

From the Ohr HaChayim

by Jacob Solomon

In the future, your child may ask, saying: "What is this?" You should answer him: "With a show of power, G-d brought us out of Egypt, the place of slavery" (13:14).

The Pesach Haggadah identifies this as the question of the simple son - the tam. The Hagaddah expounds on the four instances where the Torah requires parents to tell the children about Yetziat Mitzrayim; three times in this Parsha, and once in Sefer D'varim (6:20-25). The Torah phrases each instance differently, in order to address each type of child according to his or her individual nature: wise, wicked, simple, and indifferent. This indicates that a child's learning should be approached according to personality, in the spirit of: "Train a child according to his nature, so that when he is old he will not turn away" (Mishlei 22:6).

However the Torah's setting of the tam's question is not during the eve of Pesach proceedings, but within the mitzva of pidyon bechor, the redemption of the firstborn. People and animals can give birth for the first time at any moment in the year, not just on Pesach. The bechor is sanctified, but the Torah states that humans (and donkeys though not sanctified) are redeemed (13:12-13). The Chinuch stresses that this

practice with the bechorim should recall and remind of G-d's distinguishing and sparing the Hebrew firstborn in the final plague of makat bechorot, the killing of the firstborn.

In addition, the Ohr HaChayim points out that the tam's question differs from the rasha's in the following respect. Like the chacham's, but unlike the rasha's, his question adds the word "laymor" - literally "saying", but with the meaning of politely asking for a response. The tam is the one who frames his question as a simple, but sincere request for information. The father should answer his question personally, directly, and with the simplicity that makes an impression. No complicating information whereby the son will "not be able to see the wood for the trees".

The Ohr HaChayim goes further, suggesting that passages in the Torah dealing with the four sons do all not center on the mitzva of Sipur Yetziat Mitzrayim on Pesach. Their being brought together in the Hagaddah text is drash (homiletic) rather than p'shat (plain meaning).

However, the Haggadah's k'neged arba banim dibra Torah - "the Torah speaks of four types of children" may be claimed to be close to the p'shat for the following reason. The way that a child behaves during the rest of the year indicates the way he/she should be included in the Seder

night proceedings.

Thus the chacham generally asks for detailed information: "What are the testimonies and decrees that the Lord our G-d commanded you?" The Torah gives guidelines for the response during the year, ending with "G-d commanded us to perform all these decrees... for our good... to give us life..." (D'varim 6:20,24). And such an attitude likewise invites attention to detail on Seder night, exemplified by "do not eat anything after partaking of the Korban Pesach".

The rasha speaks arrogantly, exemplified in this case by the Korban Pesach: "What is this service to you?" Your service, not my service. He isn't interested in the answer: there is no "laymor", politely requesting information. The response is "You shall say that it is a Pesach offering", not "You shall say to him that it is a Pesach offering". Just explain what is happening and let him do the observing. Hirsch explains that the aura felt by all those present at the proceedings, including the rasha, can be more influential than the strongest and most logical arguments. And if his behavior persists, you can "blunt his teeth" with a "had you been there, you wouldn't have been redeemed".

The tam will accept the simple narrative: "With a show of power, G-d brought us out of Egypt, the

place of slavery." But the she-eino yode'a lishol, the indifferent child, needs the emphasis of visual aids as well as simple explanation: "It is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I came out of Egypt" (13:8). The word "this", explains the Hagdadah, is only when "these" visual aids of Matza and Maror are in front of you.

"Train a child according to his nature, so that when he is old he will not turn away." 