

# WHAT A DIFFERENCE A NIGHT MAKES

by Rabbi Label Lam

*There is nothing more irrelevant than the answer to a question that was never asked. (Anonymous Philosopher)*

If there is one number that stands out at the Pesach Seder it is probably the number 4! Why? We'll leave that question for another time. Sorry! Pesach is a time to ask questions. The Seder, which means "order", goes out of order, by design, only to prompt a question or four. Why? So that this sacred night when Jewish parents and children have an opportunity to wed themselves not just to Jewish history but Jewish destiny as well, should not be left up to unprofessional pedagogy. Nobody likes to hear the old style parental lectures, especially children. "When we were kids we had to walk to school, 10 miles, up hill in both directions in the freezing cold."

Questions drive the Seder. According to the style of question so will be the meaning of the Seder! Therefore we follow the most successful lesson plan ever written. Two of the prominent "fours" we meet are the famous "four questions" and the equally memorable "four sons". There is a strong resemblance between each one of the "fours" and by matching them carefully perhaps we can find four different ways to intone the questions with different attitudes.

**1-**The first question is about the Matzos. The Wise son asks about Mitzvos. The word Matzos and Mitzvos not coincidentally share the same Hebrew letters. The wise son is concerned about Mitzvos. He asks the question of the evening in the following way: "What can we do different? What can we learn tonight that we have not learned or done on other nights?" "Night" symbolically refers to exile. "What can we do this exile that we have not done on other nights of the exile? If we are here still then there is something we must do better or learn to graduate from this situation. How can we reinforce our family our people with Mitzvos? Which Mitzvos in particular are most necessary for our peculiar situation? Woe to the general who fights the last battle. What does the battlefield of our lives demand from us as individuals or families to survive and thrive?"

**2-**The Wicked son who asks about the "hard work" can easily be made to correspond to the Marror-the bitter herb which reminds us of the suffering we endured at the hands of our oppressors. Focusing on the price he fails to realize the merchandise. He seeks to excuse himself not just from the Seder but from the host of difficulties that come with territory of being a Jew. He cynically asks a rhetorical question, "What are we going to learn or do different tonight that we have not done other nights!? We've all seen the movie and read the book! Been there! Done that! Where has all this

gotten us but more pain and sorrow and we're still here in exile!" He barks pessimistically, "What's going to be accomplished this night that was not already attempted on other nights?!"

**3-**The third son, the simple one, corresponds to the question about the double dipping. His eyes dart in both directions from the wicked to the wise and he wonders aloud, "Which is correct? What is it? The answer depends on whether or not there is something different about this night. Why are sitting here again as a family? What forces us to be here on this night of all nights, for hundreds and thousands of years predictably eating the same Matzos? What organizing principle compels this decentralized people to spontaneously reconfigure as a nation of families on this night, all on the same page, across the globe? Is there something magically or mystically different about this night?"

**4-**The fourth son who does not know how to ask can be understood to relate the question about reclining. We are asleep, stuck in the "comfort zone", unable to change, self absorbed. His question is a shallow recital. So he remains unaware of the importance of his words the great meaning of the Seder and what a difference a night makes. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and

**Torah.org**.