



## TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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# The Scent of Mesorah: From Our Frying Pan to Theirs

Walking through the streets of Israel from Rosh Chodesh Kislev onward, it's impossible to miss the sufganiyot — they appear everywhere: in makolets, bakeries, and even gas stations. As Chanukah approaches, the air itself seems to change; the scent of sizzling latkes drifts from home to home, filling the streets with the unmistakable aroma of the chag.

We often think of these minhagim as fun, nostalgic, and delicious, but perhaps not particularly significant. Yet already in the 1100s, **Rabbeinu Maimon ben Yosef** — the Rambam's father — cautioned us not to take these customs lightly. He explains that all such practices, from eating a sheep's head on Rosh Hashanah to preparing symbolic holiday foods, are filled with deep meaning.

Those who keep them, he writes, are *zerizim u'mishtadlim* — people brimming with energy and enthusiasm for mitzvot. These seemingly small acts form part of the very foundation of Jewish life. It is about them that the pasuk in Mishlei teaches: “אַל־תַּטֵּשׁ” “תּוֹרַת אִמְךָ” — “Do not abandon the Torah of your mother.”

This idea — that our customs and foods carry spiritual depth — is beautifully expanded upon by **Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik**. In his *Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne*, he explains that there are two kinds of *mesorah*. The first is *Mussar Avicha* — the transmission of halacha and Torah knowledge from one generation to the next. The second, equally vital, is *Torat Imecha* — the passing down of the warmth, flavor, and emotional experience of Judaism. He writes of his own mother: “Most of all, I learned from her that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience. She taught me that there is a flavor, a scent, and warmth to mitzvot.”

Modern research, interestingly, supports this spiritual truth. Studies have shown that smells — especially those connected to food — are powerful triggers of memory and emotion. Our sense of smell is closely

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linked to the amygdala, the part of the brain responsible for emotion, and the hippocampus, which governs memory formation.

Perhaps this explains why every *chag* has its own tastes and scents that define its spirit: the aroma of frying latkes and sufganiyot on Chanukah, the scent of challah and kugel for Shabbat, the *simanim* of Rosh Hashanah, the familiar dishes of Pesach. Each connects us to the essence of the day and awakens memories and emotions that bind us to Torah and mitzvot.

Recognizing this, we can understand that our role as parents goes far beyond teaching the story of Chanukah or the halachot of lighting candles. We are also charged with igniting joy, excitement, and emotional connection in our children. Whether it's decorating the house with colorful streamers and Chanukah artwork, playing lively games of dreidel or Chanukah Jeopardy, or cooking feasts of latkes, sufganiyot, and of course, giving Chanukah gelt — through these experiences, we help our children build a living connection to Torah, mitzvot, and Hashem.

And so, as we mix, fry, or bake, we can do so with *kavana* — that the spiritual messages and meaning of each *chag* should be felt in the food itself and passed on to those who will taste and remember. ■

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