

How far do we go in the Jewish education of our children?

By that question I mean, how far do we go in inspiring our children with Judaism and Jewish values? On the one hand we don't want to shove Judaism down our children's throats. We want their Judaism to be something about which they feel positive. On the other hand if we do not teach our children properly they will only receive a compromised, half-baked, watered-down version of their heritage.

The answer I believe is to be found at the outset of our Sedrah this week. Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh and warn him that if he doesn't acquiesce to their demands and let the people go, G-d will send a plague of locusts which will destroy the remaining vegetation.

It seems that Pharaoh has a change of heart, a momentary weakness. He says to them. "Go serve your G-d But who's going to go?"

Moses responds: "We are going to go with our youngsters and our elderly, with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds, for it is our festival to G-d".

Let me paraphrase what happens next: Pharaoh says, "I will give you permission to go with the adult men, but you cannot take the children. You are going to go and serve G-d in the wilderness, you want to follow your religion, go with pleasure. But this serving G-d thing, this religion thing is only for the adult men, but the children, why do you need them?"

Moses responds, "No deal, no compromise. If we want to ensure a Jewish continuity we all have to be part of the action, and that includes our children".

I think these words reverberate in the mind. Pharaoh believes in the compartmentalisation of religion. He understands the need to go serve G-d in the desert but he cannot see why everybody needs to go. The adults of course need to be there, but in regards to the children their minds are not fully developed; perhaps wait until they are older, and then, they have a free choice and can make a "rational" decision for themselves as to what path they are going to follow.

The outlook of Pharaoh lives on. There are those who say that it is not necessary to give our children a full Jewish education when they are young because when they are more mature they will be able to make the decisions for themselves. However my response is; what type of free choice are we giving our children if, from the outset they have never been exposed fully to Jewish values?!

Take the case of a gardener who wants to leave his garden for one year to grow its own way. He will return at the end of the year only to find the garden overgrown with weeds.

The seeds of Jewish values need to be sown early and nurtured. In the words of Moses; "We are going to go with our youngsters...."