

## A Thought on Parashas Vo'eiro

By Jeremy Richards

In Memory of my Dear Parents, a"h

L'ilui Nishmos Yitzchok Ben Nachman Halevi a"h and Yenta Bas Yisroel a"h

לעלוי נשמת יצחק בן נחמן הלוי ע"ה ולעלוי נשמת יענטע בת ישראל ע"ה



There is a Torah concept that lies at the very heart of all that is important to us, yet is very difficult to translate into one word: חינוך - chinuch. This is something that is fundamental to the life of every Jew, be it adult or child, and perhaps the most central concern in the life of a Jewish family. The term immediately evokes thoughts relating to teaching children mitzvos, Torah values, perhaps guiding them in their general behaviour, in making decisions, in building friendships. Adults fulfil the mitzvoh of חינוך when they teach children textual skills as well as when they show them how to pray, and how not to pray, when they direct them to show respect for adults, and when they demonstrate the mitzvoh of washing hands upon rising in the morning and before eating bread. We have chinuch in mind when we buy a set of arbo'oh minim for Sukkos, when we prepare for leading the Pesach seder, and when we say brochos aloud so that our children will hear, respond with 'omein,' and thereby learn the importance of saying brochos - and learn that saying brochos is something that is important to their parents. Chinuch encompasses the whole array of learning, experiences and development to which Jewish children need to be exposed, which is why it is so hard to confine its meaning in a single word.

Single word or phrase translations for the word 'chinuch' might include the following: educate, direct, train, guide, habituate, inaugurate, dedicate, imbue, prepare, mold, shape, nurture, bring up. The closest of these to the literal meaning is probably 'dedicate.' 'Chanukah' is closely related to 'chinuch,' and refers to the rededication of the Second Beis HaMikdosh after it was defiled by the Syrian Greeks. We have a 'chanukas habayis' - 'house dedication' - after moving into a new home. Many of the words above, however, are less literal indicators to the broader implications in the word and concept, 'chinuch.'

Chinuch has the sense of preparation for the future, for a life of Torah and mitzvos, with all its inevitable depth, breadth and complexity, excitement, beauty and joy, commitment and fulfilment. For this reason, one word is not enough to capture the fullness of the task. It is not a one-time endeavour, but a process, a journey. Chinuch is a relationship between parents and children, and between teachers and students. It is a relationship that is carefully and sensitively nurtured and developed. It has no limits. It grows, deepens, broadens and becomes more complex over the course of many years, whole lifetimes. An important source for the mitzvoh and the endeavour of chinuch is the possuk in Mishlei (Proverbs) 22:6:

חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֱר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ גַם כִּי יִזְקֵן לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה

'Train a child according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not turn away from it.'

This instruction, itself, can be understood on many levels, and raises many questions. We have already asked, what is the meaning of חינוך, and here we have translated it, 'train.' What is meant by על פי דרכו (according to his way)? The last phrase, translated here, 'even when he grows old, he will not turn away from it,' has been understood and interpreted in many ways. In general terms, we can say the possuk teaches that chinuch is about teaching, guiding and shaping a child in a manner that suits his/her nature and circumstances, so that the instruction and lessons will remain with the child throughout his/her life. Much has been written over the centuries in efforts to give the truest sense of these words.

Ultimately, effective chinuch results from a constant, continual search for wise guidance on the subject, and the application of principles that can be found in any number of places throughout Tanach and the Talmud. Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov, in his sefer איש וביתו (the translation is called, 'The Jew and His Home') finds a chinuch principle in this week's sidroh which emerges from an ingenious interpretation of the pesukim.

In his פתיחה (opening) to וּשְׁנַנְתֶּם לְבַנִּיךְ, Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov discusses the four expressions of redemption which Hashem used to describe the progressive stages through which Bnei Yisroel would be passing on their journey from slavery to redemption. He writes that, when the Jewish people were sunken in the deepest pit of servitude, Moshe came to them by Hashem's word to inform them of Hashem's great plan to free them from bondage in Egypt and take them to Him as a nation. Moshe explained each stage in turn: ...וְהוֹצֵאתִי... וְהַצַּלְתִּי... וְגַאֲלֹתִי... וְלִקְחָתִי... "I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you from their labour, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to Me as a people..." Rabbi Ki Tov gives the expanded sense of these expressions that the people were to understand:

וְהוֹצֵאתִי - they would be receiving a new spirit of freedom, with which they would no longer be able to tolerate the Egyptian burdens; וְהַצַּלְתִּי - they would be able to praise and serve Hashem, no longer slaves to Paroh; וְגַאֲלֹתִי - even the Egyptians would soon know that Hashem is G-d, and no other; וְלִקְחָתִי - the Jewish People would soon be for Hashem a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Torah then informs us that Moshe told all these things to the Jewish People exactly as he had been instructed by Hashem:

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֵר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה

"Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of their shortness of breath and because of their hard labor."

How are we to understand this response of Bnei Yisroel? Did they not want to leave Egypt? Why did they not respond to these promises with relief, elation and jubilation?

Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov compares this to the situation of a person who is trapped and being held captive in a pit, groaning under the weight of his troubles and afflictions. People come and tell him, "Tomorrow we are going to come and lift you out from there, give you thousands of pounds, and elevate you to a high position of greatness!" The person responds to this, "Just take me out of here right now and don't give me anything!" This is the reason, writes Rabbi Ki Tov, that four pesukim later the Torah says:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן וַיִּצְוֵם אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם  
לְהוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

So the L-rd spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and He commanded them concerning the children of Israel and concerning Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, to let the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

Simply "להוציא ממצרים" - "...to take them out of Egypt" - these were words to which they were able to listen.

Rabbi Ki Tov now asks: why, initially, did Hashem instruct Moshe to speak to the Jewish people in a style and with words to which they were unable to listen? Furthermore, he asks, why is it that even after Hashem gave the people a shorter, simpler wording did He then still go ahead and fulfil His original promise in every respect? We might suggest that Moshe could have given the Jewish People the second, simpler wording first, and then, once they had seen themselves redeemed, he would have given them the first wording, together with all the lengthy and lofty details of their redemption. Why did Moshe not speak to the Jewish people in an order and in a manner to which they were able to listen?

This comes to teach us, explains Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov, that anyone who is destined for greatness must not turn his gaze down to small, less significant things, even for a short time. Even though this person might be stuck in a lowly place, unable to listen to elevated ideas, you should nevertheless force him to hear those things even against his will. Then, later on, when he is finally able to turn his heart to listen, his hearing of these superior notions will actually have begun from now, and his whole path will have been one of constant, continuous greatness.

Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov summarizes this idea as follows:

## הגדול אינו רשאי להיות קטן

*A person with (the potential for) greatness is not permitted 'to be small'.*

His actions may be tiny, trifling; however, his heart and his thoughts should constantly be in the loftiest heights. Moreover, this person should have his plan for rising to greatness 'written and unrolled' before his eyes all the time; he should constantly be thinking about it. Then the time will quickly arrive when he will reach the exalted place to which he has aspired from the start.

These remarkable ideas are a mandate for parents and teachers to have the highest aspirations for their own achievements in chinuch - to always aspire to achieve great things, to think big and strive without rest towards the highest goals - as well as for them to notice the potential greatness in every one of their children so that they can 'write' the plan in front of the children's eyes and work tirelessly together with the children until they each fulfil their unique potentials.

This is surely a powerful way to understand the words,

תְּנֵךְ לַנֶּעַר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ גַם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה

Let us now translate the possuk freely, according to the ideas we have discussed: 'Work with the child to achieve his unique potential, ensuring that he will always have his personal plan for achieving greatness etched before his eyes, and constantly in his mind and heart.'

Through an analysis of Hashem's preferred approach in communicating to the Jewish People His four 'expressions of redemption,' we have constructed, or discovered, a valuable principle for chinuch and, indeed, for life in general. If we now take this principle and apply it to the very text from which we learnt it, we see that Hashem was in no doubt as to the Jewish People's ability to rise from their low and downtrodden station to become servants to G-d, infused with holiness and purity, imbued with dignity and elevated to priesthood and royalty.

It is similarly our duty as adults to spy the particular potential for greatness in each of our children and students, to help them to see it for themselves, and to assist them in successfully navigating the path to reach it. To enable a child to see his/her own potential for greatness is to instil confidence in that child, to imbue him/her with self-esteem and self-respect, a sense of pride and a feeling of dignity. May we all enjoy success in chinuch, and may each of us be blessed with achieving our own potentials for greatness, children and adults alike.



Wishing everyone a Good Shabbos,

Jeremy