

SPECIAL EDITION 1: PESACH: MITZVAH OF ׀VEHIGADITA L'BINCHOH ׀ RETELLING THE STORY OF EXODUS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The Mesorah - From Parent To Child

Have you ever gone to a lecture or class, only to have it go directly over your head? One of the most important rules of public speaking is to know your audience. Speak to them on their level and with terms with which they are familiar. Otherwise you run the risk of boring them or even possibly putting them to sleep.

At the Pesach Seder, this rule is especially important. The stakes are much higher! If we don't speak to our children and guests on their level, we could miss out on the fulfillment of a Mitzvah D'Oraysah, the commandment to tell our children the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. If we analyze every nuance of the language of the Haggadah at the Seder, causing our children to fall asleep before we have told them the full story, we may have fulfilled the Mitzvah of Limud HaTorah at our Seder, but the Mitzvah of "VeHigadita L'Binchah" will remain unfulfilled!

As we approach Pesach, it is worthwhile to take a few quiet moments amidst the hustle bustle of our normal Pesach preparations to prepare for the performance of this very important Mitzvah. As parents, we must make sure that we are ready to perform this Mitzvah by teaching ourselves the story, and thinking about how to ensure that it is understood by our children, each on his own level. This can be done by studying the Midrashim relevant to the Exodus - The Midrash Says (Rabbi Moshe Weissman - Bnei Yaakov Publications) on Shemos is an excellent source to look up. Also, in Hebrew, the Sefer Kol Aggados Yisroel has many beautiful and fascinating stories about Yitzias Mitzrayim that are not commonly known.

Why, you ask, is this really so important? The entire year I rely on my children to come home and teach ME about the Parsha? Why all of a sudden when it comes to Pesach must we switch roles?!

Horav Shimon Schwab Zatzal one jokingly commented during one of his Shiurim on the Haggadah that today we have a new Mitzvah of "VeHigadita L'Avicha" - And You Shall Tell Your Father! Our children come home from school weighed down with Divrei Torah and Question and Answer sheets, and are bursting to share their wealth of knowledge with us. However, we must bear in mind that the Torah explicitly states that the manner of the Haggadah must be "Ki Yishalchah Binchah" - When Your Son Asks You. The child must do the asking, not the parent. If the parent is asking questions and the child is providing the parent with the answers that he learned in school, their roles are

reversed. This specifically rules out use of Question & Answer sheets that the children bring home. (This is not to say that they shouldn't be used at all. They can be used during the daytime Seudos when there is no specific Mitzvah of Haggadah). The Divrei Torah that add to and illuminate the actual story of Yetzias Mitzrayim may be shared. However care must be taken that younger siblings should not be distracted from the Mitzvah at hand.

Throughout the generations it has become customary to invite guests to the Seder. Often, the hosts feel torn between devoting attention to the guests and to the children. Generally, if we would explain to our guests that a Seder must be devoted to the children, as this is the primary time of the year when we transmit the Mesorah to our children, they will welcome the opportunity to participate on those terms. If, however, we see that the guests will need special attention that will come at the expense of the children, we may need to arrange for them to participate in a Seder with a family that does not have such small children, and welcome them to our own homes for the daytime Seudos.

II. Pesach, Matzoh, and Marror

"Rabban Gamliel used to say, whoever neglects to mention these three things on Pesach, has not fulfilled his obligation (of Haggadah); Pesach, Matzoh, and Marror."

At first glance, the above statement is puzzling. Why should it be necessary to *mention* Pesach, Matzoh, and Marror to fulfill our obligation to retell the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, when we are actively partaking of them? And if we do mention them, is that considered fulfillment of the Mitzvah even though we might neglect to mention other parts of the story, such as the birth of Moshe, or the splitting of the Red Sea?!

It seems that Rabban Gamliel may be telling us not *what* to say, but *how* to say it.

To illustrate, let's take the example of a story told in a full length novel. This novel has basically three parts, a beginning, a climactic middle, and an ending, yet it is 650 pages long. Readers Digest may decide to print a condensed version of this novel and leave out certain parts. However those three basic parts must remain. Someone else may decide to abridge the story further into a children's edition. Much of the original full length novel will be left out, but the three integral parts of the story will remain.

The same is true with the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. There are three integral parts of the story. The beginning, the bondage of the Bnei Yisroel, is represented by the Marror. The climactic middle is the process leading up to their freedom, culminating with Makas Bechoros. This is represented by the Korban Pesach. Finally we have the end, the actual exit from bondage, represented by the Matzah.

Rabban Gamliel is teaching us that we must decide on which version is appropriate for our audience, full length, condensed, or the children's version. But our story must at least touch on each of these

three integral parts to fulfill our obligation. If we dwell on Divrei Torah on "Arami Oveid Avi" and have to rush through the remainder as the children are nodding off, we have not fulfilled our obligation!

III. Educating The Child Within

Rav Dessler Zatzal (Michtav M'Aliyahu, Vol. 4) points out that the Haggadah was set up by Chazal to facilitate fulfillment of the Mitzvah of "Vehigadata L'Bincho," engraving the truth of Yetzias Mitzrayim and our formation as a nation, on our children's hearts. From the Haggadah we can learn many educational techniques. For example, we see that teaching is best done in question and answer form, especially if the child is posing the question on his own. That is why we reward questions with candies and/or nuts, and we do many things "Kdei Sheyishalu HaTinokos" - so that the children should ask. Similarly, we use visual animation to stimulate understanding, such as raising the Matzoh and Maror when explaining about them. We explain practical ramifications by bringing seemingly abstract ideas to life: "If we had not been taken out...we and our children would still be enslaved." And so forth.

However, the Mitzvah to educate about Yetzias Mitzrayim is not only for our children. As the Gemara says, if you do not have a child to ask the Four Questions, your wife should ask. And if you do not have a wife, you should ask yourself! Even if you are in the presence of another Talmid Chochom, you should ask one another the Four Questions, as if you were the youngest child.

How is it possible, asks Rav Dessler, that the educational techniques used for the youngest of children be the same as those used for an eighty year old Talmid Chochom?

Rav Dessler gives the following eye-opening answer: The Mitzvah of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is to internalize the truth of Yetzias Mitzrayim within our hearts. Although a person may be intellectually mature and wise, *we are all young at heart*. The way to impress the heart is the same for child and adult. Internalizing into an adult heart requires the same pedagogic skills that are required to penetrate a child's heart. During the Seder we are all required to be young again, and allow ourselves to be impressed and inspired, like the youngest of children, with the story of Hashem's miracles in forming us into Am Yisroel.

Feedback is appreciated! It can be sent to Rabbi Aaron Tendler: atendler@torah.org.

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