

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

Appreciating the Good

In each of the first two books of the Torah we are introduced to the beginnings of the Jewish people. In the first book of Breishit, the focus is on the family; the three patriarchs and their families- the striving and the bickering within the families. The second book of Shemot begins with the emergence of the Jewish people as an entity, their rise to greatness and their perceived threat and eventual expulsion from the land. It is a story of love and hate, jealousy and adoration. Breishit in essence deals with the beginnings of the family of the Jewish people, while the book of Shmot stresses the initial stages of the formation of the great nation of Israel.

The bridge between both books is the dramatic account of Joseph and his brothers; his rise to power and his innovations in the land of Egypt. Because of his efforts, Shmot begins with the surfacing of the Jewish people as a powerful nation, and finally "there arose a new king of Egypt who did not know of Joseph"-or at least he pretended that he did not know-and the persecuting of the Jews leading to their final ouster from the land.

A dominant theme in the book of Shmot, is the attention to the importance of "Hakarat Hatov, recognizing the good. The Torah references times when Pharaoh did not recognize the good that Joseph had brought upon Egypt, while at the same time spotlighting the sensitivities of our teacher Moses in refusing to punish the Egyptians with the plagues of blood, frogs and lice, for the waters saved his life when he was cast onto the Nile as a baby, and the land rescued him by providing a place to bury the Egyptian that he slew, ultimately saving his life. This theme of "Hakarat Hatov" appears in other instances in this story as well and brings home the lesson of the importance of this attribute in a Jew's daily life.

An added display of the reaction of Almighty G-d when one denies "Hakarat Hatov" can also be seen in the way G-d punishes Pharaoh.

Pharaoh denies Joseph's existence. He rejects any good or benefit that the Jews of Egypt have bequeathed his land. He snubs their existence. G-d's response for this obvious lack of "Hakarat Hatov", recognition for the good, is that the land of Egypt would be inundated with plagues, each a symbol of how Egypt

would have appeared had Joseph not been there during the famine to save it.

The blood represents the lack of water; this leads to the frogs and amphibians engulfing the land in search for water. As a consequence of the lack of water, lice befell the people. Wild animals then ascended upon the land for there was no food to be found and they had no alternative but to seek their sustenance within the vulnerable population of humans. Further, when there is no food the cattle and livestock die (Dever, Pestilence). All these unsanitary conditions lead to boils (Shichin). Finally the hail and the Locusts destroy all the remaining food leaving the land barren and in darkness, ultimately leading to the death of children, the very future of Egypt's existence.

G-d needed to show Pharaoh how his land would have looked had Joseph and all the Jews not been there. The result was desolation and emptiness; total destruction.

In essence, this is also the cycle of Jewish History throughout the ages. Despite contributions of the Jewish people, and their work to better society, they are often taken for granted and are not given the proper Hakarat Hatov, recognition of the good, that they so deserve.

One has only to look at the amount of discoveries in science and medicine, the Arts and in education to appreciate the vital role that the Jews have played. Yet they are constantly ridiculed and blamed for all of the world's troubles, very often becoming the scapegoats for societies.

This is the story of the book of Exodus. And this story is the basis for all the stories of the Jewish sojourn in world history.

In each land that we visit we grace it with our knowledge and drive. We improve their society. When finally we are chased out, often the land we sojourned in is left void and empty. One need only look at the land of Israel after the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. Only the Jews were able to eventually return in the late 1800's and till the soil and make it



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fruitful and beautiful; a land flowing with milk and honey.

The message of the importance of Hakarat hatov therefore becomes apparent. Its lack is a plague which also affects Jews as well. It stems from a feeling of entitlement and the wielding of power and influence.

How many of us thank the schools that our children attend and receive such a fine education? How many of us thank their teachers, their Rabbis and the people who work so hard to keep the doors of the Day School or Yeshiva open? How many of us thank our parents for all their love and support? And yes, how many of us thank the simple person who performs menial tasks like cleaning the bathrooms at the airport or in our offices? A simple "thank you" would go a long way! And a simple "thank you" would bring our redemption that much closer! ©2009 Rabbi Mordechai Weiss has been involved in Jewish education for over four decades. He has served as Principal of various Hebrew Day Schools and as evaluator for Middle States Association. He has received numerous awards for his innovative programs and was chosen to receive the coveted "outstanding Principal" award from the National association of Private Schools. During his distinguished leadership as Principal, his school received the sought-after "excellence in education" award given by the US Department of Education. He now resides in Israel and is available for speaking engagements. Contact him at ravmordechai@aol.com.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Passover Seder we will be soon be celebrating is an evening dedicated first and foremost to the relationship between the generations, to parents communicating to their children the agony and the ecstasy of Egyptian enslavement and exodus – that seminal biblical drama which most profoundly forged our Israeli identity and traditions. Indeed, the masterful booklet that tells the tale and structures ("seder" means order) the entire evening is called the Haggada (literally, telling), from the biblical verse "And you shall tell your children [vehigadeta] on that day" (Exodus 13:3).

But what if your children – or one of your children – is not interested in hearing? What if he or

she is willing to participate in the meal, but is totally tuned out of and turned off to the ritual that surrounds and informs the meal? How are we, the parents, teachers and communicators, supposed to respond in such a case? The Haggada is not only a text of the Egyptian experience; it is also a masterful guide to the art of effectively parenting-communicating the message of our mesora (tradition). By its very place as the centerpiece of a much-anticipated evening dedicated to the performance of many commandments – commandments that parents are to experience together with their children – we learn that we can only successfully impart a value that we ourselves believe in and act out; children will learn not by what we say, but by how we perform.

Moreover, our children-students must feel that they are the prime focus of the evening, and not mere adjuncts to an adult happening; and the message must be molded in such a way as to respond to their questions and concerns (Maggid begins with the "Four Questions"). Each individual must be given the opportunity to ask his/her questions and to receive answers appropriate to both question and questioner (note the "four children" of the Seder). Finally, the atmosphere around the table must be more experiential than cerebral, punctuated by familial stories and the fun of games (hide-the-afikoman), and warmed by wine, food and love. Such is the Haggada's formula for effective communication between parents and children – not just one evening a year, but every single day of every year.

But what of the apathetic, uninterested child? One of the four prototypical children of the Seder is the "wicked child," whom the author of the Haggada designates as such because of the biblical question ascribed to him: "What is this service [avoda] to you?" (Exodus 12:26) Why does the Haggada assume a negative attitude on the part of this child, who is merely seeking a relevant explanation for a ritual he doesn't understand? The Haggada's answer to this child also seems unduly harsh. "What is this service to you' – and not to him. And because he took himself out of the historic Jewish community, he denied the basic principle. And so you must set his teeth on edge [hak'heh], and tell him, 'It is because of this [ritual] that God did for me [so many wonders] in taking me out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8). 'God did for me' and not for him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."

The seemingly abrasive response of the Haggada seems to be the very opposite of everything we've been positing: Set his teeth on edge! Does this mean (God forbid) rap him in the mouth? And why switch from second person to third person in the middle of the dialogue? First the Haggada reads, "And you tell him," and then concludes – as if you aren't even speaking to him – "Had he been there, he would not

have been redeemed.”

Has he been closed out of the family Seder? I believe that the most fundamental message of the Seder – indeed, of family dynamics, of classroom management and of national policy as well – is to be inclusive and not exclusive, to make everyone feel wanted and accepted rather than rejected or merely tolerated.

Indeed, it is in the context of the response to the wicked child that the Haggada teaches that the most basic principle of our faith is to include oneself – as well as everyone who can possibly be included – within the historical community of Israel, to be part of the eternal chain of Jewish being, to be a member of the family. Therefore, the problem with this child’s question is not his search for relevance; that is to be applauded and deserves a proper response. The problem is that he has excluded himself from the familial-national celebration; he sees it as applying to “you” and not to “him.”

The author of the Haggada tells the head of the family, when confronted by a child who excludes himself from the family ritual, to “hak’heh” his teeth; not the familiar Hebrew form hakeh, which means to strike or hit, but rather the unusual Hebrew hak’heh, which means to blunt or remove the sharpness by means of the warmth of fire (Ecclesiastes 10:10; B.T. Yevamot 110b). Tell him, says the author of the Haggada, that although we are living thousands of the years after the fact, God took me – and him/her as my child – out of Egypt, because we are all one historic family, united by our family celebrations and traditions. Tell him that the most important principle of our tradition is to feel oneself an integral part of a family that was once enslaved and is now free – and to relive this message of the evils of slavery and the glories of freedom, because if they happened to our forebears, it is as if they happened to us. Since we were formed by them, we are them and they are us. And so is he/she.

And don’t tell it to him matter-of-factly by rote or harshly with animus. Tell it to him with the flame and passion of fire that blunts sharp iron, with the warmth and love of a family that is claiming and welcoming its own as one who belongs – no matter what. Encourage the child to take part in and feel a part of the familial-national celebration. Then, but only then, will the child feel redeemed.

And why the switch from second person to third person? Perhaps the child asked this question, and left the table. He spoke and ran, leaving you no choice but to address him as a third person no longer in your presence. What do you do then? I would suggest that when we open the door for Elijah, it is not in order to let the prophet in. After all, anyone who can visit every Jewish Seder more or less simultaneously will not be obstructed by a closed door. I believe that we open the door – in the spirit of the herald of redemption who will

restore the hearts of the children to the parents and the parents to the children – in order for us to go out, to find the “wicked child” and lovingly restore him to the family Seder table. This is the greatest challenge of the Seder night. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the more amazing things about the holiday of Pesach is that even though it is over 3300 years old it is relevant and current to our world today just as it was when it was originally celebrated by the Jewish people in Egypt long ago. It naturally speaks to every generation in a different tone and nuance, but its basic message of human freedom and Godly service has never changed.

Its rituals and commandments are the key to its longevity and survival over all the centuries and, in spite of all of the challenges and difficulties that are so replete in Jewish history. In fact, were it not for these rituals and commandments the holiday itself, if not even the Jewish people, would have long ago disappeared into the ash heap of history.

The Godly instinct that has made ritual a daily part of the life of every Jew has been the surest method of Jewish survival and continuity. It is what binds the generations one to another in families and nationally. Without it, the disconnect between generations and the circumstances of society would be so great that it would be impossible to overcome.

The night of the Pesach Seder is the greatest example of the power of ritual and tradition to preserve human relationships and to bind disparate generations together. It is no exaggeration to say that the Jewish world is founded on the night of the Pesach Seder. Without it, we are doomed to extinction. With it, we become immortal and eternal.

I myself have always been privileged to celebrate Pesach and the Seder at home. I only went to a hotel for Pesach once in my lifetime when my wife was ill, and we had no other choice. I am not here to decry all of the Pesach programs that exist and prosper worldwide. I understand and appreciate why they are so popular and in our generation of relative affluence in the Jewish world, it is completely rational to use these services.

But it is completely ironic that in our time, because of technological advances, all sorts of automatic appliances, Pesach kitchens and an unbelievable plethora of prepared Pesach foods and products, that giving one’s family the unforgettable experience of a Pesach at home is slowly disappearing from the Jewish scene in many parts of the world.

Let me hasten to say again that I do not criticize anyone for any reason who celebrates Pesach at a hotel or with any sort of organized program. There are many circumstances in life that justify these

choices. However, for the purposes of Jewish continuity and survival, I feel that it is important for children to remember a family Pesach at home, to recall how their parents and grandparents conducted a Seder and to be able to give personal expression to the glory of the holiday and to the memory of our history.

At the Pesach Seder there is a potential for uniting hundreds of years of family memories. Grandparents remember their grandparents and the little great-grandchildren, whose sole interest is to extort their elders for the return of the afikomen, are united in binding together hundreds of years of family life and Judaism. A Seder at home with the family provides the optimum setting for such an emotional and spiritual experience.

Eighty years ago, I attended the first Seder that I can recall. It was in the house of my grandfather who was educated in the great yeshiva of Volozhin and who was a rabbi of a congregation in Chicago as well as being one of the heads of the yeshiva that then existed in Chicago. That Seder is one of my earliest memories in life. I remember the deference that my father and uncles paid my grandfather and I recall how my cousin and I hesitatingly recited the four questions to him and the delight that shown on his face when we did so.

There were about 30 people at my grandfather's Seder that year. Only my cousin and I still survive but I have tried to pass on the memory of that Seder to my own grandchildren and now great-grandchildren. By so doing, a whiff of Volozhin, and even of Egypt and Sinai, may be transmitted to them and from them to their generations as well. Like all else in Judaism, Pesach is memory. And memory is the most powerful tool for the preservation of a Jewish way of life.

I wish you and your families a happy and kosher Pesach. ©2018 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The literal approach to the Haggadah's four children is straightforward. On four different occasions, the Torah describes questions asked by children about Passover. Based on the language of the question, the author of the Haggadah labels each of them. One questioner is described as wise, the second rebellious, the third simple, and the fourth not even knowing how to ask. And the Haggadah, basing itself on the Torah text, offers answers to suit the specific educational needs of each child. But if we go beyond the literal approach, hidden messages emerge.

While this section of the Haggadah is

associated with youngsters, is it not possible that the children referred to here include adults of all ages? After all, no matter how old we are, we are all children—children of our parents and children of God.

From this perspective, the message of the four children is that every Jew has his or her place in Judaism. The challenge is to have different types of Jews seated around the Seder table in open respectful dialogue, each contributing to the Seder discussion, each exhibiting love for the other. It also reminds us that we have much to learn from everyone – this realization is what truly makes us wise. In the words of Ben Zoma, who is mentioned just before this section in the Hagaddah, "eizehu hakham? Halomed mikol Adam. Who is wise? One who learns from each person." (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

Another approach to the four children: Perhaps they are not four separate individuals? After all, no one is completely wise, totally rebellious, perfectly simple, nor absolutely unable to ask. Rather, the four children are really one individual in whom there are each of these elements: wisdom, rebelliousness, simplicity and silence.

The message: as we sit opposite each other at the Seder, we ought to recognize that everyone has strengths, represented for example by the hakham (the wise child), and weaknesses, represented, for example by the rasha (the rebellious child). The challenge is not to allow the weaknesses we know to exist within ourselves to destroy our self image. For that matter, neither ought we allow the weaknesses we see in others to destroy our relationship with them. As opposed to our first hidden message that teaches integration, this approach teaches us that there are times when weaknesses should be set aside in order to continue on.

A final thought: Perhaps the most important child is none of the four, but the fifth, the one who is not mentioned, the one who is not even at the Seder table. It was Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits who once quipped: "Who is a Jew? One whose grandchildren are Jewish." The sad reality is that for most Jews their grandchildren are not Jewish or will not be.

The message at the Seder is to reach out to that fifth child. Maybe that's why we open the door for Eliyahu Ha Navi (Elijah the Prophet). It's Eliyahu, according to the Prophets, who returns the hearts of children to their parents. (Malakhi 3:23 24)

As we reach out for the missing child, we ought recall the words of Rav Shlomo Carlebach, of blessed memory: "Do you know the way you walk back from the Holy Wall? You don't turn around and walk away. When you meet the Czar of Russia, you don't turn around and walk away, you walk backwards. And I want to bless you, when your children grow up and they walk out of your house, and they build their own houses, sad enough, a lot of children turn around and they don't

build a Jewish house any more. I want to bless you your children should walk away backwards." ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

Eating to Live

The very first mitzvah given to every individual of Am Yisrael was the Korban Pesach. As opposed to all other offerings, eating the meat is a separate mitzvah unto itself (Shemos 12:8, Rambam aseh 56). In contrast to other offerings, if it becomes impure and cannot be eaten it may not be offered (Pesachim 78b). Conversely, when the majority of Am Yisrael is impure and the Korban Pesach is brought in an impure state, it is eaten that way since the whole reason to offer it is to eat it (76b).

The Torah teaches us that eating, the most basic human need for survival, can be done before Hashem (Devarim 14:23), as a mitzvah. Although this activity is one which man shares with the animal kingdom (Chagiga 16a), man must elevate his eating to a dignified level.

This is a uniquely Jewish perspective. A non-Jew can offer a sacrifice, but only an olah, which is totally burned on the mizbe'ach (Menachos 73b). Eating before Hashem does not exist in a bifurcated lifestyle in which worldly actions are not included in religious life.

Esav told Yaakov "Pour into me now some of the red soup" (Breishis 25:30). Rashi writes, "I will open my mouth, and pour a lot into it, as we have learned (Shabbos 155b) we may pour food into a camel's mouth." Rav Yerucham Levovitz (Daas Torah) explains that many laws apply to eating in order to raise it from an animalistic act to a human one. The portion size and the pace distinguish humans from animals. A Jew must eat for the sake of doing Hashem's will, just as we must do when eating kodshim from the mizbe'ach. Woe unto a person whose eating is not superior to that of an animal.

When Yaakov received the berachos instead of Esav, he was told by Rivka to bring meat from the Korban Peach to Yitzchak (Rashi 27:9). Yitzchak planned to give Esav worldly berachos and Yaakov spiritual ones (27:28,29; 28:4). Rivka arranged for Yaakov to receive the physical berachos as well. Her plan was for Yaakov to sublimate earthly matters by including them in avodas Hashem, and this is symbolized by the Korban Pesach which she gave to Yaakov in order to receive, and thereby elevate, worldly berachos (Rav C.Y. Goldvicht). Divine Providence ruled in accordance with Rivka's view (Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik).

"A tzadik eats to satiate his soul" (Mishlei

13:25). As a rule, the Torah discourages asceticism, and yet running after food is deemed sinful and requires teshuva (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 7:3).

Recently, medical science has taught that overeating is injurious not only to the soul but to the body as well. In the U.S., overweightness and obesity are primary causes of mortality and morbidity, perhaps even exceeding smoking (see The Health Risks of Obesity Worse Than Smoking, Drinking or Poverty <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB4549.html>). The typical eating habits of Orthodox Jews on Shabbos and Yom Tov, especially Pesach, can have negative medical consequences. The Torah prohibits dangerous activities, and this includes smoking (Rav Ovadia Yosef, Yechaveh Daas 5:39). Unhealthy eating is difficult to define precisely, but egregious gluttony, which clearly reduces longevity, is prohibited.

The Ramban (Vayikra 19:1) describes a lustful individual who avoids technical prohibitions as a "naval bereshus haTorah - a degenerate operating within the technical requirements of Torah." "Kedoshim tihiyu - be holy" requires moderation in food and alcohol. If excessive eating or drinking endangers one's health, it no longer is bereshus haTorah. The Rambam (Hilchos Deos 4:1) rules "It is the way of Hashem to be healthy, as illness prevents understanding and knowledge of the Creator. Therefore, one must distance himself from things that harm the body, and conduct himself with things that heal and strengthen. One should not eat unless he is hungry".

Our bodies do not belong to us, but rather to Hashem (Radvaz, Hilchos Sanhedrin 18:6), as we say in Selichos, "...and the body is Yours" (See Leor Hahalacha by Rav S.Y. Zevin, p. 318-328). We are commanded to follow medical advice and avoid dangerous practices. We must eat to livelonger and healthier lives and avoid living to eat, especially if it shortens or harms our lives.

"You may not break a bone in it" (the Korban Pesach) (Shemos 12:46). The Chinuch (16) explains that it is not honorable for princes to eat like dogs that break bones. To remember the exalted level we reached on Pesach, we must eat like princes would, and not like animals.

The Chinuch famously continues that a person's heart is influenced by his deeds. One should not indulge in the pleasures of those who engage in gluttony and scoffery, as these actions, even if not technically prohibited, affect one's heart and soul negatively.

The Rambam (Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18) states that when one eats and drinks on yom tov, he is also obligated to feed the poor and the stranger (ger). If one does not feed the poor and the embittered souls, his is not a simcha of mitzvah but of his stomach, which is a disgrace.

This can explain the juxtaposition of the

subsequent pesukim (12:47, 48). "All of Adas Yisrael shall do it", (the Korban Pesach), including a ger. One who doesn't break bones recognizes that eating should not be gluttonous but refined. Sharing with those who do not have the means assures that all Am Yisrael, including the poor and the ger, will fulfill the mitzvah of Korban Pesach. This elevates the Korban Pesach of the donor, as he eats it like a prince, who bears and feels responsibility to provide for the unfortunate.

The original Korban Pesach was eaten only in one's home (12:46) in a princely fashion (see Chinuch 15). Ideally, the seder should be at home, with extended family and appropriate guests.

For those who, for whatever reason, spend Pesach in hotels, the words of the Chinuch are doubly important. Unfortunately, a culture of overindulgence, reported by participants and reflected in advertisements, can negatively influence a person's heart and soul on Pesach.

True simchas yom tov requires moderation in eating and drinking, the avoidance of idle chatter and scoffing, and significant time learning Torah (Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:19). In some cases, as the Chinuch writes, this requires resisting temptations and social pressures. For those expending great sums for hotels and/or travel, the amount of money given before Pesach to feed the poor should increase commensurately.

On Pesach 5778, let us all be mindful of the elevated status we achieved on Pesach years ago and thereby merit the rebuilt Bais Hamikdash and the renewal of the Korban Pesach. ©2018 Rabbi M. Willig and TorahWeb.org

RABBI ARI WEISS

Where's Moshe?

This year, like every year, as we read through the Haggadah, we wonder why Moshe is not mentioned. One would think that Moshe, through whom all of the plagues were brought, and whom Hashem commanded to lead us out of Egypt would be the central character at our seder. Wasn't it through him that our redemption occurred? Yet, we find no trace of Moshe's name anywhere.

In order to understand why Moshe is in the background during our seder, we must examine the content of maggid. Maggid outlines the story of our redemption and actually retells the story of every exile we've gone through and will go through. In maggid we read of the prototypical exile and redemption that generalizes all of our exiles and redemptions. The Baal Hagadah presents this in the form of four P'sukim which are expounded upon during maggid. The first verse describes our descent into exile, and how it was intended for but a short time. The second verse describes how the Egyptians oppressed and afflicted us. The third verse describes how we finally called out

to Hashem to help us, and the final verse describes our redemption.

These four verses can therefore be seen as the outline of golus and geula. We first go into exile, are oppressed, cry out to Hashem for help, and he answers by saving us. This is the model for all redemptions, including our final one (IY"H). But what happened to Moshe - the Moshiach? The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin underscores the importance and requirement of Moshiach in our redemption. Yet the Baal Hagadah neglects to mention Moshiach as one of the elements of Golus and Geula.

It is very possible, then, that the Baal Hagadah is focusing on our role in the Geula and how we can help to bring it about. We read, therefore, in the maggid how Hashem listened to our calls, saw our afflictions, our toils, and our troubles. It wasn't until we cried out to Hashem in tefillah that we were saved. We finally realized that we couldn't do it ourselves and could only be saved through Hashem's intervention. But the Baal Hagadah goes on to explain that the Passuk also refers to the children. Hashem came to redeem us because of our tefillos and because of the Jewish identity instilled in the children.

So why isn't Moshe mentioned? Because Moshiach is Hashem's "job." Ours, as is recalled in the Haggadah, is Tefillah and the home. When we uphold our end, Hashem will bring about the Geula in whatever way He sees fit.

AISHDAS SOCIETY

Aspaqlaria

by Rabbi Micha Berger

The Haggadah tells us that the Torah addresses the question of telling the Passover story to our children by referring to four different kinds of children. One is wise, one is evil, one is uncomplicated, and the last doesn't know to ask questions. Each son asks a question, even if the last does so in his silence. We can see from the question what they are looking to take from the seder experience.

I believe these four approaches follow through in how we react to tragedy as well. Given the dismal state of current events, perhaps this is worth some exploration.

R' Joseph Ber Soloveitchik zt"l ("the Rav") addresses the question posed by the Holocaust in his seminal work on religious Zionism, "Kol Dodi Dofeik". His position is that the question of why is there human suffering can't be answered. Any attempt to address theodicy is going to insult the intellect or the emotions, and quite likely both. But "Why?" isn't the Jewish question. Judaism, with its focus on halachah, on deed, asks, "What shall I do about it?"

The Rav continues by quoting the Talmudic principle, "Just as we bless [G-d] for the good, so we bless [Him] for the evil." Just as we dedicate all the

good that comes are way to be tools in our avodas Hashem, we also dedicate ourselves through our responses to suffering.

This is the wise son's reaction. "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." The wise son is one who turns everything into a learning experience. His response to the seder is "What are the testimonial acts, the dictates, the laws, which Hashem your G-d commanded you?" How does G-d teach us to react to the events of Egypt and freedom? How am I supposed to react to tragedy?

When G-d presents tragedy to the wise son, they are called nisyonos- challenges or tests. Like the Akeidah, a learning experience for Abraham, to get him to fully realize his potential.

The second son, the wicked son, needs a wake up call. What the gemarah refers to as "yisurim". In the weekday prayer "Tachanun" we ask G-d to forgive our sins "but not through yisurim or bad illness".

The evil son of the Hagadah doesn't respond to this wakeup call. He asks, -- no, he says rhetorically, "What [good] is this job to you?" Our response is to blunt his teeth and point out that had he been there, he wouldn't have been amongst those to merit the Exodus. We tell him that it's not the tragedy that is leading him to rejecting G-d-it's his rejection of G-d that lead him to the tragedy. I like to imagine he accepts this answer in the silence after the paragraph.

There is a second kind of yissurim, yissurim shel ahavah-tribulations of love. This is not where the person is being evil, but he's not living up to his full potential. He too is in a rut, and G-d calls to him to break out of it and improve. G-d calls him to ahavah, to greater love and closeness to G-d.

This is the uncomplicated son, the one who believes with simple and pure faith. He asks "What is this?" and we answer with the Pesach story, with all that G-d did for us. Unlike the wise son, who wants to know all the laws of the day, all the nuances of how to react, the uncomplicated son is given motivation to cling to the A-lmighty.

Then there are times where the thing we want is a greater nisayon, a greater challenge, than the ones we don't. And if we are not up to the challenge, if it's a test that we couldn't pass, G-d doesn't make us face it.

There is a story told (Taanis 24b) of R' Chanina ben Dosa, a man so holy that the Talmud tells numerous stories of miracles that occurred to him. And yet one so poor that a heavenly Voice commented that the whole world was supported by R' Chanina's merit, but he himself lived off a small measure of carob from one Friday to the next.

Eventually his wife just couldn't handle the abject poverty any longer. He agreed to her request that he pray for wealth. A heavenly hand came down and handed them a huge golden table leg. Certainly worth a fortune.

That night, R' Chanina's wife had a dream. They were in heaven, and all the other couples were sitting at three legged tables. Except for them. Their table only had two legs, it couldn't stand.

Realizing that the third leg of their table was the gift they had received, she asked her husband to pray for it to be taken back. And it was.

R' Chaim Vilozhiner associates the three legs of the table in this story with the mishnah (Avos 1:2) about the three pillars of the world: Torah, Divine service, and acts of charity. The Voice said, after all, that R' Chanina supported the world.

The golden leg they received was the one of kindness. Until now, they had reason not to give more charity-they had nothing more to give. The story as R' Chaim understands it (I wouldn't say this about R' Chanina ben Dosa on my own), suggests that R' Chanina would have been unable to practice charity as he was worthy to had he had the opportunity.

So, R' Chanina ben Dosa was poor.

Similarly, the person who is medically needy because that keeps him close to G-d. The person who, had he been healthy, would have been more distracted by the physical opportunities afforded him.

This is the son who doesn't know how to ask. Unlike the wise son, who asks "How shall I respond?" or the son of uncomplicated, pure and simple faith, who asks "G-d, G-d, why have you forsaken me?" (Tehillim 22:1) this son isn't asking anything. He isn't capable of grappling with this issue- be it a tragedy, or be it the Exodus. "You shall start for him." Our response must be to help them grow.

Of course, these four sons are archetypes. Real people are wise on some issues, determined to be wrong about others. We have a simple straight to the point perspectives on yet other things, and there are those issues we aren't prepared or ready to face. But it is only through growth that we can reach our goals as individuals and as a people. ©2002 Rabbi M. Berger & The Aishdas Society

RABBI TZVI KLUGERMAN

Baruch Hamakom

As we enter deeper into the recitation of the Passover saga, we recite Baruch Hamakom, Baruch Hu, Blessed is the Omnipresent. This paragraph concludes with Baruch Shenatan Torah L'Amo Yisrael, Blessed be the One who gave Torah to His nation Israel. This blessing is unique, as it is said without Shem u' Malchut, the Divine Name and Royal Appellation. A blessing usually



signifies the liturgical division of a prayer service. This blessing, albeit without the Divine Name, sanctifies what may be the actual start of the Passover seder, the commandment to relate the Exodus from Egypt.

This possible beginning of the seder, is marked by the section of the four sons. Why would the seder begin with the four sons? Why not begin immediately with the passage from the Midrash Mechilta "Yachol M'Rosh Chodesh, You might suppose that we should begin from the beginning of the month"?

If the motif of the seder is Chinuch Hayeladim, instruction of the children, then we have to establish pedagogical guidelines. We bring the example of the wise son, the Chacham, to reaffirm our obligation. Even if our children are more learned than us, we still have an obligation to transmit our heritage. The Rasha, evil son, reminds us not to discount the rebellious child without trying. The harsh response offered to this son is another attempt to show him the folly of his attitude. As we learn in the Torah, the Ben Sorer u'Moreh, rebellious son, was declared rebellious only after repeated attempts were made to teach him. The Tam, simple son, receives the simple answer. We are encouraged to be persistent in our attempts to teach him, even if he doesn't understand after the first time. The Sheino Yodea Lish'ol, one who doesn't even know to ask, reminds us not to disregard the quiet student, and not to assume that everyone present understands what is being said and done.

Yet, perhaps there is another meaning behind the placement of the four sons at this juncture. The saga of the Redemption of the Israelites as G-d's people, was an epic event that had many different facets. Witnessing the Otot u'Mo'otim, G-d's wonders and signs that were visited upon the Egyptians and retelling the Exodus can have profound reactions in the same person.

After learning about the Exodus, we should be able to see The Divine and search out G-d in the events. This spiritual revelation may overwhelm us, even inspire us to new heights, but even the sky is a limit. We must remember the seemingly inappropriate answer given to the Chacham, "Ein Maftirim Achar Hapesach Afikoman, nothing is to be eaten after the Afikomen". Regardless of the spiritual revelation achieved, the primacy of Halacha remains supreme.

Similarly, we may at times deny the Divine in the events of the Redemption saga. Like the Rasha, we might try not to see the hand of G-d in the events. The answer given to the wicked son makes us aware that had we denied the Divine during the actual plagues and not heeded Moshe's warnings to place the blood upon the doorposts, we would not have been saved.

However, there are times that we look at G-d's divine providence with some hesitation. Did He have to do it that way?, we might ask. The answer given to the Tam instructs us to look at the wonders and signs of

The Almighty with Temimut, full acceptance. This is the approach of Nachum Ish Gamzu, who regularly stated "Gamzu L'Tova, this too is for the best". That is the approach of the Tam. Acceptance of G-d's will with Emunah She'leimah - complete belief.

Yet, there may be events of the Redemption that overpower us and our response is one of silence. We are too overwhelmed to respond. "At Petach Lo, you open for him", is the response to the Sheino Yodea Lish'ol. The learning process must never cease.

At the beginning of our Kiyum Hamitzvah, the discharge of the commandment, of telling the Exodus saga, we need to be aware of others' and our own reactions. © 1999 Rabbi T. Klugerman

YITZ WEISS

Generations

What is the lesson of the four sons? My grandfather, Rabbi Moshe Weiss z"l, explained the lesson with a story: Once there was a scholarly gentleman, with a long white beard and black cloak. He was a deeply righteous man who grew up in very religious surroundings. The man married and moved to America to seek his fortune. He arrived with hopes and dreams, and a commitment to his heritage. Time passed, and the man had a son. His son was a rasha, a wicked son. He only concerned himself with the here and now. He discounted his heritage as archaic and wanted to completely assimilate himself in his secular surroundings.

Years later, the rasha marries, and he, too, has a son. His son learns very little of his Judaism from his father. But once a year he sits at his grandfather's seder and asks questions. The rasha's son is a tam, a simple son. He asks his questions at the seder and hears the answers.

As time progresses, the grandfather passes away and the tam grows older and marries. His son is now a she-eino yodaiya lishol, one who can't even ask a question. He can't ask his father - he is only a tam. He can't ask his grandfather - he's a rasha. His questions not only remain unanswered, they also remain unasked. He doesn't even understand enough to be able to ask questions.

So what happens when all the Jewish people eventually become she-eino yodaiya lishol's?

Now we can understand why the Jewish people are compared to the moon. The moon starts out bright and large, and slowly diminishes over the course of a month - almost until it seems that it would disappear forever. But then, like a spark in the night, it becomes whole again, and the process repeats. So too the Jewish people may seem to dwindle. What will happen when the Jewish people become totally assimilated? Impossible. For when things seem at their worst, suddenly there is a spark and we are great once again.

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