

DANCING FLAMES

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

A friend with a secular orientation once asked me, "Rabbi, considering the size of your family, wouldn't you agree that your children's emotional well-being would be compromised by the addition of yet another child?"

I explained to him that it depends on one's perspective. We can view each child as a liability that could potentially deplete our parental reservoir, or we can look at the infinite richness each one contributes to the family, and ultimately, to the world at large. With this perspective, the parents' joy, far from diminishing with the birth of an additional child, becomes all the greater.

Underscoring this idea, we celebrate the gift of each child by designating an individual candle for him or her, every Friday evening at *licht-bentching*. Each additional flame adds to the radiance of the cumulative light.

If we see ourselves as beneficiaries of Hashem's bounty, granted the wonderful privilege to share and care for another human being, to ennoble and enlighten that child as much as possible, we will find that the resources we've been blessed with are more than enough for our needs.

One of the most universal human responses is the unconditional embrace of a newborn. The very sight of the baby elicits exclamations of endearment and delight. An infant reflects pure innocence and activates the inherent good and love within people.

Perhaps on a certain level, we long to recapture that outpouring of love we ourselves were showered with at that stage. But do we want it so badly we'd prefer to remain that little child? Surely not. Although maturity imposes burdens we'd sometimes rather do without, perpetual childhood with its carefree absence of responsibility would obviously not make for a fulfilling and meaningful existence. The *neshama* needs to be nourished, and that only comes with continuous challenge and growth.

We encounter this thought in this week's Torah portion, as we read of Moshe Rabbeinu's longing to enter Eretz Yisroel at the end of his life. His desire to grow in spiritual stature despite having reached the apex of human accomplishment, is unabating. He is 120 years old, but still longs for a new frontier.

Having overcome the most gut-wrenching obstacles and challenges in the first 80 years of his life, he was chosen by the Al-mighty to lead the Jewish people from bondage to freedom, to smash the

Egyptian oppressors, and to endow the Jewish nation with Hashem's Torah. For forty years he has led them through the wilderness, connecting them to the Divine Spirit every step of the way. He has attained the highest level of prophecy possible for a human being. The legacy he is about to leave behind is unparalleled. Yet he isn't prepared to rest on his laurels. At the doorstep to the promised land, Moshe fervently beseeches G-d to allow him to enter with the Jewish people, so that he can perform the commandments that are exclusive to Eretz Yisroel and take part in the building of the Holy Temple.

With his unrivaled leadership and achievements, couldn't Moshe have contented himself with basking in past and present glory?

The point, however, is that each moment in life's journey carries its own special challenge and opportunity. To be satisfied with yesterday's achievements is to sell oneself-and Hashem-short.

As a young boy, growing up in Manchester, England I was quite a car enthusiast. I went from one car dealership to another, collecting glossy brochures of every sports car model. My collection included Aston Martens, Alpha Romeos, Triumph Spitfires, and of course limited-edition Mini Coopers. They were all lovingly stored in two suitcases under my bed. At the age of sixteen, I went off to advance my yeshiva studies in Gateshead. Upon my return, I discovered to my chagrin that my mother had thrown out all my brochures. She said that as she was cleaning for Pesach, she figured I didn't need them any more, and had thus disposed of them.

I recall suppressing my indignation with difficulty, while resigning myself to the finality of my loss. To my mother, an automobile was simply a means of getting from A to B. How could I explain to her that to me, the torque, graceful lines, special features, and even the MacPherson struts, were all of vital importance?

With time, I was able to look back with appreciation for what she had done. Sometimes we need to be pushed to the next stage of our journey. Holding on to our childish fancies may inhibit our ability to mature and to appreciate the more important things in life. Yes, I am still a car enthusiast at heart. Most vacations include a visit to an automobile museum where I can delight in examining early Packards and Chryslers. But this hobby, instead of being a dominant theme in my life, is now one minuscule facet of a much larger mosaic.

As parents of a newborn once again, my wife and I pray that we are granted the health, wisdom, and sensitivity to guide this child through the many crucial stages of his development, turning his tiny flame into a vibrant torch. May we merit to be at his side to help him try out his wings, test his engines, and position his headlights, to taxi him all the way to the end of the runway.

May we all be zocheh to watch with pride as our charges take off and soar independently to the skies. And may we be inspired to set an example for them by being unafraid to tackle new frontiers on our own individual life journey. Text Copyright © 2012 by Rabbi Naftali Reich and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).

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