

FOUR QUESTIONS AND THE YOUNGEST CHILD

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Question: *Why does the youngest child always ask the 4 questions on Passover?*

Answer: Our Rabbis tell us that the reason that it is the youngest who asks the four questions, is so that he/she will remain an active participant in the Seder, for after all – the main idea of this Seder is “Hagada” - to tell over the story of our heritage to future generations. Indeed, many of the activities done at the Seder, both traditional, and of new traditions, are designed to keep the little ones involved. The *Afikomen* (eating of the last *Matzah*), the opportunity given to each child to exhibit his /her projects from school (and to see where all our tuition money goes!) and another activity I have seen as of late, the plastic set of plagues that help re-enact the story. Yes, the Seder is geared around the children, so that we may “Pass” “OVER” our story and heritage to them.

But this is by no means the end of the story. Our rabbis pose the question, what if there are no children present to ask the question. Well then, they say – the adults say it. And even with children present, it need not be only the youngest one reciting, rather everyone gets a turn, with the youngest going first for a change. In my house, we have a United Nations session, as the questions are chanted in Hebrew, English, French, Yiddish, and Russian. Because no matter where they are located, all Jews need hear the message.

And what if one has the unfortunate situation where he / she is alone for the Seder. Surely he/she is not going to sleep. There is no one present to answer the question! Nonetheless, it is written that the questions must be asked and answered, even if the questioner and asker are the same person.

The message of the “Hagadah” aka, “the book of telling” is clear: our responsibility is to give over the message to our young ones, to each other, and to ourselves. Perhaps on a deeper level, the idea of the youngest one represents the fact that it is the youth among us who are still willing to hear the new messages imparted to them, while adults are entrenched in their ways, and are often too jaded to make any change. Perhaps the Torah is telling us that we must all find the youth inside of us, the experiences we shared as children, and the fond memories we have of the holiday.

It is no coincidence that in this era of rabid assimilation, the vast majority still attend some form of Seder celebration. Passover, more than any other holiday, carries with it the most traditions and rituals, ones that can be passed down from parent to child. We remember Bubby’s *Matzah* balls, and how Zaidy stole the *Afikomen*. The burning of the *Chametz* (leavened bread), and the fight over who opened the door for Elijah. These are the types of rituals that stick within us, they are “the youngest

child within us" and they resonate within us even today. Because without concrete rituals and memories, without a framework by which to transmit our heritage, then all we are left with are "cardiac Jews", Jews at heart. Our century has proven time and again, that it is not enough to be a Jew at heart. We need to look to the youngest, both externally and internally and make the spark of our nation come alive.

Regards,
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