

Our Sages relate a most interesting incident concerning Rabbi Judah the Prince, the redactor of the Mishnah, affectionately known as Rebbe. One day, we are told, Rebbe hayah yoshev ve'doresh - Rabbi Judah was preaching to his congregation. Suddenly he was faced by a distressing problem, one that has challenged generations of public speakers. Nitnammem ha-tzibbur, his audience began to fall asleep. This was a bad situation; and so, moved by a speaker's instinct, bikesh Rebbe l'oreran ~~Rebbe~~ Rabbi Judah attempted to wake them up. But how is that done? Some speakers turn on the volume higher, relying more upon decibels than upon content in order to stimulate interest. Others use a variety of techniques. But not so Rebbe; instead, he aroused his listeners by making the following alarming statement: yaldah ishah be'Mitzrayim shishim ribbo be'keres achat. "There was a woman in Egypt who gave birth to 600,000 children all at once." It is meticulously recorded by the Rabbis that at least one of his listeners, Ishmael the son of Rabbi Yose by name, was jolted out of his slumber by this piece of intelligence. What, he inquired, can you possibly mean? And Rabbi answered: zu Yocheved she'yaldah et Mosheh she'shakul ke'negged shishim ribbo shel Yisrael - I refer to Yocheved who gave birth to Moses, a man who was equated in value to the 600,000 children of Israel who lived at that time.

This is indeed sensational news. It is quite unusual for mother to be blessed with a son who can lead, inspire, and teach a whole people. It is startling news that parents are privileged to have, as a child, a Moses. Not everyone has such good fortune. Nevertheless, every parent dreams of deriving some form of nachas from children. Every father and every mother wants to have at least an inkling of the kind of happiness, satisfaction, pleasure, pride, and fulfillment of dreams, that Amram and Yocheved derived from their son Moses.

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Often we ask: how does one do it? What must we do to deserve such nachas?

do we go about raising children who will live up to their own inner promise, achieve great things for their people and for the world?

It would be foolish to say that there are any hard and fast rules. There is no secret recipe for nachas. Some attain it, seemingly, effortlessly; others are disappointed no matter how hard they try. Nevertheless, there are certain guiding principles. And the way to discover them is to learn something about Amram and Yocheved, the parents of Moses. And if we investigate their lives and character, we will discover three special qualities possessed by these proud forebearers of the great prophet.

The first prerequisite is hinted at by our Rabbis when they stated kakh yehei adam oseh kerat ruach le'ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu le'olam kol yemei chayav (Tana de'be Eliyahu, Rabba, 18). A man should all his life attempt to live so that G-d derives Korat ruach - or, nachas - from him. It is a simple enough rule valid both morally and psychologically: if you want nachas from your children, you must first give nachas to your Father in Heaven. Thus, for instance, our Sages tell us that Kol ha-ragil la'asot tzedakah, zokheh ve'havyan leh banim baalei chokmah, baalei osher, baalei agadah (B.B. 9b) - he who trains himself, all his life, to be charitable and philanthropic will have children who are wise, wealthy, and learned. So, in other passages, do they tell us that those who wish to have nachas from their children should themselves observe the mitzvot and develop a higher level of morality. The Zohar teaches that when a man goes on the path of truth and strives for a spirit of holiness from above, his children will benefit from that heavenly spirit.

This is, as we stated, both morally and psychologically true. Morally, he who gives nachas deserves to receive it. Psychologically, when children see an example before them, in the person of their parents, of the attempt to live not only for one's self,

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but for a transcendent goal, then they too will live in order to fulfill and indicate the dreams of their parents for them.

So, Moses was greater than his parents. But his parents were worthy people indeed. His father, Amram, we are told that he was gedol Yisrael u-gedol ha-aretz - a great Jew and a great human being. Of his mother, Yocheved, we are told that she was ishah tzidkanit - a devout, pious woman. His parents gave nachas to our Heavenly Father; their son gave nachas to them.

This, indeed, must be our first guiding principle. What we want from children we must first give to the Almighty. For indeed, in the words of David, yismach ha-Shem be'maasav - the Lord wishes to be happy with his creatures.

The second suggestion for raising children who will give nachas to parents, is to provide for the children as happy and peaceful a home life as possible. The Talmud taught: ha-ragil be'ner havyan leh benin talmidei chakhamim (Shab.236) "the person who carefully observes the mitzvah of lighting the Sabbath candles will have children who are scholars." The Sabbath candles are symbolic of domestic tranquility, of peace, and quietness reign in the home, then there is an opportunity for the native genius of a child to blossom, flower, and bear fruit.

Listen to the Bible's description of the origin of Moses. Va-yelekh ish mi-bet Levi va-yikach et bat Levi - "and a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi." That is all there is to it - no notice in the social column, no great noise, and - unlike other religions - no sainthood for the father or deification of the mother. All is done with simplicity, in good taste, and with modesty. The Zohar points out that not even the names of the two people are mentioned in the Torah!

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All is be'tzinna - in modesty and silence. This, indeed, is a fundamental element in the background of Moses, that which enables him to be a Moses: tzinna - equanimity, modesty, serenity, domestic tranquility. These are some of the ingredients that can help to achieve that greatest of all blessings, nachas.

The third quality is important not only for us as individual parents, but for all of us collectively, as a people, as a mature generation looking forward anxiously to deriving nachas from the generation that is now growing up. Our Torah reading of this morning tells us that after Moses and the Children of Israel sang their song of triumph at the Red Sea, that Miriam too followed suit: va-tikach Miriam ha-neviah achot Aharon et ha-tof be'yadah, "and Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand..." Our Rabbis were puzzled by the fact that the Torah described the prophetess Miriam as the sister of Aaron. Should she not also be described as achot Mosheh, the sister of Moses? Is not Moses at least as important as Aaron?

They answer by relating the following crucial incident in the history of our people in Egypt, an incident which speaks volumes to our generation. Pharaoh had burdened the Israelites by increasing the quota of their work. They were enslaved and depressed beyond endurance. And, on top of this, came the cruel decree that every male child born to the Israelite be drowned in the Nile. A wave of great despair gripped the people. Amram, who was the head of his people, saw no hope for the future. And so he and Yocheved, who were already the parents of Aaron and Miriam, decided to separate and divorce, and he counselled all other Israelites to do the same. He cried out Lamah anu meyagim et atzmenu le'chinam - why shall we struggle to no avail? Why raise a family if, in the end, the birth of a child means only the death of a child? Why shall we go through all the torments of hell producing cannon-fodder for Pharaoh's troops, and innocent victims for his sadists? Better let Jewish family

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life come to an end and let us disappear as a people.

But this was not to be. For Miriam, who was then the sister of Aaron and not yet the sister of the unborn Moses, came to her father and to her mother and spoke to them of hope and courage, of determination and fortitude and faith. And she prophesied to them and said atid imi she'teled moshia le'yisrael - my mother shall yet give birth to one who will save the people of Israel! Do not give up hope. From amongst these children who seem to be doomed as the victims of Pharaoh, a redeemer will yet arise. And Amram listened to his daughter. He began to realize that it is possible that some day the dark clouds will part, and a ray of sunshine will brighten the dismal lives of the people. He began to understand that G-d will not remain silent forever. And so he instructed his people to return to their wives and their homes, and fling a challenge in the teeth of fate.

And how beautifully our Sages describe that remarriage of Amram and Yocheved, Amram built an apiryon, a chuppah, for his wife Yocheved. At the wedding ceremony, their children Aaron and Miriam, danced before them - and the angels from heaven provided the music, singing the words of David em ha-banim semechah, halleluyah - "the mother of the children is happy, praise ye the Lord." And out of that reunion, our Sages continue, was born Moses, the redeemer of Israel, he who forced back the black clouds ^{br} and/ought down those rays of sunshines, and the message of freedom and promise and courage to empty hearts, broken souls, and despairing spirits.

That is what is required of all of us if we want nachas from the generation that is growing up. Faith, even when in the grip of doom; courage, when such virtue is deemed foolhardy; trust in G-d's goodness, even when that appears ludicrous and ridiculous.

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If we American Orthodox Jews want a new generation of Jews who will be authentic and remain loyal to the great Torah and Tradition of Israel, we must defy an environment which sucks minority group into the vortex of bland assimilation. To do that demands courage, and the faith to realize that despite all toils and temptations, netzach Yisrael lo yeshaker, the eternity of Israel will forever prevent the disappearance of either Torah or our people. It means that we must have the fortitude to believe with all our hearts and all our souls that Torah will not only survive but will thrive in our generation and in our country - without our abandoning Torah on the one hand, or withdrawing altogether on the other, both a sign of a lack of faith in the future of Torah. If we take the attitude of Amram before Miriam taught him differently, the attitude that we are the last of a long line of loyal Jews, that we are about to draw the curtain down on the last act in a long drama of Judaism, then we ought to cry out with Amram: lamah anu me'yagim et atzmenu le 'chinam, that, in that case, it is not worth the effort to keep up Jewish institutions, customs, loyalties, and traditions. Then despair will have dealt us a crushing defeat.

But if we are willing to learn from Miriam, as was Amram, and to accept the prophecy that atid imi she'teled moshia le 'Yisrael, that there are amongst the members of the future generation some individuals, and indeed communities of individuals, who will redeem the dream of Israel and vindicate our hope and justify our faith - then indeed our optimism will give birth to a new reality. This is not a blind faith, for there are positive symptoms of the renaissance of a true religious spirit in our own day, a thirst for Torah in our new generation and a willingness to commit our faith to it. If we have the courage to see the promise of the future already appearing in the present, then we shall also hear those heavenly voices rejoicing with us and singing em ha-banim semechah, halleluyah. Then we, fathers and mothers of the next generation, will be happy indeed, our trust vindicated, our

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hope fulfilled, our dreams realized. In a word: our nachas will be achieved.

Too often it appears that many of our fellow Jews are in one category with the congregation of Rabbi Judah the Prince: ha-tzibbur hayah mitnamnem. They are asleep, spiritually morbid, dulled by a dismal despair into an intellectual coma. It is incumbent upon us to take them out of this lethargy. We can do this only by reminding them, as Rebbe reminded his congregation, that nachas is yet within our reach; that, indeed, there can yet arise a few highly dedicated individuals who will bring nachas to an entire generation and an entire people. We must remind them that, as our Rabbis pointed out, the Torah says of Moses not az shar - "then he sang" - but az yashir - "then he will sing". Literally: the Moseses will yet sing in the future. There will yet be new prophets, redeemers, scholars, and great Jews. We shall yet, if we are brave enough to hope, witness children who will proclaim, with Moses, zeh Eli V'anvehu, Elohei avi ve'aromemenhu - this is my G-d and I will glorify Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.

In the words of David (Psalm 128): "behold, thus indeed shall the man be blessed who reveres the Lord. The Lord bless you from Zion; may you see the welfare of Jerusalem all the days of your life; may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!"