



## Why Do so Many Children Leave the Torah Path?

### Jewish Education Starts at Home from the Moment of birth

Educating our children the Torah way is a great challenge, especially in our time. So many distractions are accessible: from computer games and smartphones to popular punk-styles and green nail-polish. Sadly, even in religious communities, during Friday night services, boisterous teenagers gather together outside of the synagogue- some may even be smoking. This phenomenon can happen to the best of families. Even a Rabbi's daughter may be walking around in a miniskirt, flirting with the neighbor's son. People who adhere to a more modern outlook may blame it on large families, claiming that the parents don't have time to give each child proper attention. The more Yeshivish among us might blame it on the secular influence exuding from billboards, shopping-malls, computers and smartphones. But it seems like it hardly makes any difference to what spectrum of Jewish observance a family may belong. No-one is immune to the risk of their children leaving the Torah path. So, what can we do to reverse this 'going off the derech syndrome'? Without being an expert on the topic and with no research on the subject matter under my belt, I will still venture to say that we need more 'Jewish-mother-presence' in our homes. Today, when mothers are often working full time, the family bank- account may benefit, but the children suffer. Just as charity starts at home, Jewish education starts at home from the moment of birth.

### Connecting Children to the Torah of the Home – Like the Cherubs

In *Parashat Teruma* there is an allusion of the importance of giving our children a proper Torah education. The cherubs on the Ark represent our children:

**ספר שמות פרק כה פסוק יח עשית יח עשית שנים כרבים זהב מקשה תעשה אתם משני קצות הכפרת:**

**(יט) ועשה כרוב אחד מקצה מזה וכרוב אחד מקצה מזה מן הכפרת תעשו את הכרבים על שני קצותיו:**

"You shall make two golden cherubim; you shall make them of hammered work, from the two ends of the ark cover. And make one cherub from the one end and the other cherub from the other end; from the ark cover you shall make the cherubim on its two ends (*Shemot* 25:18-19).

"Each of the cherubs had the image of a child's face" (*Babylonian Talmud Sukkah* 5b).

"One in the likeness of a boy and the other of a girl" (*Zohar* Vol. II, 277b).

The child faced *Keruvim* (cherubs) were attached to the Holy Ark containing the Tablets of the Torah, to teach us that our children are beautiful when they are attached to the Torah. With shining faces they bring the Shechina into the world. However, when they stand alone, detached from Torah, they can literally become angels of destruction- terrorizing and destroying everything around them. Torah is life. Being devoid of Torah and left to the winds of the world cause the spirit to dim and darkness to reign. What does it mean to be attached to the Torah? It's not just about learning Torah verses by heart or being an expert on Talmudic studies. It's the environment and attitude at home that matters and has a lasting impact. It permeates every conversation and every family related decision. Do you run a Torah based home, or do other things act as the family compass, with all eyes pointing towards it? By giving our children Torah, we give them life (Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein).

## The Mother's Role in Torah Education

It is interesting to note that the keruvim were situated in the holy of holies, inside the Temple. In Hebrew, the Temple is called *Beit Hamikdash* – literally meaning 'Home of Holiness.' It's the home of the Shechina – the Divine Indwelling Feminine Presence. The Temple in Jerusalem is modeled after the first Jewish home – Sarah's Tent. The Temple vessels correspond to her challah, and Shabbat candle. The Cloud of Glory permeating the Temple corresponds to the cloud hanging over Sarah's tent (Rashi, *Bereishit* 24:67); (See, [Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion](#) p. 70). Every woman has a responsibility to make her home a miniature Temple – nothing less will serve as the right environment to raise children attached to the Torah, just like the cherubs fastened to the lid of Holy Ark of the eternal Torah in the "Home of Holiness." Just as the Divine Feminine Presence permeated the Home of Holiness (Temple), so do our children need the feminine presence of their mother in order to stay attached to the Torah. "Hear, my son, the instruction of your father (*mussar avicha*) and do not abandon the teaching of your mother (*torat imecha*)" ([Mishlei 1:18](#)). *Torat imecha*, the lived experience of Torah, is built first at home. No au pair, babysitter, or after school club can be considered a viable alternative to spending quality time with Mommy! I'm not saying the mother must be present 24/7 and never take a babysitter. My point is that in modern times, with women fulltime in the work market, children are not getting enough mothering. Whereas, the father's instruction is an intellectual-moral one, by teaching the children *mussar* – integrating Torah ethics in correct actions – the mother teaches that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with Torah-law but also in a living experience. "She [my mother] taught me that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to mitzvot. I learned from her the most important thing in life – to feel the presence of the Almighty and the gentle pressure of His hand resting upon my frail shoulders" (Rav Soloveitchik, *A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne*, [Tradition 17:2](#) [Spring 1978], pp. 76-77). It is specifically through *Torat Imecha*, the mother who brings the experience of G-d and Torah to life, that we can link children to Torah for life.