

The Individual Child

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The Pesach Seder is the vehicle we use for יציאת מצרים, the Biblical commandment to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt. The Torah addresses four different types of children in the fulfilling of this Mitzvah.

The answer we give the חכם is different from the ones we give the רשע, the תם, and the יודע לשאול. The concept of חנוך לנער על פי דרכו, "Teach the child according to his way," is what the Torah wants us to practice, optimizing the results of the ספור to each individual child.

The חכם is asking about what and why we do all the Halachos of the night. Our response to him is to delve into the depths of Halacha and to explain each part of the Mitzvah, up to the very end of not eating after the אפיקומן. We attempt to satiate his desire for knowledge by exposing him to as much as he can handle.

Jump for the moment to the תם. We tell him the basic facts, without trying to treat him as someone he is not. His understanding and comprehension is limited, so we boil it down to the basics. To quote from the Rambam in הל' חמץ ומצה "פ"ח הל' חמץ ומצה", "כמו עבד זה או שפחה זו ופדה אותנו הקב"ה והוציאנו לחרות", "We were slaves like this slave or maidservant (using a visual aid to help him comprehend) and Hashem redeemed us (which is a fact in itself – we are no longer slaves) and took us out to freedom (the physical leaving of מצרים)".

What needs explanation is the answer we give the רשע. How is telling him that he wouldn't have made it accomplishing יציאת מצרים? What part of the story is he being told?

This can best be answered in the context of Seder night. Every year we relive יציאת מצרים. The Haggadah is not just a story but a reaction to what happened and will again happen when משיח comes. Part of the story of יציאת מצרים is that there are consequences for behavior. The fact that 80% of כלל ישראל didn't make it out is part of the story of

גאולה and גלות. One cannot hope that he can live a life of a רשע and be included in the eternity of כלל ישראל. We tell the רשע that his part of יציאת מצרים is the part of those who didn't make it, who suffered consequences for their behavior. The lesson is clear. You earn your way out of גלות; it is not automatic.

This leaves us with the שאינו יודע לשאול. There are many questions on this passage of the Haggadah.

- Why can't he be told the same פסוק as the תם? Isn't the תם the one who barely understands?
- Why is the פסוק more understandable than the פסוק עבדים היינו? ויוצאנו?
- Why את, the feminine, not the masculine אתה?
- What does פתח לו, "Open it for him," mean? Why not relate to him or tell him?

Some explain the שאינו יודע לשאול as one who doesn't care to ask. He is the unhappy child who loses his desire to need Torah or the one who is apathetic, uninterested. The message to him is twofold. First, את פתח לו. Treat him softly, in a feminine manner, not harshly, masculine. Do not drive him away. Be encouraging. But at the same time, use the פסוק לי ולא עשה ד' לי, רשע. But don't tell him לי. Don't stress the negative, but point out that his path is slippery and at the end of the day he stands to lose being part of the נצחיות, eternity, of כלל ישראל.

The lesson to us as parents is to know your child. Each needs his own personal approach. Don't deny reality; recognize who your child is. Teaching the חכם's answer is missing the point. The same goes for the rest of the children.

Pesach night is the night of אמונה. Through a real Seder, we can teach our children about a real רבונו של עולם who cares about כלל ישראל. This opportunity must be correctly utilized so the message will reach every one of our children and teach them אמונה – not to believe just in our minds, but to actually relate to הקב"ה. 📖