



## בראשית

### Unlimited Potential

וַיְבְרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵי אֱלֹקִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

And G-d created man in His image, in the image of G-d He created him; male and female He created them.

אמנם להבין ענין אומרם בצלם אלקים דיקא. ולא שם אחר. כי שם אלקים ידוע פירושו שהוא מורה שהוא ית"ש בעל הכחות כולם כמ"ש בטור א"ח סימן ה'.

However, to understand why He specifically stated “in the image of G-d-*Eloki*”m” and not some other name, it is because the meaning of the name *Eloki*”m is well understood, that it implies that He (blessed be His name) is the Master of All Powers, as explained in the *Tur, Orakh Chayyim, siman 5*

Nefesh Hachaim, Chapter 1

The potential possibilities of any child are the most intriguing and stimulating in all creation.”

Ray L. Wilbur

Malcolm Gladwell is well-known for his works of pop-psychology that often provide a novel perspective on familiar issues. His bestseller, *Outliers*, uncovers the secrets to success with some great surprises along the way.

Gladwell opens the book with a fascinating study of the birth-dates of professional hockey players, noting the disproportionate number of players born in the first few months of the calendar year. The distribution of birthdates cannot be explained by statistical randomness, and indicates that another factor is at play. That factor is the cutoff age for kids playing hockey in the pee-wee leagues. The cutoff date, an arbitrarily selected day meant to group children by approximate age for competitive balance, is the first of January. The unintended consequence of that cutoff date is that a child born at the end of December will play alongside another child born in the beginning of January, despite the fact that the December child is nearly one full year younger.

The surprising result of the age disparity between the youngest and oldest members of the same age group is the start of a feedback loop that strongly favors the older members of the group. It works as follows: Coaches look for youth with size, ability, and natural athleticism, singling them out as uniquely suited for success at hockey. But, the coaches mistake physical maturity for physical ability. Lined up next to kids nearly one full year younger, the older kids are bigger, faster, and more athletic than their peers. The coaches, seeing the “talent” encourage these kids as budding stars, devote their energies and resources to these kids, and gently encourage their smaller, slower, less athletic peers to pursue other activities, as the gap between them and their older peers continues to widen over the years.

The problem of course is that the coaches’ assessment of talent is completely wrong. The younger boys may have as much as or even more natural potential than their older peers, they are simply not as physically mature and developed. The net result is that a large pool of talent is completely ignored, and the birth dates of professional hockey players are heavily skewed to the beginning of the calendar year.

The lesson is simple. Talent in children is a funny thing. Often childhood talent is not discovered by adults, it is created by the adults who come to the conclusion, correct or not, that a child has a proclivity for one thing or another. The influential adult’s belief in the child’s potential causes that adult to encourage and foster that talent, making it into a talent or ability even if none really existed before.

That is because children are born as blank slates of almost limitless potential. They can do almost anything as long as we adults encourage that anything.

The unlimited, raw potential of the newborn is subtly contained in this week’s *parsha*. The Torah tells us that man is created *b’tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d. The *Nefesh Hachaim* notes the specific name of G-d used in describing the creation of man



in G-d's image. Why is man described as fashioned *b'tzelem Elokim* and not *b'tzelem Hashem*? The *Nefesh Hachaim* points to the Tur in *siman 5* who explains the Divine name "*Elokim*" to mean G-d as the *בעל הכחות כולם*, the Master of all Power and Ability.

While the *Nefesh Hachaim* finds a more *kabbalistic* meaning in man's G-d-like potential, there is a *pshat* aspect to it as well. Man is created in the image of the Almighty, and that makes man all mighty as well. The human being is created with potential to do just about anything. It is the job of the adults in the child's life to foster those abilities.

The big takeaway for parents is that we should view our children as blank slates with potential for anything, and we should foster and encourage that all-encompassing potential. Never allow yourself to mistakenly believe that there's something your child cannot do. If you believe they can do it and you foster their ability, your belief will come to fruition and they will come through.

Good Shabbos,  
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Principal