



## TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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# Planting Seeds: Parenting Lessons from Moshe's Infancy

In this week's parsha, Parshat Shemot, we meet Miriam, who was standing watch by the water, waiting to see what would become of her baby brother, Moshe:

וַתָּתַחַז אֶחָתוֹ מִרְחַק לְדֹעה מָה יַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ

*"And his sister stood from afar, to see what would be done to him."* (Shemot 2:4) Miriam waited to see that Moshe would survive physically. But her concern didn't end there - she also waited to make sure that he survived spiritually.

**Rashi** teaches that when Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, discovered Moshe in the basket and took him out of the river, she immediately tried to find a nursemaid to feed him. To her dismay, baby Moshe refused to nurse from all of the Egyptian women.

"מלמד שהחזרתו על מצריות הרבה לינק ולא יنك לפיה שהיה עתיד לדבר עם השכינה"

*"They brought him to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he would not nurse, because he was destined to speak with the Divine Presence."*

Miriam understood that this was the moment she had been waiting for. She jumped out of her hiding place and offered to find Moshe a Jewish nursemaid — bringing him, of course, to their mother, Yocheved. Yocheved nursed Moshe for two years (She-mot Rabbah). During that time, she didn't only sustain him physically — she nourished his soul. We can imagine Yocheved using those precious months to instill in Moshe Jewish values and beliefs, to sing him Jewish songs, and to fill his earliest consciousness with the sweetness of Torah and connection to Hashem.

One might wonder- How much can a baby truly absorb at that age? He's too young to understand, too young to remember.

But **Rav Shlomo Wolbe**, in his classic work *זרעיה ובנין בחינוך*, teaches otherwise. He writes that education begins with planting



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seeds, even before a child can speak or understand:

”אם רצים שהילד יצמח ליהודי הלומד תורה ומקיים מצוות צרייכים לזרע בו את הזרע של תורה. הוא אשר אמרו חז”ל: קטן היהודי לדבר, אבי מלמדו תורה וקריאת שם. דברים אלו הם הם הדברים שבחם יהיה שורש דברות.”

*“If we want a child to grow into a Jew who learns Torah and fulfills mitzvot, we must plant within him the seed of Torah. As our Sages said: as soon as a child begins to speak, his father teaches him Torah and Shema. These words become the root of his speech.”*

Rav Wolbe explains that those seeds planted when a child is still a baby are the key to his *chinuch*. The *Shema Yisrael* whispered at bedtime, the Torah stories told as he drifts to sleep, the earliest awareness that there is a Creator in the world, the warmth and love he receives from his parents, and the living example he witnesses in their actions — these are what make all the difference. Those early moments — the sounds, the tone, the atmosphere — leave a spiritual imprint that lasts a lifetime.

History bears this out. After the Holocaust, there were accounts of Rabbis entering Christian orphanages in search of hidden Jewish children. They would softly call out, “*Shema Yisrael...*” and some of the children, who had been placed there as babies and raised for years as Christians, would suddenly begin to cry, run to the Rabbis, and respond with tears. The seeds planted in those earliest years — a whisper of *Shema*, a mother’s lullaby of faith — were never erased.

The lesson is clear. As parents, we must recognize the tremendous significance of what we do, even — and perhaps especially — in the earliest stages of our children’s lives. It’s

easy to think that “real” parenting begins in the teenage years, when children can understand and discuss values and ideas. But the truth we learn here is that the most formative time to instill our values is during those very first years — in the quiet moments of early childhood, when the deepest foundations are being laid.

I wanted to conclude this article with a beautiful parenting insight brought down by **Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky**. Rav Kaminetsky notes that the **Rama** learns from Moshe’s refusal to nurse from the Egyptian women that there is a Halacha that a Jewish child should not be nursed by a non-Jewish woman (unless there is no other option). Rav Kaminetsky raises a powerful question: How can this be the basis of the halacha? Moshe was unique — he would one day speak face-to-face with Hashem! Surely this standard cannot apply to every child.

Rav Kaminetsky answers with the following insight - **Every** Jewish child has the potential to speak to Hashem! Every child has the ability to achieve greatness and to come close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. When we look at our children, we must see not only who they are, but who they can become. Our task as parents and educators is to plant those seeds early — with faith that each child carries infinite potential. B’Ezrat Hashem, when we plant those seeds with love and faith, our children can grow and reach the highest of heights. ■

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