

TARNISHED TREASURES OF PESACH

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Pesach, the holiday that celebrates the liberation of the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt, begins this year at sunset on Wednesday, March 31, 1999. The Seder is a special service unique to Pesach, and is conducted on the first (and second, outside of Israel) night(s) of Pesach. The Seder centers around the step of Maggid, in which we read the Hagadah, the story of our redemption and related passages, praises, and prayers.

During our recitation of the Hagadah, we discuss the Four Sons: The Wise son, the Wicked Son, the Simple Son, and the One Who Does Not Know How To Ask. Each of these sons poses the father a challenge. The father must properly respond to the challenge the child poses, and assure that his son properly appreciates the significance of the redemption of the Jewish people. We find that the Wise Son poses a rather straightforward question. He asks about what is occurring on Pesach: "What is the meaning of the testimonies, statutes, and laws which Hashem, G-d, has commanded you?"

The answer does not appear to address the question. The response, the Hagadah tells us, is "Explain to him the laws of the Pesach offering: that no desert may be eaten after the Pesach sacrifice." How is teaching the laws of the Pesach offering, and specifically, a law concerning its consumption, responsive to the Wise Son's query?

Rabbenu Bachya, in his introduction to his masterpiece Chovos HaLevavos, explains his purpose for writing this book on proper conduct. He writes that his work is intended for those who trust in Hashem and believe in His Torah. It is to teach these individuals the foundations of faith and the duties of the heart that he authored his book. He explicitly states that his work was not intended to counter points of argument raised by heretics or hypocrites. Rather, he wants to reveal the roots of the Jewish faith which are deeply rooted in our intellect and the foundations of our Torah which are buried deep within our souls. He explains his goal by means of a parable:

There was an astrologer who was known for his ability to divine the location of buried treasure. On one occasion, he entered the courtyard of a beloved friend of his, and sensed that booty was located underfoot. This astrologer began digging, and located blackened coins. Although at first glance these coins did not appear to be of any worth, the astrologer realized that the coins were black due to tarnish and rust, and that there truly was a fortune about to be revealed. To convince the homeowner that his discovery was something to take notice of, he ordered that vinegar and salt be brought to him. He began soaking the coin in this mixture, and sure enough, the coin began to gleam a bright silver once again. He then told the homeowner to do the same to the remainder of

the trove, so that the magnitude of the discovery would be revealed.

The Wise Son sincerely wants to know about the laws about Pesach. He truly wants to appreciate the significance of the holiday and the events it commemorates. He asks, "What is all of this? What does it mean?" The father's response is intended to merely start the discovery process. The Wise Son's understanding is clouded, and the father wants to clarify the matter. But this cannot be done all at once. The Father begins by revealing one precious nugget: The Pesach sacrifice is so unique that nothing can be eaten after it. Of course, this is not the entire answer to the Wise Son's question. Just as one coin had to be cleaned off to show the homeowner that a treasure was under his very nose, so too does the Father begin with one small but insightful piece of information to demonstrate to his son that Pesach is very special. After the initial revelation, the discovery process can continue, with more and more treasures of priceless value being unearthed as time progresses.

Rabbenu Bachya taught Mussar, ethical teachings, by revealing what appeared to be hidden. The Father of the Hagadah is to teach his Wise Son in this fashion. So too, are we to teach others about Pesach. We should attempt to dispel any mystery or confusion about the departure from Egypt and the celebration of Pesach. As with any task, there is a square one from where we all begin. It is that "first step" that the Hagadah relates is the response to the Wise Son's query. And it is that first step that we all must take on Pesach so that we and all with us truly feel like we, ourselves, were liberated from slavery in Egypt.