



## The Four Sons – A Model for Educators and Parents

One of the famous components of the Magid portion of the Haggadah is the Four Sons – Chacham, Rasha, Tam and ShEino Yodea Lishol. The straightforward explanation why this midrashic source is part of the Haggada is to illustrate the performance of the mitzvah of Vehigadta Levincha. The Mitzvah Deoraita of the telling over the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim is incumbent on us all and is formulated of a parent telling the story over to one's children. The halacha states that if one has no children at the seder, then a man should tell the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim to his wife, and if he is alone, he is still obligated in the recitation. However, as the mitzvah is formulated, the primary method of telling over the story is for the parent to recount the events with his children. By including the midrash of the four sons, the Baalei Haggada are telling us an important lesson – depending on the child, there are different methods in telling over the story.

The wise son's questions are answered differently than the wicked's which are different from the simple son and another method should be used for the son who does not know how to ask questions. As an educator, I can tell you that different children learn in different ways and that Chazal in their infinite wisdom are conveying to us this obvious lesson. There are children who are interested in all the details and delve deep into understanding of all their knowledge for which they pursue. However, it is equally important to reach out to the simple children and ensure that the lessons of Torah do not pass them by. They may not need such a deep level of understanding, in fact, they may not be intellectually able to handle all the lessons, however, a teacher's obligation is the same. Even more so, the wicked son – maybe he is chutzpahadic, maybe he is rebellious, does that excuse my obligation to teach that child? Of course I cannot use the same methods for the other children but I need to educate – and one could easily argue that this case is the place where one's efforts are most essential.

There is an interesting point I read brought by Rav Shlomo Aviner in his sefer Tal Chermon on the Parsha. He notes that the pasuk used to answer the Rasha and ShEino Yodea Lishol is the same pasuk from Parshat Bo – the pasuk states “VeHigadta Levincha Bayom a HaHu Leimor, BaAvur Zeh Asah Hashem Li Betzeiti MiMizrayim”. Though when we quote the pasuk in the hagada – we precede the Rasha's answer with “Af Ata Hakheh et Shinav” and emphasize the word “Li Ve Lo Lo” when we conclude – why do we use the identical pasuk for these two sons? Is the ShEino Yodea Lishol – just because he does not know how to ask - really like a Rasha? The lesson from here is that in education a passive state is detrimental. **If you are not acquiring new knowledge, or asking questions, you are regressing. If I am not teaching a child as a teacher then I am harming him.** It's like Rashi says on the pasuk by Yosef – “VeHaBor Reik Ein Bo Mayim” – though there was no water – there were snakes and scorpions. If the “mayim” of Torah is not present, there will always be danger.



## The Four Sons – A Model for Educators and Parents

I believe also that we have an important parenting lesson as well. While we all agree that there are different ways to teach children and that we are guided by the words in Mishlei “Chanoch Hanaar Al Pi Darcho” to give each child what they need educationally – the same can be said about parenting. **Different children will have different needs. Even within the same family each child based on his or her nature, strengths and shortcomings will have different needs and we as parents need to know which type of child we are dealing with.**

Taking the example above of ShEino Yodea Lishol, we can interpret it in a slightly different way than we did above. The hagada instructs us how to help him as before quoting the pasuk of “VeHigadata Levincha” it says “At Petach Lo” – it’s incumbent on the parent to help him ask – you need to provide him with the tools and help him ask and if he cannot, we still must tell over the story for him. One obvious question of the language used by the midrash – why does it say “At” using the feminine form? Would it not be better to say “Ata”? One answer is that this is an instruction to the mother of the child. This child doesn’t know how to ask, or maybe is too shy to ask and requires a gentler approach that maybe is better provided by the mother. We can see from this – one’s parenting style needs to adjust to the nature of the child. The way to speak to and parent a bright child is different than the unruly one. But being strict with rules to control ones children – whether they need the structure or they have difficulty controlling themselves, will not work for the sensitive child. Actually, it may “work” in that your child will behave, but is this the best for that sensitive child? Taking this a step further as I actually rarely classify children as unruly, disruptive, etc., as all children, like adults, will display different behavior at different times – the lessons from the Four Sons is a tremendous lesson to all parents and in fact is a key component of Pam Leo’s Connection Parenting. Just like the teacher who hears a QUESTION must also know the type of PERSON who is asking the question in order to formulate the appropriate answer, so too **when a parent observes the behavior of a child she must listen and observe carefully not only to the BEHAVIOR, but also to the PERSON and CIRCUMSTANCE behind the behavior.** To address a child’s needs properly, the parent must not only understand the behavior, but must also be aware of the motivation behind it.

As we embark on the celebration of the Chag HaPesach, I hope and pray that our tefillot are answered and we are Zoche to experience the ultimate Geula in this year’s Chodesh HaGeula. Wishing you all a Chag Kasher VeSameach!

*Coach Adina*