

YOU AND YOUR SONS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

In the Passover Haggadah, we find a discussion of four sons: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not even know what to ask. The Haggadah explains that the Torah provides an answer which we should give to each son.

"Concerning the one who does not know what to ask, you should begin on his behalf, as it says in the Torah: 'And you shall tell it to your son on that day, saying, "it is for the sake of this that HaShem did for me when I went out of Egypt."' [Exodus 13:8]

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach, shlit"a, a leading contemporary Torah scholar, says that this passage offers a lesson for all Jewish parents. "And you shall tell it to your son [or offspring]..." - the Torah gives us the responsibility of educating future generations. We must tell them, "it is for the sake of this that HaShem did for me." Why?

In beginning the discussion of Korach's rebellion, the Torah says, "And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, took..." [Numbers 15:1] Levi was the son of Yaakov, but the discussion of Korach's lineage stops there. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki quotes the Medrash, which explains that Yaakov knew prophetically that such a rebellion would occur, and asked G-d to exclude his name: "into their gathering may my honor not be joined." [Genesis 49:6] Rav Shach poses the question: why does it matter?

The answer is that G-d knows all that happens, and also all that *could* have happened. And it is possible that a grandfather bears some responsibility for his grandson's misbehavior. Perhaps if the grandfather would have given his son a better education, then his son in turn would have offered the same to the grandson. This is clearly not always the case - as we all know - and Yaakov requested that his name not be mentioned in association with the rebellion, in order to demonstrate that he had no connection to it, and the root of this evil did not come from him.

Rav Shach further explains that problems can occur even when the grandfather is completely dedicated to Judaism and moral values. We must realize, he says, that children are very sensitive to our emotions, and can "pick up signals" rather than simply listening to our words. They detect messages in our tone of voice, in the liveliness of our expressions, in our interest and warmth. If the father or teacher delivers a lesson properly, but in a cold monotone rather than a lively voice, then the son recognizes it, and his heart grows cold to the subject!

This is why, specifically here, when confronted with the Mitzvah of "and you shall tell it to your offspring," the Torah emphasizes that you should say "it is for the sake of this that HaShem did for *me*." We learn in the Talmud [Tractate Pesachim 115b] that a person is obligated to see himself as if he (or she) left Egypt. Because only if one transmits this message with liveliness and passion as if he experienced it himself, will it enter and fill the heart of his son!

We cannot use this to blame today's assimilation crisis on previous generations. Many people came to America and scattered to other countries around the globe, but did so without the necessary tools in hand to transmit a warm Jewish education. Interest in Judaism clearly waned, and few noticed how great the problem was growing.

Today, on the other hand, we have all seen this lesson first-hand - it is not enough to drop off the kids at the synagogue a few times weekly, leading up to a big party at age 13, and expect them to grow up to enjoy Judaism. It doesn't happen, it doesn't work. The Haggadah tells us: *_we_* must transmit Judaism to our children - not a dry transmission of empty ritual, but a vibrant and warm demonstration of our own love for Torah study, the Mitzvos which we do, and the Jewish people of which we are a part. May we receive G-d's help with this great task He has laid upon us!

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