

The Ten Children Award

Celebrating Mother's Day every day.

Upping Israel's Birth Rate

This week, statistics were published about the citizens of the state of Israel. To date, 9.5 million people live in Israel, of whom about 7 million are Jews. More than twenty percent of the population is under the age of twenty.

Israel has the highest birth rate among developed nations.

But this was not always the case. In 1948, some 600,000 Jews lived in Israel, and the birth rate was lower than it is today. To rectify the issue, then Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, launched a special campaign in which every mother who gave birth to ten children received a one-time grant of 100 Israeli lirot. To put into perspective, a piece of land in Ramat Gan at the time cost 250 Lirot.

Along with the money, the couple would receive a letter signed by the Prime Minister, which stated: "The Government of Israel hereby sends you a check for a sum of one hundred lirot, as a sign of appreciation and encouragement to a mother in Israel who gave birth to and raised ten children. May you raise them to Torah, service and good deeds for the sake of our homeland and our nation. May your hands be strengthened."

A few weeks after the dramatic announcement, the newspaper reported that the award had been ceremoniously given to nine

Jerusalem women: five of them were mothers of ten children, three were mothers to eleven, and the last gave birth to no less than thirteen descendants. The winners' photos did not appear in the report, nor were any personal details published. "The women asked not to publish their names in the press, for fear of an evil eye," the newspaper reported, adding that another 190 applications had been submitted for the prize. A similar ceremony was held in Haifa.

The prizes were distributed en masse. Some were handed out by Ben-Gurion himself, who began spending more time at brisses and baby namings than at the Knesset. It seemed as if there was a new level of awareness about the importance of having children.

Still, the "Birth Award Law" gave rise to problems and complaints. One Bedouin, a father of seven, asked to receive the prize "on credit," promising to bring a tenth child in due time. Another father, this one of ten, waited a full year and four months for his award to process through the Israeli bureaucracy.

One enterprising fellow, a new immigrant from Yemen who resided in Rosh HaAyin, heard a rumor that in Eilat, the prize was 1,000 lirot, and he decided to immediately move his family's residence to the small southern settlement. He contacted the Jewish agency officials, updated them regarding the planned move, and was sent home to await a reply.

As time passed, he began to worry that his wife would decide to give birth before the transfer, and then his tenth son would

cause him a very significant loss of 900 pounds. Worried, he turned to the local police and asked them to intervene on his behalf, but he was informed that they were not responsible for the matter. He looked up at the heavens and said, “Well, we will pray for G-d’s mercy that we receive the answer in time.”

In another instance, shortly before Passover in 1955, a baby boy was born to one of the residents of the Herzliya transit camp. The father’s joy knew no bounds — and not only thanks to the new baby joining the family. It was the tenth child in the family, and the excited father expected to receive 100 Israeli lirot for the occasion, a handsome sum by all accounts. Indeed, every day, smiling families were seen on the pages of the newspapers, photographed next to the check known as the “Birth Award.” This Herzliya fellow, in light of his “windfall,” decided to invite all the local dignitaries to the bris.

The big day arrived, and the head of the council and the local rabbi arrived along with a photographer hired to commemorate the event. The crowd gathered, the bris was carried out, the name was given, a sumptuous meal was served, and the ceremony was over. But a week passed, and another week passed, and the long-awaited gift didn’t arrive.

One day, a registered envelope addressed to the father arrived at the transit camp. The father let out a sigh of relief and opened the envelope in anticipation, but instead of the coveted check, he found a detailed letter explaining why he was not eligible for the award: his ten children were not from the same mother: some were born to him in a previous marriage — so he did not meet the criteria.

At first, the grant was only given to Jews, but that created a controversy and the government decided to give it to all parents, regardless of religion or origin. Also, experts claimed that *all* families should be encouraged to give birth to *several* children, instead of encouraging a small number of women to give birth to ten, because that creates an economic crisis for the families who lose the ability to raise healthy children. Therefore, it was better to create a small grant for every child born, especially from the fourth child onwards.

In the end, in 1960, the “Birth Award” was abolished.

Mother’s Day Parsha

Sunday is Mother’s Day here in the United States. You might say it has become the most sacred day on the calendar, when everyone, without fail, pays homage to their mother, the mother of their children, future mothers of children, and so on and on.

It just so happened that in this week’s parsha, right at the beginning, in the second verse, it states, “A man should fear his mother and his father, and observe my Sabbaths, I am the L-rd your G-d.”

But why is this commandment necessary? Weren’t we already told in the Ten Commandments, “Honor your father and your mother”? What does the Torah add here? Rashi answers, “There is a difference between honor and fear.”

“What is honor? Feeding them and dressing them, bringing them in and taking them out.” We all know that caring for older

parents can be a challenge so the Torah commands us to “honor” our parents — meaning, to care for them, day in and day out.

“And what is fear? Don’t sit in his place, don’t speak in his turn, and don’t contradict his words.” You can’t tell your parent, “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” even if that’s actually the case.

This brings us to the next question: Why, in the Ten Commandments, did a father precede a mother, “honor your father” and only then, “and your mother,” while here, it mentions the mother before the father? Rashi says: “Because it is clear that a son fears his father more than his mother,” and might not treat his mother with the proper “fear,” so the Torah preceded the mother to emphasize that she is no less important than the father in this regard.

And why in the Ten Commandments, when it comes to honoring parents, does the father precede the mother? Rashi says: “Because it is clear that the son honors his mother more than his father, because she coaxes him” (Kedoshim 19:3).

The Midrash gives a different answer to the same question:

The Midrash asks, “Why, at Sinai, did a father precede a mother, and in the Tabernacle, a mother was mentioned first?” The Ten Commandments were said at Sinai, while Parshas Kedoshim was said during a Hakhel gathering at the portable temple, the Mishkan. Why the differences between the two gatherings?

The Midrash says something amazing: “At Sinai, because the nations of the world heard the words, a father preceded the mother, and in the Tabernacle, where only Israel heard, the mother came first.” (Midrash Aggada).

The Ten Commandments were heard by all the people of the world. It was meant for them as well. As we see today, almost all the inhabitants of the world accept the Ten Commandments (Hisvaaduyos 5742 vol. 3 p. 1265). That is why the father preceded the mother — because for gentiles, nationhood is determined by the father. As the Talmud says, “For nations of the world, follow the male” (Kiddushin 67b).

But Parshas Kedoshim was said only to the people of Israel, and for us, nationhood is determined by the mother. Therefore, the Torah precedes the mother to the father.

True Honor

My friends, in the world, Mother’s Day is once a year, but for Jews, Mother’s Day is every day. Let me give you an idea of how we should treat our mothers:

A few years after the Rebbe emigrated to the United States from Europe, his mother left Russia and came to France. The Rebbe traveled to France and stayed there until he managed to arrange all the paperwork for an entry visa to the United States, and then accompanied her here.

From then on, from 1947 to 1964, the Rebbe would visit his mother every single day! No matter how busy he was, he would drop everything and walk to his mother’s house. He kept a key

in his pocket so she would not have to get up and open the door for him. He would pour her a cup of tea, and sit with her for fifteen minutes. And he didn't do this once a year. He did it every day!