



Parades's Parsha Discussion with Rabbi Alex Israel

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Bo. Judaism for Kids; Judaism for Adults!

After seven plagues, Pharaoh agrees to permit the Israelites to leave their labors to worship God. Pharaoh asks: "Who will be going?"

Moses responds:

"We will all go, **young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters**, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the Lord's festival." (10:9)



For Judaism, it is unthinkable to have a "chag la-Shem – a festival for the Lord" without the entire family. The theme of parents and children, young and old, resonates throughout the parsha. From the purpose of the plagues that are "So you may recount **to your children and your children's children...**" (10:2) as well as the instruction, regarding the Matza and its commemoration of the Exodus: "**And you shall explain to your child** on that day, 'It is because of thus that the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.'" (13:8) And the Seder is, therefore, an intergenerational archetype, a model of generation transmitting our story to the next.

We might then gain the impression that the focus of Judaism is on educating children, on raising the next generation. That is true. But it is far more than that.

In this vein, here is a challenging passage from a mentor of mine, Chief Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits (Chief Rabbi of the UK 1967-1991. Died 1999), in a reflection which begins on a family tour to a movie studio in Hollywood:

Hollywood: We had an introduction to one of the studios to view a film production. On calling to arrange my visit. I was asked if I had any young children since that particular show included some rather unchaste scenes and would not be suitable for children.

I replied: "If it is not fit for children, it cannot be fit for the parents either."

Does this not illustrate one of the most curious and perverted notions of our age? Religion and morality are for juveniles only. Children must be protected from smutty literature, indecent pictures, immoral thoughts; they must not drink or gamble. But for grown-ups all this is in order, as if they were less sensual and more immune to corruption.

What sort of a world are we going to have if goodness and decency were to be the exclusive preserve of children? What kind of an example are we going to set our children if we preach virtue for them and practise vice for ourselves?

The same goes for Judaism. Many people seem to think the Torah is a children's Torah. On Pesach they conduct a Seder not for themselves, but only for the sake of the children. They expect their children to go to Hebrew classes, but Jewish learning and reading is not for them.

Judaism teaches the reverse. Of course, children must be trained in the virtues of religion and decency and learning to prepare themselves for the challenges of life ahead. But legally no obligations of any kind are incumbent on them until they reach Bar Mitzvah age-13 years for boys and 12 years for girls.

Judaism is an adult religion, meant primarily for grown-ups. With Jewish education often ending instead of beginning in earnest with Bar Mitzvah age, is it any wonder that so many Jews have such a juvenile, primitive notion of Judaism, that their understanding of Jewish thought—stunted before their brains matured—is of nursery or elementary school level, and therefore quite incompetent to cope with the complex intellectual challenges of our times? With such a childish appreciation of Jewish values, is it surprising that the flimsiest arguments or distractions encountered on the college campus are enough to knock down their Jewish loyalties and convictions like a pack of cards before the slightest breeze?

For holiness, just as for special "holy" prayers like Kaddish and Kedushah, we require a quorum of adults, not children. (The Timely and the Timeless, pgs. 399-400)

Judaism is for adults! Only women aged 12 and men aged 13 and above are in fact obligated to perform the requirements of Judaism! Children are "in training" so they may fulfil their obligations proficiently as they enter the threshold of adulthood. It is not children who have to study as much as adults who are bound by the mitzva (obligation) of Talmud Torah (Torah study). Grace after Meals is not for camp or school; it is for every adult Jew whenever they partake of bread!

Obviously, we need to educate the next generation. But we do that, more than anything else, by emulation and personal example, such that when children grow up, they will desire to participate in their Judaism because that is their parents' passion.

Maybe, this is the true fulfilment of the verse: "We will all go, young and old"

Please discuss:

- What do you think of Rabbi Jakobovits's idea? In the environment in which you live, is Judaism for kids or for adults?
- Do adults set a good enough example for children in keeping Torah and Jewish practice?

- What is Rabbi Jakobovits saying about the notion of a bar/bat-mitzva. IS this how you feel about your own bar/bat-mitzva?

Shabbat Shalom!