



The Rocking Cradle Was First Used in the House of Avraham Avinu

Avraham Avinu Was the First to Place His Son in a Cradle Surrounded by Guardrails to Teach Us the Importance of Chinuch at a Young Age

This week's parsha is parshas Vayeira. We learn that Avraham Avinu made a lavish feast on the day his son, Yitzchak, was weaned. Here is the pertinent text (Bereishis 21, 8): **"ויגדל הילד ויגמל ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום הגמל את יצחק" — the child grew and was weaned; and Avraham made a great feast on the day Yitzchak was weaned.** According to Rashi, this refers to when Yitzchak was weaned from his mother's milk, at two years of age. In the teachings of Chazal, however, we find several other opinions regarding when Yitzchak was actually weaned. Here is one of them from the Midrash that all the commentaries are dumbfounded by and deserves further scrutiny (B.R. 53, 10):

"Avraham made a great feast" – a feast of great people (giants); Og (the giant) and all the great men were there. They said to Og, "Did you not used to say that Avraham is a like barren mule and cannot beget a child?" He said to them, "Now, what is his gift, is it not puny? If I place my finger on him I could crush him." HKB"H said to him, "Why are you disparaging his gift (Yitzchak)? By your life, you will (live to) see thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads emerging from his grandchildren, but that man (you, Og) will meet his end only by his hand," as it is stated (Bamidbar 24, 24): "Hashem said to Moshe, "Do not fear him, for I have delivered him into your hand . . ." It is as Rabbi Levi said: A cradle was only rocked for the first time in the house of Avraham Avinu.

In his commentary on the Midrash, Rashi remarks that this suggests that the day Avraham made the feast for the

weaning of Yitzchak was on the day that he placed Yitzchak in the cradle; and people came and showed him kindness. In a similar vein, the Ran in his commentary on the Torah, says that Avraham began this feast when Yitzchak was placed in a cradle. He states that this is a common minhag today in some places; people are invited on the day the infant is placed in a crib; it started with Avraham.

Yitzchak Avinu Was the First to Be Born as an Infant

The Matnos Kehunah on the Midrash cites Rashi's remarks and adds an intriguing chiddush in the name of אב"א (commentary of Avraham ben Asher on the Midrash, printed in the sefer Ohr HaSeichel). He explains that the reason Yitzchak Avinu was the first child to be placed in a cradle was because he was born as an infant. Prior to him, all human beings came into this world as adults (grownups); as such, they did not require a crib or cradle.

We find support for this intriguing notion in a passage from the Midrash related to the generation of the mabul (ibid. 36, 1): **When one of them would give birth during the day, she would say to her child (the newborn), "Go and bring me a rock with which to cut the umbilical cord"; at night, she would say to her child, "Go and light a candle to cut your umbilical cord."** Furthermore, it is suggested that Avraham Avinu was himself a giant. For, it is written (Yehoshua 14, 15): **ושם חברון לפני קרית ארבע —האדם הגדול בענקים הוא—formerly, the name of Chevron was Kiryas Arba, who was the biggest man among the**

Anakim (giants). They expounded in the Midrash (ibid. 14, 6): **The biggest man among the Anakim refers to Avraham.** Therefore, regarding Yitzchak, who was the first to be born as a small child, the Midrash teaches: **A cradle was only rocked for the first time in the house of Avraham Avinu.**

Accordingly, we can explain how the fact that Avraham made this feast on the day that Yitzchak was placed in a cradle is alluded to by the passuk: **ויעש אברהם משתה גדול ביום** "הגמול את יצחק". For, according to Rashi, Yitzchak was weaned from his mother's breast at the age of two. Hence, so long as he required his mother's milk, he slept in her bed. Once he was weaned from her milk, however, Avraham placed him in a cradle (crib).

Notwithstanding, one can only wonder what prompted Avraham Avinu to make a grand feast on this occasion. According to one reading of the Midrash, this meant that he made a **"משתה גדולים"**—a feast for Og and all the giants in his coterie. Apparently, they were larger and taller than the other people living at that time. In contrast, since he was the first to be born so small, he was also the first to require a crib. Still, why did Avraham Avinu see fit to celebrate specifically on that occasion?

In truth, we can deduce his motivation for making this feast from the passage in the Midrash. Recall that Og boasted to his colleagues **"that Avraham is a like barren mule and cannot beget a child."** Therefore, Avraham Avinu saw fit to sanctify the name of Heaven by announcing publicly that HKB"H, the G-d of the heavens and the earth, altered the laws of nature to enable him to beget a child. Thus, he reinforced the emunah in Hashem as the G-d of the world to all mankind.

Notwithstanding, it is still incumbent upon us to explain the mystery of why Avraham chose to make this grand feast specifically on the day that he moved Yitzchak to a crib (as per the opinions of Rashi and the Ran). Additionally, why did HKB"H arrange for people to be born fully-grown until Yitzchak? Yet, Yitzchak and all human beings after him were born as small infants.

The Vital Lesson Learned from Yitzchak about when to Begin Educating Children

To answer these questions, I would like to present a novel idea to our esteemed audience. We have learned in the Gemara (Succah 42a): **"תנו רבנן קטן היודע לנענע חייב בלולב, אביו לוקח לו תפילין, יודע לדבר, אביו לומדו תורה וקריאת שמע, תורה מאי היא, אמר רב המנוא, תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב, קריאת שמע מאי היא, פסוק ראשון."** **The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: A minor who knows how to wave is obligated in the mitzvah of lulav; to wrap himself with a tallis, he is obligated in the mitzvah of Tzitzis; to protect the tefillin, his father should buy him tefillin; how to talk, his father should teach him Torah and Krias Shema. What is meant here by "Torah"? Rav Hamnuna said: The passuk (Devarim 33, 4) **תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב**. What is meant here by "Krias Shema"? The first passuk (in other words, the passuk (ibid. 6, 4): **"שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד"**).**

We learn from here that a father's obligation of "chinuch" begins from the moment his small child begins to talk. In fact, this is one of the foundations and bedrock of Jewish education and upbringing—not to delay the process of "chinuch" until children are able to fully comprehend. Rather, a child should be taught Torah and Krias Shema as soon as he or she is able to talk. Here is a concise summary of what the Shela hakadosh writes on the subject (Sha'ar HaOtiyot Dalet):

The purpose of procreation is to have children and grandchildren who study Torah and perform mitzvos. It is essential to accustom a child and to teach him good midos and proper behavior from the moment he is able to talk. For, the passuk says (Mishlei 22, 6): **חנוך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה—educate a youth as befits him; even when he grows old, he will not abandon it.**

Apropos this subject, it is worthwhile introducing the inspirational words of the Chovot HaLivAvos (Sha'ar Cheshbon HaNefesh, Chapter 3, 14). He encourages us to drive the yetzer out of our hearts from the moment it enters and not to wait until it has firmly settled in. He writes that initially the yetzer is very weak and cannot prevent you from recognizing the truth of a matter. If you are aware of

its presence at that time, it will be easy for you to thwart its efforts. If, however, you ignore it, it will grow stronger and will obscure the light of your intellect. Then, it will be difficult to recognize its presence. Therefore, hurry to save yourself and rely on G-d's help to rid yourself of its influence. Strive to enable the light of "chochmah" to help you see the true nature of things with the eye of your heart.

A War to the Bitter End between Kedushah and Tumah regarding Early Chinuch

It is evident from the teachings of Chazal that the primary battle between kedushah and tumah concerns the development of young children before they become obligated in mitzvos. Let us begin by introducing a passage in the Midrash (ibid. 65, 20) related to the passuk (Bereishis 27, 22): "הקול קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו"—**the voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav:**

No philosophers (wise men) arose in the world like Bilam son of Beor and like Avnimos HaGardi. All the nations of the world gathered around him (Bilam). They asked him: "Tell us, will we be successful in dealing with (harming) this nation?" He said: "Go around their synagogues and study halls. If you find children there chirping vocally (words of Torah), you will not be able to confront them. For this is what their forefather (Yitzchak) assured them when he told them: "The voice is the voice of Yaakov"—when the voice of Yaakov is found in the synagogues, the hands are not the hands of Esau (they are ineffective), but if not, "the hands are the hands of Esau"—you can overcome them.

It is evident from the counsel of the wicked Bilam that the essence of Jewish chinuch involves young schoolchildren. As explained above, a parent must initiate this process as soon as a child can utter words of Torah and recite Krias Shema. We find an incredible teaching concerning the crucial importance of teaching Torah to young schoolchildren (Shabbas 119b):

"אמר רב המנונא לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו בה תינוקות של בית רבן... אמר רב יהודה אמר רב מאי דכתיב אל תגעו במשיחי ובנביאי אל תרעו, אל תגעו במשיחי אלו תינוקות של בית רבן, ובנביאי אל תרעו אלו תלמידי חכמים. אמר ריש לקיש משום רבי יהודה נשיאה אין העולם מתקיים

אלא בשביל הבל תינוקות של בית רבן, אמר ליה רב פפא לאבבי ידי וידיך מאי [מה עם הבל התורה שלי ושלך], אמר ליה אינו דומה הבל שיש בו חטא להבל שאין בו חטא."

Rav Hamnuna said: Yerushalayim was only destroyed because they were remiss in the Torah-education of the schoolchildren . . . Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: What is the meaning of that which is written (Divrei HaYamim I 16, 22): "Do not touch My anointed ones, and to My prophets do no harm"? "Do not touch My anointed ones," this refers to schoolchildren who study Torah; "and to My prophets do no harm," this refers to Torah scholars. Reish Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah: The world continues to exist solely in the merit of the breath of schoolchildren (the words of Torah they utter). Rav Pappa said to Abaye: Mine and yours (words of Torah), what of them? He answered him: Breath that contains (the taint of) sin cannot be compared to breath that contains no (taint of) sin.

The holy Admor, the Maharid of Belz, zy"a, provides us with a marvelous interpretation of the following dispute between Moshe Rabeinu and Pharaoh (Shemos 10, 8):

"ויושב את משה ואת אהרן אל פרעה ויאמר אליהם לכו עבדו את ה' אלקיכם מי ומי ההולכים, ויאמר משה בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך בבנינו ובבנותנו כי חג ה' לנו, ויאמר אליהם יהי כן ה' עמכם כאשר אשלח אתכם ואת טפכם ראו כי רעה נגד פניכם, לא כן לכו נא הגברים ועבדו את ה' כי אותה אתם מבקשים ויגרש אותם מאת פני פרעה."

Thereupon, Moshe and Aharon were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, worship Hashem, your G-d; who specifically are going?" Moshe said, "With our youngsters and with our elders, we will go, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our cattle we will go, because it is a festival of Hashem for us." He said to them, "So may Hashem be with you when I will send you and your children! See that evil faces you. Not so, let the men go now and worship Hashem, for that is what you request." And he chase them out from Pharaoh's presence.

He explains in his own sacred, inimitable way—based on our sacred sources—that one of the bases of Yisrael's

continued existence is the chinuch of our sons and daughters. It is imperative that they continue to follow the ways of the holy Torah that have been handed down to us from generation to generation. It is for this reason that the yetzer hara and all the forces of tumah strive to prevent the young members of our holy flock from being educated in the ways of the Torah.

Clearly, the wicked Pharaoh was aware of this fact. Hence, when he realized that it was inevitable for him to accede to Moshe's request—to allow Yisrael to go and worship Hashem for three days—he sought a compromise. He would allow only the men to go but would insist that the young children remain in Mitzrayim. After all, we are familiar with the aphorism: "If there are no kid goats, there will be no he-goats (leaders)." In other words, Pharaoh sought to disrupt the perpetuation of the sacred lineage of the people of Yisrael.

His malevolent intent was apparent to Moshe Rabeinu. So, he responded definitively and unequivocally: **"With our youngsters and with our elders, we will go!"** He emphasized that for Jews the education of our youngsters in the service of Hashem takes precedence over that of our elders, who have already been educated. This infuriated Pharaoh, so he responded angrily: **"So may Hashem be with you when I will send you and your children! See that evil faces you. Not so, let the men go now and worship Hashem."** In other words, leave the young children in Mitzrayim; they are fragile; why trouble them to serve Hashem?! This concludes his sacred remarks.

We find a disturbing passage in the Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 10, 2) concerning Achaz the King of Yehudah. He attempted to abolish the study of Torah among the people of Yisrael by shutting down the Batei Kenesses and Batei Midrash. He knew that this would prevent schoolchildren from being educated in the ways of Torah. Here is the passage:

"למה נקרא שמו אחז, שאחז בבתי כניסיות ובבתי מדרשות, למה היה אחז דומה, למלך שהיה לו בן ומסרו לפידגוגו, והיה מבקש להורגו, אמר אם אני הורגו הרי אני מיתחייב מיתה, אלא הרי אני מושך את מניקתו ממנו ומעצמו הוא מת, כך אמר אחז אם אין גדיים אין תישים, אם אין תישים אין צאן, אם

אין צאן אין רועה, אם אין רועה אין עולם, כביכול כך היה אחז סבור בדעתו לומר, אם אין קטנים אין גדולים, אם אין גדולים אין חכמים, אם אין חכמים אין נביאים, אם אין נביאים אין רוח הקודש, אם אין רוח הקודש אין בתי כניסיות ובתי מדרשות, כביכול אין הקב"ה משרה שכינתו על ישראל".

Why was he named Achaz (the grabber)? Because he grabbed control of the Batei Kenesses and Batei Midrash. To what may Achaz be compared? To a king who had a son and entrusted him to his pedagogue. The latter wanted to kill him (the prince). He said, if I kill him, I will be put to death; instead, I will take his wet-nurse away from him and he will die on his own. This is what Achaz conjectured, "If there are no kid goats there will be no he-goats; if there are no he-goats there are no flocks (of goats); if there are no flocks of goats there is no shepherd; if there is no shepherd there is no world." Supposedly, this is what Achaz was thinking: If there are no children, there are no adults; if there are no adults, there are no sages; if there are no sages, there are no prophets; if there are no prophets, there is no "ruach hakodesh"; if there I not "ruach hakodesh," there are no Batei Kenesses or Batei Midrash. Thus, HKB"H will not rest His Shechinah on Yisrael.

Avraham Avinu Placed Yitzchak in a Crib with Guardrails Establishing the Fundamental Practice of Starting Chinuch Early

Following this line of reasoning, we will now explain the profound wisdom of Avraham Avinu. He made a lavish feast for all the big people such as Og and the other giants **"on the day Yitzchak was weaned"**—the day he placed Yitzchak in his own crib. He had been commanded to circumcise Yitzchak when he was eight days old. He saw that HKB"H modified the natural order of the world. Until now, everybody was born fully grown with knowledge. This enabled them to fetch whatever their mothers asked them to fetch on the very day they were born. This all changed with the birth of Yitzchak.

Avraham sought to understand why HKB"H altered nature specifically with Yitzchak. He realized that Yitzchak was the first human being born as a Jew. According to two different opinions in the Midrash (ibid. 64, 4), Avraham

Avinu did not recognize the presence of his Creator until he was either three years old or forty-eight years old. In other words, the bloodline of those born as Jews began with Yitzchak Avinu. Therefore, Avraham was instructed to circumcise Yitzchak when he was but eight days old—still small and lacking knowledge. This was meant to establish a fundamental principle and precedent for all future generations of Jews. Chinuch must be initiated when our children are very young; we must not wait until they are knowledgeable. For, then chinuch is more difficult, since they already have minds of their own.

To publicize and spread the emunah in Hashem throughout the world, Avraham Avinu devised a clever plan on the day Yitzchak was weaned from his mother's milk. He placed Yitzchak in a crib surrounded by guardrails to protect his son and prevent him from falling out. This was a magnificent symbolic gesture emphasizing the need to also protect a child spiritually even while it is still in a baby crib. A child should not be allowed to do whatever it wants to do with total disregard for Torah and mitzvos. It was for this reason that Avraham threw a lavish party for all the giants of the world on the day Yitzchak was moved to a baby cradle. He wished to demonstrate to them that the proper and best way to serve Hashem is to initiate a child's chinuch at a very young age, in keeping with the passuk: "חנוך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנו".

This is also why the Midrash mentions rocking the cradle: "לא ינדה עריסה תחלה אלא בביתו של אברהם אבינו". The purpose of rocking a cradle is to calm an infant down when it is uncomfortable or upset. In keeping with this discussion, this represents a symbolic gesture to educate a child and calm him down when he is faced with the yetzer hara. He must learn the importance of setting up strong, firm guardrails, and establishing boundaries, so that he will now fall into the traps of the yetzer hara.

It is worthwhile interjecting what the Avodas Yisrael writes regarding a passuk in parshas Shelach (Bamidbar 15, 20): "ראשית עריסותיכם חלה תרימו תרומה"—**the beginning of your kneading you shall set aside a loaf as a portion**. He interprets this passuk allegorically. A person should not think to himself: "I am still quite young and there is plenty of time to do all of these things. When I grow old, I

will resume serving the Almighty by elevating the sparks of kedushah. For the time being, it is written (Koheles 11, 9): **'Rejoice young man in your childhood.'**" To which, the Torah teaches us here that this is not the proper attitude. Rather: **"The beginning of your kneading you shall set aside a loaf as a portion"**—the essence of one's service to Hashem is in one's childhood and adolescence, when a person is still full of vim and vigor. This initial, youthful energy should be dedicated and sanctified.

Based on what we have learned, we can embellish this thought. We can suggest that this passuk alludes to the obligation of chinuch incumbent on parents. For, the word "עריסותיכם" can refer to a crib, the bed of an infant. We find this term used in the Gemara in this context (Berachos 47b): "קטן המוטל בעריסה"—**an infant lying in a crib**. Thus, we can interpret the passuk as follows: "ראשית עריסותיכם"—when children are still confined to a crib; "חלה תרימו תרומה"—it is already the appropriate time to elevate them by educating them to be a servant of Hashem. They should become accustomed to follow in the ways of Avraham Avinu, who threw a lavish party on the day that Yitzchak was placed in a cradle to symbolize the importance of initiating the process of chinuch as early as possible, even in infancy.

This explains beautifully what Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai attests regarding his disciple Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah (Avos 2, 10): "אשרי יולדתו"—**praiseworthy is she who bore him**. Based on the Yerushalmi (Yevamos 1, 6), the Bartenura explains that when the sages came to Rabbi Dosa ben Hyrkanos, he saw Rabbi Yehoshua and exclaimed: **"I recall that his mother would walk his cradle to the Beis Kenesses, so that his ears would be immersed in words of Torah."** Based on this discussion, we can suggest that his mother was emulating Avraham Avinu, who placed Yitzchak in a crib to demonstrate the need to begin chinuch at an early age.

The Dispute between Yitzchak and Yishmael

Understood in this light, it gives me immense pleasure to explain a fascinating passage in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeira 18) related to the passuk at the beginning of the passage of the Akeidah (Bereishis 22, 1):

“And it came to pass after these words that G-d tested Avraham”: What words were spoken? Yishmael would say to Yitzchak, “I am superior to you, for I underwent circumcision at the age of thirteen years old, and underwent the extreme pain (that accompanied it), while you were merely eight days old at the time of your circumcision and were not aware of the pain. Even if your father had slaughtered you, you would not have known the difference. If you had been thirteen years old, you could not have tolerated the anguish.” Yitzchak said to him, “That is not so! If HKB”H should command my father, ‘Slaughter your son Yitzchak,’ I would not resist. Immediately thereafter, it came to pass, as it states: “And it came to pass after these words that G-d tested Avraham.”

Let us propose an explanation in keeping with our current discussion. Yishmael boasted that he was superior to Yitzchak for having been circumcised at the age of thirteen. As such, he already had an intellect, felt and tolerated pain, and could have refused but did not. Yitzchak, on the other hand, was circumcised when he was only eight days old; he lacked awareness and could not refuse. To which Yitzchak

responded that that was precisely HKB”H’s reason for commanding Avraham to circumcise him on the eighth day of life, when he had lacked cognizance. It was to inculcate in him while he was still a very young infant that a Jew must sacrifice himself for the sake of Kedushas Hashem.

Yitzchak proved his point by arguing: **If HKB”H should command my father, “Slaughter your son Yitzchak,” I would not resist.** Why? Because my father, Avraham, inculcated the value and power of self-sacrifice in me as an infant. Hence, the attribute of self-sacrifice remained imprinted upon my neshamah. You, Yishmael, on the other hand, who were not circumcised until you possessed an intellect, are not capable of sacrificing yourself for the sake of Hashem. To prove that Yitzchak was correct and spoke the truth, Avraham Avinu was commanded to bind Yitzchak atop the mizbeiach, so that Yitzchak could demonstrate his willingness to sacrifice himself for Kedushas Hashem. Thus, the incredible benefit and advantage of having performed the “Bris milah” specifically when he was an infant became evident. The quality of self-sacrifice for the sake of Hashem that was ingrained in him was demonstrated in dramatic fashion.



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