

SHABBOS HAGADOL L'KATAN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

THE CENTERPIECE OF MANY a Seder is the asking of the Four Questions by the children, one after the other. Expectations run high as parents anticipate beaming with pride and joy as their children/grandchildren/great-grandchildren perform the time-honored tradition of reciting the "Mah Nishtanah."

And they usually do a great job. Teachers work hard to make sure that their students are ready to put on a good show Seder night. It is a reflection of their own hard efforts to put their little protege on the same page as their parents, literally.

Why is this such a central part of the Seder? Not because how wonderful the children seem to perform. It is not about performance. It is about the questions, and even more about the answer that follows.

In fact, if a parent suspects that a child may fall asleep before they get to the answer ("We were slaves to Pharaoh, etc."), they should jump to that part for the children. After they have made sure that the children received and understood the answer they should return to the proper order from where they skipped.

How many children even care about the answer, or that they have to stick around to hear it? After they have done their job and received their praise, most probably assume that they're off for the night. They don't realize that they were the warm-up act to get things going. Their finish is really their start.

It stems from the mitzvah to teach one's children. One of the most difficult things to do is to secure the safety of a tradition from one generation to the next. People change. attitudes change, and the world changes. Against such a backdrop of change, it is hard for anything to remain the same.

Remarkably, the Jewish people have kept this tradition for over 3,000 years. The mitzvah to pass the word of God from parent to children, from teachers to students, has made this possible. Many other societies only educate. Torah society educates and protects, as if the world depends upon it, which in fact it does.

Creation has a purpose. As long as the purpose is fulfilled, even partially at times, then it justifies its existence. If that purpose is lost to man, then God tends to reboot history, usually at great cost to mankind.

That's why it is precarious when so many Jews lose sight of the Divine purpose for Creation. Only a couple of million live by Torah, and even many of them don't understand what Torah does for Creation. They think mostly in terms of going to the World-to-Come and avoiding Gehinom. They think that they have all that covered with this alone.

The point of the Haggadah is to put everyone through a refresher course. To realign our purpose in life with God's purpose for Creation. He didn't just free the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. He did so with a specific task in mind, and end for which Torah and mitzvos are the means.

The Leshem sums it up this way. He reminds us that if freedom had been the only issue, then a non-spectacular plague would have done the job. Rather, he explains, God did it miraculously, VERY miraculously to make a point. It was to show the Jewish people how He is prepared to bend the laws of nature to help a Jew fulfill the purpose of Creation.

What is that purpose? To reveal God. To praise Him. Not for HIS sake, He doesn't need our praise). It's for OUR sake. Revealing God in Creation perfects it. Find something that approaches perfection in Creation, and it will seem Godly. Revelation in God reveals the perfection of Creation, and accesses it. This is good for man.

The prophet Yechezkel warned that the Final Redemption will come, but not because we will have earned it. It will happen, the prophet said, just to end the terrible profanation of God's Name while living in the Diaspora. God will end the exile to end the Chillul Hashem.

How did that happen? How will we have lost our way so dramatically, even while learning Torah and performing mitzvos?

It will be because, somewhere down the line, someone did not do an adequate job of transferring information. Somewhere, at some point in time, the tradition became altered, and then altered some more, until it was lost. Generations then grew up not clear about what to do with life and how Torah is supposed to facilitate.

Man has become so obsessed with keeping time that we now do so atomically with phenomenal accuracy and consistency. Yet, when it comes to the transition of ideas and educations, we are less fastidious. We seem to think small errors do not matter that much. That's why educators make such low salaries. Their jobs aren't valued enough.

Today's world is the proof that they indeed matter a tremendous amount. It is also proof that small errors in education make a huge difference, if not immediately then down the line. It's a confused and divided world with many dangerously conflicting opinions. How can any even believe that there is some ultimate purpose to life?

So, this when you make your Seder, make sure to focus on passing the baton to the next generation. Give it a lot of thought, and pay a lot of attention. This is not just a time honored tradition we are continuing. It is the future of the Jewish people, and the right of Creation to continue.

