

BS”D

Why Have Kids

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Beit HaKenneset HaSefaradi BeRimon – Parshat Tzav 5782

This week's parsha of Tzav, like most of the book of Vayikra is dedicated to the work in the mikdash, primarily the korbanot. But if we read closely, between all the fire and smoke (האש והעשן), there are a deep and important messages being transmitted.

The parsha starts:

ויקרא פרשת צו פרק ו פסוק א - ב
(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹנֶק אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) צו אֶת אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת בָּנָיו ...

“Aharon and his sons” are clearly the stars of this parsha as they appear by name in 26 pesukim! There are only 97 verses in the Parsha, so that means they are being addressed explicitly in just over a quarter of the verses! This overwhelming repetition – “Aharon and his sons”, “Aharon and his sons” – begs the question: what is the message here?

To answer that question, we need to answer an even more fundamental question that my son Asaf has asked me on a number of occasions:

Why have children, at all? (למה להביא ילדים) What's the point?

His question is not that of the wicked son, but that of the wise son. His question is not motivated by any hidden agenda – he actually wants to have kids. Nevertheless he wants to understand the reason. It is a deep philosophical question:

Why is it that we have kids?

So, I answered him, quite simply: Because the good book says:

בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח, כח
(כח) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֶׁהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הַרְמִשָּׁת עַל הָאָרֶץ:

He said: That's not good enough. I want to know why; I don't just want the hok (unquestioned demand), I want the taam (reasoning).

So, of course that is certainly a legitimate endeavor. It is called “Taamei HaMitzva” – our subjective attempt to understand God's objective law. We are, explains the Beit HaLevi, of course permitted to engage in understanding the reasons for the mitzvot, for that is part of the mitzvah of Torah Study. However, he cautions, this endeavor is not to

affect our performance of the command in the slightest way – i.e., we are to do God’s will precisely because it is God’s will.

בית הלוי בראשית פרק יז פסוק א

התהלך לפני והיה תמים. ענין התמימות הוא שיעשה רצון הבורא ולא יחקור למה ציוהו כן, ואף על פי שהאדם רשאי לחקור אחרי טעמי המצות, זה בכלל לימוד תורה שמצוה ללומדה ולידע אותה וגם הלימוד הזה יעשה אותו מפני שמצוה כן הוא ללמוד אבל בעיקר העשיה שלו וכן בהלימוד יעשה רק מפני שכן הוא רצון הבורא יתברך ולא מפני שהוא רוצה לחקור אמאי ציוהו כן.

So, the first “taam”, reason for bringing children in to the world is brought by the Midrash Hagadol, which quote Isaiah: “God created the world not as a wasteland, but formed it to be inhabited.” In short, we are to have children to keep the world populated.

מדרש הגדול בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

מצות פריה ורביה, לשבת יצרה (ישעיה מה, יח) בענן ישעיהו פרק מה: יח - כי כה אמר יְקוֹק בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים יִצֵר הָאָרֶץ וְעָשָׂה הוּא כוֹנְנָה לֹא תִהְיֶה בְרָאָה לְשֶׁבֶת יִצְרָה אֲנִי יְקוֹק וְאֵין עוֹד :

This is echoed by the Ohr HaHaim and others:

אור החיים בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

שברך אותם שלא יכרת מין האדם מן העולם.

The first response is not very convincing for someone living in a world that is worried about over population.

So the Midrash Hagadol brings a mystical explanation, teaching that the Mashiach cannot come until all created souls have been brought down to earth.

מדרש הגדול בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

[ר' יוסי אמר] אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו כל הנשמות שבגוף

Having children, then, is a way to move God’s plan of creation forward.

This explanation, while certainly expressing a deeper motivation for the commandment still leaves the mystic and the modern Jew in a quandary. First, the mystic asks how exactly does this work? Doesn’t Jewish mysticism also contain the notion of *gilgulei neshamot* (reincarnation)? If so, parents don’t really have it in their power to bring “new” souls to the world. This seems to be something left to the calculations of heaven. Second, the modern asks if this is really the intent of the mitzvah? For this argument – to bring as many children to the world as possible in order to bring creation to its halcyon completion – seems to prioritize quantity of children over quality of children to the point of disregarding the environment and the quality of life itself – surely that is not the intention of the mitzvah.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (RSRH) wholeheartedly agrees that goal is quality not quantity. The goal is not to simply populate the world, but to insure a harmonious society. He learns from the word “pru urevu umilu” – be fruitful and multiply and fill – a different aspect of the command. The word “fill” indicates that each individual has the

responsibility not only to raise his own family but to help other families do so such that each individual is responsible for the peace of society as a whole.

רש"ר הירש בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

מלאו: החברה. כל זוג נצטווה לתרום את תרומתו לכך, - שהארץ תימלא אדם; ורק משהארץ תימלא בני אדם, יתקיים ייעודה במלואו. אמור מעתה: אין אדם יוצא ידי חובתו - בהקמת ביתו שלו; אלא שומה על כל יחיד לתת את ידו להקמת בתים רבים. כך נצטווה היחיד על שלום החברה.

Furthermore, RSRH explains that the term “revu” though translated to “multiply” does not simply mean “multiply”. Multiply does not simply ask that one birth children, but rather that one *raise* children:

A human child would have no chance of survival at all were it not cared for by its parents right from birth and its bodily preservation and development furthered by this parental care. Not the birth, the aftercare is the real factor of increase of the human race. But “rvu” (multiply) is something more and higher. The parents are to multiply themselves by their children, they are to repeat themselves in their children. The children are to be the replicas not only of the physical bodily traits of their parents, but also of their spiritual, intellectual and moral selves. Accordingly the parents have to plant the spiritual and moral best of themselves in their children, and carefully nurture and mature its development. In short, they have to form, educate and cultivate them.

רש"ר הירש בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

רבו - המשפחה. "רבה" = להתרבות. אין די בהולדת ילדים כדי שמין האדם יתרבה. הטיפול בוולדות הוא תנאי להתרבות - גם ברבים מבעלי החי; והוא הכרח גמור במין האנושי - ולא רק מבחינה פיסית גרידא. ולד האדם יאבד מיד, אם הורים לא יטפלו בו משעת לידתו ולא ישקדו על קיומו והתפתחותו הגופנית. לא הלידה, אלא הטיפול הוא הגורם האמיתי של התרבות האדם. אולם, "רבה" כולל למעלה מזה. חובת ההורים להתרבות בבניהם: הם יקומו בדמות בניהם; והבנים יהיו דומים להוריהם - לא רק מבחינה גופנית, אלא מבחינה רוחנית ומוסרית. על ההורים לשתול ולפתח בבניהם את מיטב כוחותיהם הרוחניים והמוסריים; קיצורו של דבר: עליהם לעצב ולחנך את בניהם מבחינה רוחנית ומוסרית. רק אז יקומו ההורים בדמות בניהם ויקיימו את מצות "רבו". ... "רבו" מצוה אפוא על ייסוד הבית והמשפחה, - שרק בהם יצלח חינוך האדם. רק משנתקבלה מצות "רבו", ניתנה ל"פרו" חשיבותו המוסרית הנעלה, ...

So the point is that we have children that carry on our values, that we develop within them spiritual and moral values. Only thus do we really fulfill the command of “PRU” which RSRH explains indicates that the offspring of the couple is like fruit – it is the expression of the very potentials of the parents, now brought out in the child.

רש"ר הירש בראשית פרשת בראשית פרק א פסוק כח

פרו - חיבור המינים כדי להוליד את פרי האדם, - את הבנים. כי האדם עץ השדה: מיטב הכוחות והמיצים של העץ "משתחררים" בפריו כנבט עצמאי (ראה לעיל פסוק י"א); וכך, מיטב הכוחות של האב והאם מתחברים כדי להוליד בר - אנוש עצמאי:

So my son said: What I hear is that having kids is all about you. You have a kid to leave of yourself to the world, to continue your values, your being.

So I answered that actually, if you read between the lines of RSRH, he is saying something much more powerful than that. He is really talking about developing relationships. That is, when he teaches that the command to sire offspring, includes raising them and caring for them, teaching them – this is about developing a relationship. This is not a one-way street, but rather a development of both parents and children and the relationship between them.

Interestingly, it is this relationship that philosophy professor [Christine Overall](#), in her book “Why Have Kids?”, argues is the strongest reason to have kids:

[After] exploring the nature of the biological parent-child relationship—which is not only genetic but also psychological, physical, intellectual, and moral— [it can be argued] that **the formation of that relationship** is the best possible reason for choosing to have a child.

[לאחר] בחינת טבעו של מערכת היחסים הביולוגית בין הורה לילד - שהיא לא רק גנטית אלא גם פסיכולוגית, פיזית, אינטלקטואלית ומוסרית - ניתן לטעון שהיווצרות מערכת יחסים זו היא הסיבה הטובה ביותר לבחירה להביא ילד לעולם.

I think that this is a wonderful explanation that aligns both with RSRH’s explanation of *pru urvu* and the repetitive addresses of “Aharon and his sons” in this week’s parsha. That is, we read, over and over again “Aharon and his sons” as they engage in a myriad of “mundane”, everyday activities:

- “Aharon and his sons”: they dressed together,
- “Aharon and his sons”: they sacrificed together,
- “Aharon and his sons”: they ate together,
- “Aharon and his sons”: they prayed together.

In the end, “Aharon and his sons” developed a relationship together. A relationship that could only be developed between father and son, between parent and child. It is this unique relationship that influences both parent and child in a way that has no parallel in any other relationship, that is the reason to have children.

That is why one has children.

So my son said: Very nice, but I still don’t buy it.

So I told him: Well, in hindsight, I can say that if I didn’t have kids I would never have met such an amazing person as you!

He said: “Hahaha, got me good!” (תפסת אותי טוב)

Shabbat Shalom.