

Large Families¹

- Most people have children for reasons of personal gratification.
- General society² subtly looks askance³ at couples having many children⁴.
- The prevailing culture often associates large families with uneducated, uncultured, and perhaps irresponsible people.
- In stark contrast to the above, the *Torah*⁵ obligates, encourages, and glorifies⁶ having many children⁷ and views it as fulfillment of *Hashem's* will and grand plan.
- The following are three insights into understanding the *Torah* approach to child bearing.

1

- *Hashem's* desire is for the world to be populated by people⁸.
- The *Rambam* says that “anyone who brings an additional Jewish child into the world is considered as if he built an entire world”⁹.
- The Jewish people have been entrusted by *Hashem* with a unique mission to accomplish over the course of history¹⁰. Every additional Jewish child helps in

-
1. Everything expressed in this shiur is from a purely general *hashkafic* perspective. In terms of the applied *halacha*, there can be exceptions and no serious decision in this area should be made without consulting a *Rov* familiar with the particular family situation.
 2. Society's attitudes on this topic are intrinsically connected to the understanding that the primary purpose of having children is for personal gratification.
 3. The term for a large family in Hebrew is “mishpachah berucha yeladim” - a family blessed with children, denoting the *Torah* view of large families as a blessing. It is important to note that recently there has been an attempt by secular Israelis to change that term to “mishpachah merubat yeladim” - a family with many children, subtly reflecting the current secular world view that large families are not at all a blessing.
 4. When the unaffiliated express surprise at the family size of *Torah* Jews, often the best response is simply to say to them that large families are our personal way of taking revenge on Hitler and his henchmen who wanted to decimate the Jewish people. For some odd reason this particular explanation goes over well with secular people. (Perhaps because everyone can identify with the concept of revenge.)
 5. In addition to the Biblical *mitzvah* to attempt to have a boy and a girl based from the verse “Be fruitful and multiply” (*Bereishis* 9:1; see *Even Haezer siman 1*), there is also a rabbinic *mitzvah* to continue bearing children into old age; see *Yevamos* (62b), *Even Haezer (siman 1)*, *Mishnah Berurah* (339:16).
 6. In midst of a personal conversation I merited to have with Rav Scheinberg Z”L on this topic, he exclaimed with great feeling - “I have five wonderful children, but how I wish I had more children”. (At the time of that discussion, each one of his five children where already great-grandparents many times over).
 7. According to the current world view, the default position of couples is not to have children and a conscious decision needs to be made in order to have children. The *Torah* view however is that the default position of couples is to have as many children as possible, a conscious decision needs to be made in order to stop having children.
 8. As the *Navi* (*Yeshaya* 45:18) teaches us - לֹא תִהְיוּ בְרָאָה - לִשְׁבֹּת יִצְרָה.
 9. See *Mishnah Torah (Ishus 15:16)* - וְזֵל, אֵף עַל פִּי שְׂקִיִּים אָדָם מִצּוֹת פְּרִיָה וְרִבְיָה הָרִי הוּא מִצּוּוֹה מְדַבְּרֵי סוֹפְרִים שְׁלֵא יִבְטֹל - שְׁכַל הַמוֹסִיף נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כִּאִילוּ בָנָה עוֹלָם עִבְלִי. מַלְפְּרוֹת וְלִרְבוּת כָּל זְמַן שִׁישׁ בּוֹ כַח, שְׁכַל הַמוֹסִיף נֶפֶשׁ אַחַת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כִּאִילוּ בָנָה עוֹלָם עִבְלִי.
 10. See *Shemos* (19:6) - וְהֵייתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים, כִּי לֹא כָל הָאָרֶץ, וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְלַכְתּוֹ כִּהְנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ”.

facilitating the fulfillment of that mission¹¹.

- The intention of a person having children should be that through his children there will be more Jews learning *Torah* and fulfilling *mitzvos*¹².

2

- The purpose of a person's sojourn in this world is to rightfully earn the ultimate pleasure and perfection of cleaving to *Hashem* in the next world¹³.
- It is impossible for a person to cleave and connect to *Hashem* in the next world if his being and persona are not G-d like¹⁴.
- The only way to develop a G-d like personality in this world is by actively emulating *Hashem* at every opportunity¹⁵.
- The primary traits of *Hashem* that we need to emulate and internalize¹⁶ are: boundless benevolence¹⁷, compassion, and character perfection¹⁸.
- The entire institution of child rearing is designed to provide a person with a myriad of daily opportunities to emulate *Hashem's* traits.
- *Hashem's* motive in creating the human race from nothingness was solely to have recipients for his endless compassion and benevolence¹⁹.
- By having children, we are also creating beings out of nothingness, to bestow upon them the care and compassion they constantly need to survive. Thus, procreation is perhaps the most powerful form of us mirroring *Hashem's* actions.
- The more children we have the more G-d like we become.

11. For an additional perspective on this point see *Avodah Zarah (5b)* - "אמר רבי יוסי אין בן דוד בא עד שיכלו נשמות שבגוף"

12. *Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer (25:2)*, see also *Mishnah Torah (Dayos 3:3)*.

13. See *Mesillas Yesharim (perek 1)*.

14. See *Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chesed chelek 2, perek 2)*.

15. See *Mishnah Torah (Dayos 1:6-7)* were the *Rambam* explains that only ongoing repetitious behavior can effectively mold and transform a person's psyche. This idea is also elaborated upon by the *Rambam* in his commentary on *Avos (3:15)*.

16. According to the *Shla"h* (preface to *Toldos Ha'adam*) the very name of man - "adam" is rooted in the term "adameh" which means to emulate and copy, for his primary objective in this world is to emulate *Hashem* as it says: "Adameh l'elyon" (*Yeshaya 14:4*).

17. See *Sotah (14a)*, *Shabbos (133b)*, *Toras Kohanim* (beginning of *Kedoshim*), *Sifrei* (on *Parshas Eikev*), and *Tanna D'Bai Eliyahu (Perek 26)*, for explicit Biblical sources and examples of traits of *Hashem* that we are obligated to imitate.

18. The *sefer Tomer Devorah* by Rav Moshe Cordovero Z"l is dedicated to clarifying in detail what exactly are the character traits exhibited by *Hashem* which we need to emulate.

19. Both in this world and the next; see what the *Ramchal* writes at the beginning of *Daas Tevunos* and *Derech Hashem*.

3

- While a person is alive his own *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim* provide him with sources of heavenly merit.
- After a person leaves this world, the primary catalyst for his ascension in *olam haba* are the *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim* of his descendants²⁰.
- The more children a person leaves behind in this world, the more potential sources of merit he has to benefit his own after-life²¹.

20. See *Sanhedren (104a)* - ברא מזכה אבא. See also the amazing words of the *Rashbah* (responsa vol. 5 siman 49) - זו"ל "כי זהו תכלית כל שכר האדם שישאר ממנו בעולם הגשמי עובד אלקים, ואז נראה לו כאלו הוא בעצמו העובד ואינו מת אלא חי, שהוא הוליד מי שעובד להשם יתברך" עכ"ל.

21. See the beautiful words of the *Shelah Hakadosh* (shaar haosios 4:25) describing how children can save their parents from heavenly punishment.