

Walking in My Ways

אם תלכו בחקותי תלכו-if you follow my laws.¹ Why do we need to follow G-d's laws? Why can't we just do whatever we want when we want to? The reason given by Rashi is ²הוא עמלים בתורה לשמור ולקיים, labor in the Torah to guard and establish it. That the word "labor," or עמל, is used is not by accident: living a life of Torah requires a tremendous amount of work. We know that in order to master something, one needs to practice-often over and over again. Seforno expands on this thought when he comments ³חוקות הם גזרות מלך שינהג האדם בהם בשתדלות עסקי חייו, והתנהג בהם יקרא הליכה. The laws are the decrees of the King that a person behaves by exerting effort in the affairs of his life, and one who behaving in accordance with them is called "walking." In life we can take numerous, diverse paths, yet through following the structure of Jewish law and tradition, we will walk down the correct path.

Who sets the guidelines for the path down which we walk? When we are children, from babies until our B'nai Mitzvah (though for some it

¹ Leviticus 26:3

² ד"ה אם בחקתי תלכו Rashi on Leviticus 26:3

³ ד"ה אם בחקתי תלכו Seforno on Leviticus 26:3

never ends) the ones setting those rules are our parents. At times the rules might seem overly restrictive, yet they are there for our protection. When one gets older, however, we set those rules in how we live our lives each and every day. G-d willing our parents have set a solid foundation for us to continue, and hopefully that includes wisdom from Torah and from Judaism. At the same time, it is up to us as to what we do with it.

Today we are here to celebrate the naming of a very special girl, Samantha Brooke Cohen. In looking up the origin of the name, it says that in Hebrew (I think erroneously) that it is derived from שמוע, “G-d heard,” which would be a very fitting name. G-d heard your desire to have a child and gave you a beautiful baby girl. However, I see a better origin of the name as being סמן, or sign. Having a baby is one of the greatest signs of G-d’s presence in the world, especially as the child grows and learns from everything that you do, often emulating it and viewing it as an ideal. Our role as parents is a derivation from the Divine Parent, G-d.

The origin of Brooke is a stream. We often find G-d's presence in the beauty of nature. We go out to waterfalls, grand mountains, white-sand beaches and vistas to find a sense of serenity and joy. Not so for a child, however. S/he finds beauty in almost everything, experiencing it for the first time. We know that as Samantha Brooke grows, her curiosity will continue to abound and through looking at you as her example, you will both grow as well.

Carlee and David-we are blessed to have you living back in New York after having lived in Philadelphia for a number of years. We are also honored to celebrate with you ten months after we celebrated at Jilliane and Joshua's daughter's baby naming. In addition, we are blessed to have Samantha Brooke's grandparents Erv, Bonnie z"l, Robert and Marlene, great-grandparents Edward and Eva, great-aunts Rosalyn and Mindy, great-uncle Andrew, aunts Jilliane, Rebecca and Lori, uncles Joshua, Douglas and Stu.

We gave Emily Brooke the Hebrew name בלימע שרה after an incredible *balabusta*, Bonnie Hoffman z"l. Blima is Yiddish for the

Hebrew Shoshana, a flower at times translated as “lily” or “rose.” Shir HaShirim contains one of my favorite expressions, כשושנה בין החוחים, like a flower amongst the thorns.⁴ Bonnie definitely exemplified this persona, and I know Samantha will as well, flowering not only in terms of beauty but also in developing a strong, independent personality, like her grandmother, z”l.

Mazal Tov on reaching this joyous and most beautiful day! To crystallize the joy of Samantha receiving her Hebrew name, I’d like to call Carlee, David and Samantha to the Bimah as we turn to Page 840 and continue responsively.

⁴ Song of Songs 2:2