

The Next Generation

Why do we do half the things we do? Whatever the answer is, it changes when we have a child. At that point it's no longer about "me myself and I" but rather about raising the next generation. Today we are blessed with a triple baby naming and I'd to illustrate the blessing of new life by means of a story.

The doorbell rang when the obstetrician was not at home. His five-year-old daughter answered the doorbell. "Is your daddy in?" asked an excited stranger. "No, he's gone," the little girl replied. "When will he return?" "I don't know. He's out on an eternity case." Rabbi Sidney Greenberg writes: "The birth of a child is such a commonplace thing. It happens 200,000 times a day. And yet each child is an original, altogether unique and so enormously special. Each child is a miracle, a tiny bundle of infinite possibilities, mysterious and unpredictable."¹

Often we're told that we are a product of nature vs nurture, that our genes and our upbringing combine to mold us into who we are. Yet which dominates? If nature, then one can exonerate him/herself from

¹ Rabbi Sidney Greenberg's book Lessons for Living, page 89.

wrongdoing, simply saying “It’s my nature.” If nurture, one can blame their upbringing for who they have become and never truly experience growth.

Two anecdotes, one from this week’s parsha the other from next week’s, illustrate the debate between nature vs nurture. This week we learn about the מרגלים, the spies who gave bad reports, not believing that G-d could help them conquer the land of Canaan. As a result, an entire generation had to be wiped out, making way for a new generation who had never known slavery to emerge. Yet this new generation was very different from the previous one. Whereas the previous generation had been afraid to move forward, their children did so with ease, conquering the entire land of Canaan. If nature predominates, then they should have been genetically predisposed to the same fear as their parents. Yet with Joshua as their general, they proceeded with unabated vigor.

For those who think nurture is more of a central focus, we need to look no further than Korach in next week’s portion to see that it not necessarily the case. Korach challenges Moses and Aaron’s authority as

leaders of Israel. He went to them with three other leaders and 250 priests and basically said, “What am I, chopped liver?” stating *כי כל העדה ה* “It is too much for you! The entire nation is holy and Hashem is in their midst. Why do you lift yourselves up over Hashem’s congregation?”² Moses could not believe his ears, proceeding to fall on his face. After all, we learned two weeks ago that he was the humblest of all people³, and yet he was accused of taking too much for himself.

Korach’s punishment for his incitement was to be swallowed up alive, going into the underworld of Sheol.⁴ However, Deuteronomy states *ובני קרח לא מתו*, the children of Korach did not die.⁵ As a matter of fact, they became the *משכילים*, or enlightened ones, who wrote psalms, including the psalm we say every Monday.

How could it be that Korach had such great hubris, challenging G-d’s appointment of Moses and Aaron as the spiritual heads of Israel,

² Numbers 16:3

³ Numbers 12:3

⁴ Numbers 16:32-33

⁵ Deuteronomy 26:11

while concurrently having children who were G-dfearing and who wrote psalms used in the Temple? If he was so self-serving, how did his children turn out to be *mentschim*? Clearly, nurture, or learning by example, is not the only way in which we are shaped. Rather there is a balance between our genetic predisposition and what we learn from others, most notably our parents.

Jennifer and Daniel, Lauren and Ben-as parents you are bound to make mistakes. As a result, you may lose your temper, have regrets, worries, frustrations and anger. Having a child however causes us to strive to modify our behavior, as we know how much children pick up on. I strive to be less angry and anxious because Ariela picks up on these emotions and I don't want her to grow up feeling at fault or emulating those emotions. Similarly, you have brought beautiful little Lilah, Ellie and Rayan into the world, with so much potential and excitement, wanting only the best for them. Having children is such a wonderful privilege and causes us to try to do the best we can in raising them, making them as calm, confident and worry-free as possible.

My prayer for you, Jennifer and Daniel, Laruen and Ben, is that no matter what bumps in the road you face, you always strive to be present and mindful of your children, giving them the best of everything you have to offer. After all, it's all about what we can do in raising the next generation in the fullest sense. Mazal Tov on reaching this joyous day! So that we can celebrate together, let us turn to Page 840 and read the sections designated for us.