

Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Shemot- "Striving for Greatness"

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In this week's parsha, as we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu as a child, we find that there is much to learn from- even what seem to be inconsequential details about his growing up.

After Moshe is retrieved from the Nile by Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, the Torah (2:7) tells us that Moshe's sister, Miriam, approaches Batya and offers to help her find an Israelite woman to nurse the baby. In giving context to this seemingly random offer, Rashi quotes the Gemara Sotah 12b that explains that after finding Moshe in the Nile, Batya took him to numerous Egyptian women to feed, and Moshe refused to eat from them. Miriam therefore offers to take him to one of the Israelite women, ultimately allowing him to be fed and nourished by his own mother, Yocheved, during his early years. The Gemara then explains that the reason Moshe refused to eat from the Egyptian women is because of who Moshe was destined to become- that the mouth that is destined to speak with shechina could not nurse from a non-Jewish woman, and thereby receive the impurity that she consumed. Such a mouth could only nurse from a Jewish woman, who kept herself to a higher standard.

In his commentary on the Torah Emes L'yaakov, Rav Yaacov Kamenetzky points out that we learn a practical halacha from this Gemara- the Rama in Yoreh Deah 81:7 paskens that a Jewish baby should not nurse from a non-Jewish woman whenever there is an option to nurse from a Jewish woman. The Gr"a there quotes some who suggest that the source for this halacha is the story of Moshe Rabbeinu. However, asks Reb Yaacov, how could the story of Moshe Rabbeinu be the source for this halacha? After all, as the Gemara explains so beautifully, the specific reason why Moshe was not allowed to nurse from a non-Jewish woman was because he was someone who literally spoke to G-d, because of his greatness- how can we infer from him to apply the same halacha to all other Jewish babies?

Reb Yaacov answers beautifully that we learn from here an important lesson in chinuch- that we have to believe that each of our children has the ability to achieve greatness. From the moment that they are infants, and throughout their lives, we must view our children as if they have the potential to reach the highest levels of spirituality and kedusha, perhaps even close to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu- and therefore treat them accordingly. We must realize that we will never know the tremendous heights that they may achieve.

I believe this message is one that is extremely relevant and poignant for us as parents. We must believe- and instill within our children- a sense of the endless potential of what they can achieve in life. Our children, each in their own way, have the ability to attain greatness- and it is our responsibility to inculcate that sense of tremendous opportunity within each of them as they grow up.

[new addition: I recently listened to a panel discussion on parenting with Charlie Harary, and he was asked to reflect upon his experience in the business world, and what lessons from successful companies could be helpful in the world of parenting as well. He explained beautifully that one major factor that defines successful companies is their strive for greatness- they are always looking to become better, to do things better, to become great. They don't get disappointed/upset by any failure or bumps in the

road, they simply pick themselves up and continue working towards greatness. Sometimes we have kids, especially teens, that get bogged down by their failures or mistakes, and they pretty much give up on who they are or can become because of it. We need to instill within them the idea of **שבוע יפול צדיק וקם** and that you can always get back up, and continue striving for greatness.]

Of course, we must be extremely careful that this striving for greatness does not lead to undue stress or pressure. We also need to make sure that our children grow up with a healthy sense of humility, and understand their place within the greater Jewish community, and world in general.

However, the message we learn from baby Moshe is that already from a young age we must to instill within our children, and within ourselves, a sense of their tremendous potential, and a passion for them to realize that potential. It is imperative that our children grow up with a deep understanding of the greatness that lies within them, and thereby the greatness that they can bring to the world.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom!