

HOW DO WE APPROACH THIS CHILD?

by Rabbi Label Lam

Concerning four sons the Torah speaks: One wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask. (The Pesach Haggadah)

And you shall tell your child on that day (Shemos 13:8)

Why are only four varieties of children mentioned here? Could there not be more types than this? Are wise and wicked opposite terms? Does the simple one stand in contradistinction to the one who does not know how to ask? Whats the order here?

Having just heard the shocking claim that We were slaves in Egypt and HASHEM our G-d took us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm

there are really only four kinds of reactions. Lets imagine, for example, someone would enter a University cafeteria and claim to be Napoleon. Now let us measure the responses. One student will come running over immediately with a note pad and paper and begin to pepper the man with the hand in jacket with detailed questions. Hell be excited to have a primary source for a paper on French history.

Another will be automatically repelled. Hell begin to look for the exit, assuming that this man is a lunatic and he has just escaped from a mental institution. Why else would a grown person walking around in the 21st century make such an outrageous claim? A third will inch a little closer and wonder, observing the other two opposite responses, and inquire more generally, Who is Napoleon? Did he invent a pastry?

A fourth fellow sitting self-absorbed, in a corner, will glance occasionally at the excitement but retreat again to whatever else hes doing. When asked his opinion on the matter hell shrug his shoulders, his look will say, Who cares who this guy is?! Ive got my own problems? Let him be whoever he wants to be! Its not my business!

These four attitudes divide evenly into two categories. There are two types of responses of those who have some knowledge base, and two possible responses by those who dont. The wise one is knowledgeable and his appetite is stimulated by the Seder and he wishes to know more and more. That hunger must be fed.

The wicked one is haunted by the fact that that he fails to live up to what he knows. His conscience doesnt give him rest. His level of existential angst is heightened by the Pesach Seder so he feels a

need to reject it all. He is basically told that he can only push himself away. He could never derail G-d's plan- His seder, but only his role in that plan. That's his medicine.

The simple one doesn't know what's flying but is willing to take some risks to discover what the real story is although the price of knowledge might be required action. He is embraced and admired for his courage to want to know.

As for the son who does know how to ask, he's paralyzed with fear to venture out of his comfort zone or maybe just to be found ignorant. He therefore emulates the ostrich, enjoying the temporary bliss of ignorance. He needs to be prompted and made to feel safe that it's ok not to know and it's better to find out what you need to know than not!

The Maharal asks why the word one appears before the name of each category of child and he says that they are really one person. We have all these parts within us though one may be more dominant at a given time. There are areas in which we are growing from strength to strength and others in which we are at risk of shrinking. Certain new and exciting topics are due to arise that may become our new friends for years to come and then there are those topics, Well, let's not go there! The question for each of us at the Pesach Seder is, How do we approach this child? Text Copyright © 2004 Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.