we say, "Arami Oved Avi" an Aramite destroyed my father", and we continue by saying that compared to Lavan HaArami, Pharaoh himself wasn't so terrible because "Paroh lo gazar elah al hazcharim", Paroh only decreed against the males, but Lavan "bikeish la'akor es hakol", Lavan, sought to uproot everything. Wow! Considering that the whole holiday of Pesach is about our redemption from the evil regime of Paroh's Egypt, isn't it a bit extreme to say that Lavan, Yaakov's father-in-law, who never killed a single Jew, was worse?

I once heard Rabbi Moshe Hauer of Baltimore give a beautiful explanation of Lavan's destruction of the Jewish nation. When Yaakov arrived at Lavan's house he met Rachel, who he was destined to marry and made plans with her to marry and build the Jewish nation. If that plan would have unfolded naturally, Rachel and Yaakov would have married and eventually, Rachel's eldest son, Yosef, would have been the firstborn of the shevatim. However, Lavan interfered, and switched Leah for Rachel, altering Jewish history irrevocably. Now, the first shevet was Leah's firstborn, Reuvein, and Yosef turned out to be the second to youngest. As a result of Lavan's interference, a rivalry sprang up between two close sisters, Rachel and Leah, and continued amongst their children. The rivalry between Leah's sons and Yosef culminated in Yosef's sale to Egypt, the enslavement of the whole Jewish people in Mitzrayim, and continued in an ongoing rift in the Jewish nation throughout history between Yehudah, Leah's son, and Yosef, Rachel's. Lavan introduced machlokes, division and strife to the Jewish nation. Sibling rivalry.

We've all seen sibling rivalry at work, and it's not pretty. When my children are in harmony with each other, the whole home seems peaceful and joyous and when they're not, it's much more difficult. What can we do to decrease sibling rivalry and increase the feelings of peace and harmony in our families? One thought to bear in mind as we head into a week of intense family togetherness time is to remember that siblings rival for and are in competition for attention from their parents. I find in my home that when I am present and connecting to each child, there is more peace between my children than when my attention is distracted from them and there doesn't seem to be enough of me to go around. Obviously, even once Pesach is here, there is a lot for us mothers to do, and we can't necessarily spend hours one-on-one with each child, but I don't think that is necessary. Simple actions like maintaining eye contact through a conversation with a child even when other kids are around lets that child know that you are focused on them and care about them. And when we get interrupted as we invariably will be, we can smile and say "excuse me" to the child we were talking to, and then apologize for the interruption, letting them know we value time with them and don't get distracted from them carelessly. We can invite one child at a time to come help us in the kitchen, or run an errand with us. The key is to look for opportunities to make eye contact, smile, and spend time with each child even amongst the general busyness and chaos of a full Yom Tov.

I wish you a beautiful Shabbos HaGadol and upcoming Pesach filled with family peace and harmony!

ROSH CHODESH NISSAN

יְכוֹל מֵרֵאשׁ חֹדֶשׁ

Rosh Chodesh, when the moon begins its cycle of growth once again, is a time infused with koach hahischadshus, the force of renewal. Day in and day out we get acclimated to life as it is, until Rosh Chodesh comes along to jolt us out of our ruts, to open us up to a new appreciation of our lives as they are as well as the possibility of growth and change that lies ahead. Particularly Rosh Chodesh Nissan, which is "Rosh Chadashim", the head of the months, is packed with the power of hishadshus, renewal.

A person who feels limited and constricted, stuck in their reality with no vision or hope for change is living a life of victimhood, very similar to that of a slave who truly has no control over his own life or choices. On the other hand, a person who lives with hishadshus, knows that he is always capable of growing and changing, and is aware that he has the power to improve his life. Carol Dweck has made this idea popular in her book Mindset which argues that people who have a growth mindset, and believe they can develop and strengthen their abilities and talents, are more successful in every area than people with fixed mindsets, those who believe their talents and beliefs are static or fixed.

Rosh Chodesh Nissan reminds us that just as the moon renews and grows from nothing to a full circle, we too have the power of growth and the ability to move out of our current realities into bigger and better ones.

In truth, that is the process of the seder as well. The Gemara in Pesachim says the essence of the mitzvah of the haggadah is to begin with denigration and conclude with praise. We begin by recalling our lowly status, our ancestors were idol-worshippers and we were slaves, and we progress along the steps of the seder until we end with the high points of hallel and nirtzah praising Hashem who took us out of slavery and brought us close to Him as His nation. On Seder night we reenact complete transformation; the first thing we eat is a lowly vegetable from below ground, and our last bite of food is the afikoman, symbolizing the holy korban Pesach. Rosh Chodesh Nisan and indeed all of Pesach inculcates in us a growth mindset, reminding us that transformation is our destiny and the power to renew and change is inherent in each one of us.

As mothers, our attitudes don't only affect us, they shape our children. When we live with hishadshus, we impart a growth mindset to our children which is crucial for their development. We want them to believe that they can work on themselves, grow, change and transcend their current limitations. When a child says, "I'm bad at this. I can't do it." they're in a fixed mindset. We can help them change their point of view to "This is hard, but when I keep working at it I can do it." A growth mindset is a Jewish mindset and Rosh Chodesh Nissan is the time to reconnect to the power of hishadshus, renewal and growth for ourselves and our children. I wish you a wonderful Shabbos, a good Chodesh, and a bracha that this month of Nissan should be a time of renewal and growth for all of us.

PESACH PARTNERSHIP

חג כשר ושמח

I don't know about you, but my head is firmly in Pesach space. We are 2 ½ weeks away from the seder and getting closer each day. From now until Pesach I would like to look at the Haggadah with you and share divrei Torah from the Haggadah that focus on our roles as mothers. In fact, if one of you volunteers to help, we can even compile my written transcripts with a nice title page into a Toras Imecha Pesach booklet that we can all print and have to enjoy and share over Yom Tov! If you would like to volunteer to make a pdf booklet with me, please reach out privately.

For today, I'll begin with Parshas Tazria as it begins with the laws of the yoledes, the woman who gives birth and move right into Pesach. Many of you know by now that one of my favorite parenting themes is that we are in partnership with Hashem as we raise our children. The Gemara says that each person has three parents, a mother, father, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu. As human parents, this means that we do our best to parent as well as we can, but at the same time we turn to Hashem and say, "This child is Your child. You love him infinitely, You have infinite power and ability to give him what he needs. I have done and will continue to do what I can, the rest is Yours." We do our part in raising children, but we also recognize that our part is limited and that Hashem's role in our children's lives supersedes ours in every way.

What does this have to do with Pesach? I know that there are articles all over the web with titles like, "Make Pesach in 10 hours!" and "Pesach Cleaning Made Easy!", but for almost all of us, preparing for Pesach is a time-consuming and intense job that takes many more than 10 hours or even days. In fact, if anyone has any OCD tendencies, we can be sure that they are probably coming to the fore right about now. You know that feeling where you clean and clean and then look at your toddler's shirt smeared with oatmeal and wonder how on earth you're going to do this?

Here's the thing. Just like Hashem helps us raise our children, He also helps us make Pesach. And yes, there comes a time when even though you can scrub something again or again, or you can triple-check or quadruple-check, we choose not to. We turn to Hashem and say, exactly as we do about our children, "Hashem, I have done my part. I have tried hard to do everything as I should, and now I can't do anymore. From now on it's up to You to please grant us a chag kasher v'sameach."

(Please note that I am not speaking here as a halachic authority or think that I am suggesting that we don't need to do the basic halachic requirements - I'm talking to all of you, who like me, take Pesach cleaning very seriously, but also recognize that we can't possibly do it until we are certain it's perfect and at some point we have to turn it over to Hashem.)

Preparing Pesach and parenting are both partnerships that we share with Hashem. I wish you much hatzlacha as you prepare for Pesach and may you feel Hashem's assistance along the way.

I wish you a beautiful Shabbos HaGadol and upcoming Pesach filled with family peace and harmony!

YOICHEVED & MIRIAM

Among all the Jewish women who were instrumental in bringing the redemption from Mitzrayim, two stand out. Yocheved and Miriam - Yocheved the mother of Moshe Rabeinu, and Miriam, his sister. These were distinguished women, leaders of all the Jewish women in that generation, and Miriam at least, continued to play a prominent role as a prophetess and leader over the next 40 years of Jewish life.

With all that being said, isn't it funny that when the Torah tells us the pivotal story of when they defied Paroah's command to them as the Jewish midwives to kill the baby boys, the Torah doesn't use their proper names, but rather introduces them as Shifra and Puah. These ladies defied the king's decree and risked death to bring Jewish children into the world. They were both instrumental in bringing Moshe Rabeinu to the Jewish nation. They were the matriarchs of Jewish kings and priests. They were each married to leaders of the Jewish nation. We know their real names, yet the Torah introduces them to us as Shifra and Puah. Why?

Rashi of course tells us that their names here describe the roles they played as they cared for newborn babies. Shifra, who was Yocheved, comes from the word "l'shaper" to beautify describing her role in cleaning and prettifying the babies. Puah was Miriam, and her name means to coo or speak gently to babies, Rashi says, Puah means to whisper soothingly to babies as women do to comfort a crying child.

Why, with all their noteworthy accomplishments, are they immortalized in the Torah for rubbing oils into babies' skin and murmuring soft words in babies' ears? Surely they should be known for much more than that! Or, maybe that is just the point. Maybe nurturing young children, giving them emotional security and love, is just the greatest accomplishment there is. Maybe there really is no greater honor for these women than being known to eternity as nurturers and women who cared for Jewish children.

We are all in the busiest stretch of the year for Jewish women and we have many important task to accomplish. Sometimes we may be tempted to rush through our time with our children as we tuck them into bed or hang out in the evening, because after all, we have so much else we need to do! Maybe now is a good time to remind ourselves of Shifra and Puah; distinguished ladies with many important roles, yet we know them as Shifra and Puah, because caring for, nurturing, talking to our children, is really the most important job of all.

Have a wonderful day!

A HISTORY OF RELATIONSHIP

פרשת וארא

Good morning. In this week's Parsha, Parshas Va'eira, Hashem appears to Moshe to send him on a mission to speak to Bnai Yisrael and introduce Hashem to the Jews as the One who will redeem them from the slavery of Egypt, and ultimately take them to be His nation, and lead them to the land of Israel that he promised to the Avos. However, before Moshe can get to that part, Hashem gives His introduction: "I appeared to the Avos, to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and I made promises to them, and I made a covenant with them to give them the land they dwelled in..." Why does the Jewish nation need a history lesson now? Why can't Moshe just say, "Hashem appeared to me and He will redeem you!"

I think that perhaps Hashem is giving Bnai Yisrael an important message: He's saying, "I know you don't really know me yet very well, and we don't have much of a relationship as of now, and a lot is about to start happening very dramatically. You may feel unsure about all of this and about Me, but here's the thing: I had a close relationship, a relationship and a binding covenant, with your grandparents. We have a strong history together and whether or not you realize it on your own yet, we have an intact and foundational relationship that goes back generations. Everything that will come, the Makos, Yetzias Mitzrayim, the splitting of the Yam Suf, and settling the land of Israel is building on the relationship I forged with your fathers and will forge directly with you, "U'lakhti eschem li l'am, v'hayisi lachem Leilokim", "I will take you as mine for a nation and I will be your God".

When parenting our children, they need to know that we have a deep relationship with them before we do things together, before we ask things of them, and before we try to teach them. Before any parenting can happen, our children need to feel that they are in an intimate, eternal relationship with us, their parents.

How can we do this today? For today, let's follow Hashem's example and share with our children the history of our love for them from the beginning. Show them baby pictures of you holding them tight, tell them how happy you were at their birth, and share with them, (even your teenagers!) the adorable things they used to say and the activities you used to share together when they were little. We need our kids to know that our commitment to our relationship with them began way back at the beginning and will continue forever just as Hashem introduced Himself to us with the same information.

PARSHA BO

והגדת לבנך

Our Parsha, Bo, is the parsha of chinuch! Just look at the repeating theme:

1. Perek Yud, passuk beis, "So that you may tell in the ears of your son and your son's son that which I did in Egypt..."
2. Perek yud-beis, passuk kaf-vav - "and it will be that when your children say to you, "what is this service to you?" You shall say, "it is a Pesach offering to Hashem..."
3. Perek yud-gimmel, passuk ches, "And you shall tell your son on that day..."
4. Yud-gimmel, yud-dalet, "And it will be when your son will ask you, "what is this" and you will say to him..."
5. Karban Pesach has to be done each family together
6. Pidyon HaBen - an opportunity to reclaim your son as your own to have a relationship with him.

Two of the four sons at the Pesach seder are in this Parsha. Not students or disciples, but children!

I think it's worth us remembering that we, parents and grandparents, have the obligation and intrinsic power to teach our children what Hashem has done for us, and to create the relationship so that they will know Hashem as their God, "v'yidatem ki ani Hashem".

This is not a thought just for homeschoolers! Although many of us delegate many aspects of education to schools to teach our kids, we have to remember that the buck stops with us. We have the obligation to wow our children with the great miracles Hashem did for us and equally so, we have the ability to do so. Hashem doesn't give us obligations we can't fulfil. So if this mitzva is on parents, you can be sure that parents are the ones who can best do it. Obviously, we are often most aware of this on Pesach, but we can and should talk all year to our children about what kindnesses Hashem does for us, from the great miracles in Mitzrayim, to the day to days ones like opening up a convenient parking spot for us.

The Toldos Adam, R'Yehoshua of Ostrova, shares a beautiful thought on the passuk in this Parsha: (yud - beis)

He shares that if we work at instilling awareness of the greatness of Hashem in our children and grandchildren, then as the passuk literally states, we ourselves, will rise to higher and higher levels in our knowledge of Hashem, "and you will know that I am Hashem".

What a motivator!

MIRIAM'S EMUNAH

שביעי של פסח

In Parshah, B'shalach, Miriam leads the Jewish women in song after kriyas yam suf. Actually, if you look at the pesukim closely, she started while still in the middle of the yam suf! And it wasn't just singing: these women had musical instruments ready for just this moment!

Imagine if you have to leave your home, not an apartment you've been in for a few months, but a home you and your family have lived in for over 200 years! You are in a huge rush - so huge that the dough you've just finished kneading has no time to rise. What will you take with you? I can think of many things I would want to take, and honestly, musical instruments don't even make the it onto the top 20! Why did the women take instruments? Rashi tells us they were so sure Hashem would perform miracles for them and they would want to sing their thanks, so they prepared accordingly. Amazing, isn't it?

But let's look at Miriam's life a little more closely. This isn't the first time we've heard of her.

As a young child, Miriam saw the pain and distress of the Jewish people which had led to husbands and wives separating, and we're told she saw that there will be a redemption and there will be a redeemer born, and convinced her father that Jewish couples had to continue building for that future even while today looked dark.

When Moshe was born, the whole house filled with light. Everyone knew he was special. Yet when it came time for him to be put in the river, who is the only one who stayed with him to watch and see what would become of him? Miriam, the person who excelled at seeing a glorious future even in the darkest moments.

The women singing shira with their drums and flutes, led by Miriam, were exemplifying emunah - looking with confidence into the future and being sure that the future was one of glorious redemption.

This is the legacy we have inherited and this is the one we need as we raise our children. It can be easy to get stuck in the moment with our children and feel frustrated at whatever difficult stage we are currently dealing with. In truth though, we need to look into the future with emunah, and have the vision and faith to see our children in the future as adults, where the exact same qualities that are so exasperating right now, can be their greatest strengths.

My mother often tells of an interview she read with Natan Sharansky's mother, where she shared that as a child he was so stubborn and strong-willed that he would gladly remain in the corner all day instead of apologizing for whatever he had done. I'm sure that was incredibly frustrating for his mother - we've all dealt with stubbornness and it isn't easy. Imagine though if his mother would have known how his stubbornness would serve him and the Jewish people as an adult over 9 years in Soviet prisons. Emunah requires us to look beyond the here and now and see the potential for the future.

This is true both in viewing our children's inherent qualities and also to keep in mind as we make decisions about how to raise them. It's crucial that we look beyond the short term and envision the beautiful future which will come from each child and each situation. This is the gift of emunah with which we have been blessed.

GRANDPARENTS & GRANDCHILDREN

Yesterday, the second of Nissan, was the yahrtzeit of my grandmother, Bina Bayla bas Dov Beryl. When I was a child I was at Pesach sederim with both my grandparents multiple times, and as an adult, after my grandmother passed away, I had the privilege of hosting my grandfather at my seder table once, giving my children the opportunity to share seder with their great-grandfather. This is not unique. Across the Jewish world, observant and non-observant, multiple generations of families gather together for the Pesach seder. In fact, it is remarkable to think about how few consecutive sederim with grandparents and grandchildren together it takes for us to go back to Yetzias Mitzrayim. If you calculate a 75 year age gap at a seder between the family patriarch or matriarch and the youngest participant, you only need 44 such sederim to arrive at the original Korban Pesach.

Grandparents play an important role in families and in our nation. The Gemara says whoever teaches his grandchild Torah, it is as if he stood at Sinai. Our mesorah depends on parents and grandparents faithfully transmitting what they learned from their parents and grandparents to their descendants. The Ramban states this relationship between generations is the basis for the continuation of the Jewish people!

I'd like to add that although not all of us may have had grandparents able to transmit a mesorah of Torah learning to us, there is another element of mesorah that all grandparents give through their unconditional love and the commitment they demonstrate as they live Jewish lives. I actually don't have memories of my grandmother, Bina Bayla, teaching me Torah through lectures, (though she did teach me how to cook Pesach lukshen!), but I do remember the feeling I got from her, that only a grandparent can give of, absolute unconditional love. A parent-child relationship is often more complicated than a grandparent's. A grandparent doesn't have to discipline, show disappointment, or correct a child; he can just radiate love.

Why is that important?

Several times we've discussed that the basis for a child's relationship to Hashem is his early relationship with his parents, but in truth it's grandparents as well. When a child feels secure in the love of his grandparents, he can begin to also feel secure in Hashem's love.

So, whether we had the privilege of a relationship with our own grandparents, or whether we are in the stage of being grandparents, today let's appreciate the gifts of grandparents! Especially as we approach Pesach, a time when transmitting the mesorah is the mitzvah of the day, we can appreciate the commitment and devotion of all Jewish parents and grandparents who have faithfully shared with their descendants the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, back through 44 multi-generational sederim all the way back to the Exodus.

EXPANDING OUR FAMILIES

כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח

Pesach is a time for family. In Mitzrayim, the Korban Pesach was eaten family by family, and during the final plague the malach hamaves passed over Jewish homes to spare the first-borns, family by family. At the same time, Pesach is a time that unites the Jewish people as a whole, and reminds us that we are in fact a single family. We remember that we are united with all Jews throughout history as we recall "ela she'b'chol dor v'dor omdim aleinu l'chaloseinu," in each generation enemies rise against us, each generation relives, to some degree, the suffering and redemption of Mitzrayim. We put ourselves back in the role of our ancestors, "b'chol dor v'dor chayav adam liros es atzmo", we have to view ourselves as if we were part of that initial generation who left Egypt. We are united with our whole Jewish family throughout time.

Pesach also unites us with our Jewish family throughout space, the other Jews of our generation, reminding us that we are one family as we invite others to join our sedarim, "kol dichfin yaysay v'yaychol", "all who are hungry, come and eat!". As we sit with our close family, we extend invitations and are joined by extended family, Jews from all over.

Over the years, as we have been fortunate to host many people for sedarim, Yom Tov, and Shabbos meals, many of our guests have become part of our extended family, and I have discovered that when I invite other Jews into my home to join my family, our guests become an extended family for my children. Over time, different guests bond with different children, providing another source of love, acceptance, and attention for them. Sometimes it does take a village to raise a child and we create that village for our children by widening the circle of people who are in our homes and in our lives. When we invite guests into our homes, we aren't only giving them a sense of family and connection to us, but also our guests provide a sense of extended family and connection to us and our children.

This Pesach, if you are privileged to host guests or if you are fortunate to be a guest in other families' homes, remember that hosting isn't just giving, being a guest isn't just receiving; rather all of us together give and receive to each other by joining together as we expand our circles of family to encompass more and more of Klal Yisroel. By opening our homes, we widen our circle of family; we touch other's hearts and allow them to touch ours' and our children's. We give and receive to each other, building connections, unity and love amongst the Jewish people, our family.

DIFFERENTIATED EDUCATION

ואפילו כלנו חכמים, כלנו נבונים...
מצוה עלינו לספר

Differentiated instruction is a buzzword in education. Teachers are trained to design their lessons and assessments with a wide variety of different methods and materials so that each child, with his or her own unique learning modality and background, can best absorb and process the new material.

Of course, Jewish parents and educators have known about differentiated instruction for millennia. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler describes the Haggadah as the tool we use to fulfill the mitzvah of "V'higadta l'vincha", 'you shall tell your son'. As such, it is the best teaching textbook for how to reach each child, with many differentiated ways of doing so.

For example, the Haggadah contains the traditional question and answer format that works well for some students; "Ma Nishtana", why is this night different? The Haggadah also stimulates curiosity and motivation to learn. We do things differently at the seder than we do at any other time so that our children will wonder and ask on their own. We use concrete items for tactile or visual learners: "this matzah which we eat", "this maror..." We also use imaginative, creative methods by stressing that we each have to feel as if we, personally, had gone out of Egypt. Rav Dessler goes on to list other educational methods rooted

in the Haggadah, as the haggadah is the handbook for Jewish education.

In just a few short weeks we will be sitting at the Seder, with our families. We will go through the haggadah and use all these various approaches to reach each one of our own and our children's hearts with the story of the geulah, redemption from Egypt. And here's a possible reality. Despite the differentiated instruction of the Haggada, one of our kids may be asleep, another may be in another room reading, a third may be spacing out at the table. We may look around the table at our children and wonder if we are failing in this crucial night of chinuch, Jewish education!

So here's some reassurance for today. As much as the Seder night is the classic night of "V'higadta L'vincha" with all the differentiated instruction found in the Haggadah, chinuch doesn't happen one night out of 365. Firstly, we have at least a week of Pesach, with many family meals and opportunities for learning of all types. This is not a one-chance-only event. Even if we don't feel we've reached a child this year, there is, G-d willing, next year, and the year after.

However, I'd like to suggest that even more important than that, is knowing that by changing ourselves we change our children! If we are alert and engaged at the Seder, if we use this Pesach to internalize the growth process of the Exodus, if we let our own hearts be touched by the many differentiated ways of learning at the Seder, we are impacting our children through our own transformation. In a mysterious, miraculous way, parents actions for themselves impact their children. The Pesach seder isn't just for our children, we can and should use it for our growth as well, and a beautiful by-product of that will, IY"H be, the growth of our children. Rav Dessler finishes his discussion by sharing that as the Haggadah says, "even if we were all people of wisdom, understanding, experience, and knowledge of the Torah" we would still be obligated to tell about Yetzias Mitzrayim, because the Seder isn't about imparting information to a brain. We need so many educational approaches because we're trying to touch hearts, not brains. We each need to let the Seder speak to our hearts, to open ourselves up to the kindnesses of Hashem, and move through our own personal redemptions, and by doing so, we also impact our children.

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL AT ONCE

A short thought for a short Friday...

Sometimes I look at all the time and energy I'm putting into my children and wonder what I could accomplish if I were using that in another way. Would I have a stronger career? Would I be able to do more chesed? Accomplish great things?

I get heartened though from this Parsha. The Torah tells us the ages of Moshe and Aharon when they stood before Paroh. Moshe was 80 and Aharon was 83. Maybe in their 30's, 50's, who knows, Moshe and Aharon also wondered what they were accomplishing? Their major life's mission didn't even begin until they were old men. But then, look how much they accomplished over the next 40 years!

I know with all my heart that every moment I dedicate to my children and family at this point is invaluable and the fulfilment of the mission I believe I have been granted in this world. However, with God's help, I, and you too, will have many years ahead of us, when our children are no longer home with us, when we too, will be able to apply our energies into new directions. The choices we make today, when our children are home, don't limit us forever. They are for this time period, and God willing, we will have time afterwards to pursue other opportunities in other areas. Probably, even well before we hit 80!

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

PARSHA BO: EVERYONE GOES

Welcome. In this week's Parsha, Bo, Paroh has finally had enough. After the hail in last week's parshah and the warning of locusts in the beginning of this week's Parsha, Paroh is ready to let us go. He pauses though to check with Moshe who really has to leave. After all, he was told we're going to offer sacrifices to our God, and surely, only adult men will be doing that. Everyone else can stay in Egypt, right?

No. Moshe answers: "Binureinu uvizkaineinu nelech, B'vaneiunu uvivnoseinu." The young, the old, the sons, and the daughters all have to come, because "Chag Hashem Lanu", this is a holiday of our God. The Kli Yakar shares with us that if we had only been going to offer korbanos, then yes, only the men could have done it, but this is a celebration, a holiday, and a person can't joyously celebrate a chag without every member of his family present. It's a beautiful idea. Each member of our families, from the youngest to the oldest, is necessary for us to have true simcha.

The word for congregation, Kahal, is made up of a Kuf, Hey, and Lamed, the gematriyas of which are 100, 5, and 30. All ages and stages are necessary and intrinsic to Klal Yisrael.

There are times that we don't always feel this reality. There are certainly times when I feel that certain occasions would be more joyous or less stressful with only a select group of my family! But that's not the Torah way to think. The Torah is teaching us to focus on the absolutely necessary contribution of each member of our family to our joy, to our simcha, and to the structure of Klal Yisroel. We may need to consciously remind ourselves of this at certain times, and that's okay, because we all recognize the truth of this fundamental idea, it's only at certain moments that it may get clouded.

Especially as our children get older, develop their own interests, and go away for yeshiva or school, they may think that their presence is no longer integral to the family. It is vital that we tell each of our children, whether they're home or not, how important they are to the family and how much we and the rest of the family treasure the time that they are home with us.

This Shabbos, let's try to verbally express our love for and our delight in each child in our families. We know how much they contribute to our joy, but unless we tell them directly, they may not know. Let's tell them! Good Shabbos.

PAROH & B'CHIRA

Thank you for joining me today. In this Parsha we encounter the age old question of how can Hashem punish Paroh with further makkos when Hashem is the one hardening his heart so as not to let the Jewish people go? How can he be punished when he had no choice? This is a classic question and we've all heard various answers. I'd like to consider one basic answer the Rambam teaches us and its ramifications for us as mothers.

The Rambam says that in the beginning of course Paroh had free will. In fact, during the first 5 makkos the Torah doesn't say Hashem hardened Paroh's heart. Paroh hardened his own heart. It's only after multiple hardenings of his own heart that he moved far enough into evil that Hashem took over the job and began hardening his heart. He began with free will, but through his actions evolved into someone who lost his power of choice.

How is this relevant to us?

Well, on a much smaller scale than Paroh, I know that there are actions I take, sometimes willingly, sometimes not, that can lead me into situations where I have less control over the way I act. For example, after a sleepless night, after skipping a healthy meal, I sometimes don't have the wherewithal to respond to tough situations the way I would ideally choose to do so.

If that is how I feel sometimes, how much closer are my children to that state of no free will. Sometimes when I go to the store late at night and see mothers dragging a screaming toddler around at 10:30 PM, I feel pity for the child who truly has no control over her behavior at that time. It's just too late and she's too tired, she's lost her free will.

With some thought we can identify for each of our children what are the factors that lead up to them losing their free will. I don't think it's the same for each person, and certainly some children get to that point of loss of control much more easily than others. Once we've identified what stressors contribute to our children reaching the point of no self-control, we can try to limit those and when they're unavoidable, build in ways for our child to rest, or recoup as early as possible.

One last point that I have found helpful to remember: when a child has lost control, you cannot reason with them, consequences or punishments will often have no effect, and no parenting can effectively take place at that time. What we can do is provide stability, unwavering love, support, and calmness, while we try to give them time and space to get back in control of themselves.

PARSHA BO: NOT ALONE

Parshas Bo begins with Hashem telling Moshe, "Bo el Paroh," "come to Paroh". The age old question is asked, why say "come to Paroh" instead of "Go to Paroh". Surely, "Go to Paroh" is what we expect to hear!

The classic answer is that Hashem is telling Moshe and all leaders of the Jewish people after him, "You are not alone. I will be right there in the throne room as you approach, supporting you and guiding you. I'm not sending you on a mission with the word "go", I am calling you to come close to me as you fulfil this mission, "come".

Sometimes we bear the responsibility of parenting until it feels like a burden on our shoulders. Guess what? There are three partners in every child; a father, a mother, and Hashem. Hashem's role doesn't end at birth. He remains part of the parenting triumvirate. The really good news is that it is not an equal 3 way split. His role in parenting your child is infinitely more powerful, loving and effective than yours. When the job seems too large, when you don't know what to do next, when you're disappointed with yourself as a mother, turn to Him. Ask Him for help – both general and specific. He is with you, and present as your partner as you mother. The burden is not ours.

This thought is the one that gives me the most chizuk as I raise my children. I know without a doubt that I don't have the knowledge to know what is best for my kids or the power to give it to them, but Hashem does. In a very real and practical way, I turn to Hashem and ask Him to show me what He wants me to do for my child next. I try to let go of feeling overwhelmed or confused by lifting the burden off my back and putting it where it belongs. I tell Him that I don't know what the right thing is, but I want to do His will as we together parent my children, and ask that He please show me what He wants me to do. These few moments of prayer reorient me so that I don't expect more from myself than I can give, they relax me as I release a burden that was never mine to bear, and they give me peace as I deeply accept that Hashem is running the world and caring for my child and myself.

We can all take a moment during the day to say a tefila like this one:

Hashem, I know that you love my child and me very much. I know that my child and I are both your children. I need your guidance to parent my child because I can't do it alone. Please care for my child and for me. Help us both feel your love and guidance. Please show me the next right thing for me to do. Please help me figure out how to be a reflection of you as I mother my child.

Hashem doesn't send leaders on missions alone. He is right there with us. All we need to do is be aware of it and ask for His help.

ATTITUDES

ואילו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את
אבותינו, הרי אנו ובנינו...משעבדים...

The Hagadah makes an astounding statement. We read at the seder, that if Hashem had not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, then we, and our children, and our grandchildren would still be enslaved to Paroh in Mitzrayim. What? How many of us really think that could be true? After all, human rights became a world-wide issue in the 1800's, and slaves around the world were freed. Surely, we would have been freed along with slaves around the world. Right?

Well, it turns out isn't so simple. You see, it isn't so difficult to free people's bodies, but it is unbelievably difficult to free people's minds. Attitudes are subtle yet powerful things and they get transmitted from generation to generation often without any of the people involved aware that they are inheriting and transmitting them! What Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for us, that no human emancipator could ever have done, was change our hearts and attitudes from enslaved people, to a nation that is truly free to live by Hashem's principles, not emotionally or spiritually subservient to any other human being. Without Hashem redeeming us, our bodies may eventually have been freed, but not our souls. Only a great miracle could transform our old attitudes of enslavement to new hearts of free people.

In our homes, our children absorb our attitudes, those we're aware of and those we're not, and they subconsciously internalize them as their own. One of the ways we can try to ensure that our healthy, positive attitudes are explicit in our home is to express our values out loud regularly and frequently. For example, I know my children know that I get tired and more stressed as we get closer to Pesach kashering day. Do they also know how much I love cleaning for Pesach? Do they know how excited I am? They may only know if I make sure to tell them, "I know I'm really tired tonight, but I'm so excited! I can't wait to kasher and start cooking for Pesach!"

We have many other values that we hold dear and want to transmit to our children. Of course they pick up so much by osmosis, but we can and should be proactive by sharing our underlying values and healthy attitudes out loud with our children. Let's tell them our core attitudes and beliefs about Hashem, Torah, marriage, children, health, money, and more. It truly is a miracle of Pesach that we were spiritually redeemed from attitudes of limitations and bondage; let's take advantage of that miracle and continue transmitting the values of our nation through the generations.

Have a chag kasher v'sameach!

A PARENT'S VOICE JUST RIGHT

There is a beautiful medrash describing Moshe Rabeinu's first encounter with Hashem at the burning bush. Hashem wanted to call out to Moshe to give him instructions to redeem the Jewish people out of the Egyptian enslavement, but Hashem had options of how to reveal Himself to Moshe. The medrash describes that Hashem didn't want to address Moshe in a strong forceful voice because it may frighten and deter Moshe from approaching. Neither did Hashem want to use a soft voice, because as a first-time prophet, Moshe may not hear it or recognize it for what it is. Do you know what Hashem determined was the perfect voice to address Moshe Rabeinu? The voice of Amram, his father.

In fact, if you look at the pesukim, the medrash fits right in. Moshe heard his father's voice, and called, "Father?". Hashem's reply was, "No, not your father, but the God of your father" - Anochi Elokei Avicha... Take a minute to reflect on this. The absolutely perfect voice to get someone's attention is... his parent's. Hashem himself first appeared to Moshe in the voice of his father, because that is the perfect voice - not too formidable that may cause him to shudder and turn away, and not too weak and ineffective that may cause him to ignore the message. A parent's voice - just right!

A Wall Street Journal article recently published was titled, "Meet Echo - My New Co-Parent". In it, the author, Alexandra Samuel, describes how much smoother her home operates now that she uses Echo as her stand-in voice when giving instructions to her children. Here is what she says: The secret is Echo's nonjudgmental tone. Unlike a human parent, these voice-controlled assistants - which we've put in all the bedrooms - don't get angry or frustrated when a child fails to listen, making them the ideal backup for parents who may be weary of their admonitions going unheeded."

Wow! What a lost opportunity for the author and her children. Instead of the parent working to modulate her reactions, becoming less angry and frustrated, the parent just outsources instructions to a machine, thereby losing a chance to connect with her children!

Communication is the tool Hashem put in the world to build relationships and connection. My father, Rabbi Daniel Lapin, recently asked, "how did Bnai Yisrael go from a state of disunity and arguments as demonstrated by the two Jewish men fighting that Moshe encountered in the beginning of Shmos, to a united nation that stood at Har Sinai "k'ish echad b'lev echad", like one man with one heart? The answer is through communication. Pesach is all about talking. The Arizal explained that Pesach is made up of the two words, "Pe Sach" a talking mouth. The Gemara in Pesachim says that matzah is called "lechem oni" the bread of answers, because it is the bread over which we answer questions at the seder. Pesach itself, and Shavuot, which is completely connected to it, are the only two holidays when we are required to talk! We have to say, "Pesach, Matza, Maror". We have to tell the story of yetzias Mitzrayim and ask questions about it. Why is there so much talking as part of Pesach? Because communication is Hashem's tool to build unity. Talking to each other brings us closer to each other.

How beautiful and appropriate then, that Hashem chose the voice of a parent to address Moshe. The beginning of Moshe's relationship with Hashem sprouted out of his connection and relationship with his father.

We don't want to program a machine to talk to our children for us. We want to talk to them and we want to listen to them, because it is through our conversations that we become connected and that our relationships deepen.

Pesach is the holiday of "V'higadta l'vincha", we have the mitzva to talk to our children on Pesach, and through that conversation we also build our relationship and connection with them which is what allows us to pass on the mesorah through the generations, which is the essence of Pesach!

This Yom Tov, let's remember that we have the absolutely perfectly modulated voice to reach our children and connect to them. There is no one else in the world who has the potential we have inherent in our very voices to forge relationships with our children. When we share with them the story of yetzias Mitzrayim, we are continuing the conversation Hashem had over 3000 years ago, with Moshe in the voice of his father. Have a beautiful day!

