

ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE

by Rabbi Label Lam

What is classically referred to as the "four questions" may actually be a misnomer. It looks more like one question, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" accompanied by "four observations". They can be synthesized into one observation about the uniqueness of the evening. We introduce Matzah as "poor man's bread" and then we meet the Marror reminding us of the bitterness of the slavery. It looks like this is one of those very sad "oy vay" days like Tisha B'Av.

Alternately, we notice the dipping which rich folks frequently do and the reclining which is more the custom of free people. There's a mixed signal here. Are we poor slaves or rich free people? The answer follows, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and HASHEM our G-d took us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm."

Why do we bother to focus on the unpleasantness of the past? What does continually reenacting the ugliness of our historical experience do for us? This is the formula prescribed by the Talmud, "Begin with denigration and end with praise!" (Pesachim 116A) How does it work?

Here's a story I made up for a younger group of students years back: There was a little boy who was born blind. As he grew and matured he learned to read Braille and adapted himself to his handicap as best he could. However, the neighborhood kids mastered the ugly art of teasing. A day didn't pass that somebody didn't play a trick on him or say something offensive, assuming wrongly he couldn't hear them either, but he did. He felt more despondent each day. He would write in his Braille diary all the terrible details on a daily basis and sometimes he would cry onto the pages leaving them warped and stiff. One desperate day he began to express his wish that he had never been born. He cried out to G-d for help.

A doctor arrived shortly after and told him of a new procedure that could grant him the ability to see. He went into the hospital for months. The great day arrived. With patches on his eyes, his parents waited anxiously that night. Soft candle lights bathed the room. The patches were removed, and amazingly he could see. Imagine the adulation. He looked deeply into the faces of his loving parents, the Doctor, and nursing staff. He couldn't sleep an entire night because of all the excitement. He wanted to just drink in everything he could gaze at. His curiosity and joy knew no limit.

Months passed and he became very much like other boys his age. One day he awoke to the sound of thunder and noticed rain beginning to pour from the sky. "Agggghhhh!" he exclaimed in disgust, "The day is already ruined by this ugly rain!" When he heard himself speak this way he became

disgusted. He felt he didn't deserve to have the sight he had gained. He had lost that feeling! He called the Doctor and told him that he wanted to go back to being blind again claiming his unworthiness.

The wise doctor prescribed a therapeutic plan. The anniversary of the operation was arriving. A table was set. The patches were placed on his eyes again. The candles were lit. His parents and dear friends and the doctor stood near. His old Braille diary was placed before him and he was made to read aloud. The tears began to flow as he reviewed the horrors of those early years. Then he reached that desperation point and he felt it again as he had before. Then he read hopefully the entry about the doctor and his proposal for an operation. The patches were lifted. He looked again into the faces, drank in the beauty of the sumptuous meal before him and he became intoxicated with ecstatic joy. The doctor told him, "Do this same dramatic exercise each year at the same time and then the pleasure of your newly gained sight will be with you "all the days of your life"" Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.