

The Four Sons

by Rabbi Dovid
Orlofsky

02 Introduction

07 The Wise Son

12 The Wicked Son

17 The Simple Son

22 The Son who cannot ask

25 Seder Tips

Introduction

Those of us who have had the privilege to study Torah beyond the most elementary level are aware of certain basic concepts. Our Rebbeim would often emphasize, for example, that the Torah is not a history book. Events don't have to be presented in chronological order, nor will unnecessary information be included. Anything written in the



Torah is essential for our understanding of the *Ratzon Hashem*. Certainly there are no extra words, and often many halachos are learnt from a *vav*, or the dot in the *mapik hei*.

Therefore, when the Ba'al HaHaggada tells us כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, it cannot possibly mean that the Torah is merely telling us an informational point. There must be an essential message for us *lidorei doros*. The point, I believe, is that the Torah is teaching us how to fulfill the mitzva of לספר יציאת מצרים. It is not enough for us to tell a story to our children. Rather we have to understand that there are four different types of children - each one asking his own question.

Here the Torah is giving us a keen insight into *chinuch bonim*. It is not enough to answer the question, rather we have to answer the questioner! We often forget to take into account who is asking the question and why.

Answering the Questioner

My son once said "Abba, I have a question." Now in my home, questions are not only tolerated, they are encouraged. Why would my son suddenly be seeking permission just to ask a question? "Well, what's the

question?" My son looked around and, although we were in a car with the windows closed, said in a whisper "I'm afraid it's *apikorsus*" (heresy).

Now, for years I have had the privilege to teach in the [Ohr LaGolah Rabbinical-training program](#). My course deals with *kiruv*, youth work and informal education. The curriculum includes a series of classes dealing with how to answer questions. One of the fears I find people have when going into *kiruv* is that they will meet THE *apikores*. The former Talmid Chacham gone bad, waiting to shower them with *mekoros* disproving their most fundamental beliefs. I assure them that to date, I haven't found him. One has to be pretty educated to be an *apikores*. Most of the people I meet are merely ignorant. So when my ten-year-old son tells me he's afraid he may be an *apikores*, you have to wonder.

*"My son looked
around and
although we were
in a car with the
windows closed
said in a whisper
**'I'm afraid it's
apikorsus'**"*

"Well Yaakov," I pointed out, "how will you know if it's *apikorsus* if you don't ask it?". "But what if it is?" he insists. I assure him that it will remain between us. "Alright" he begins hesitantly, "how old is the *olam* (world)?" Now remember, don't just answer the question, rather, answer the questioner. I thought to myself that since my son is a ten-year-old in a *cheder* in Yerushalayim, he probably isn't troubled by the theory of evolution. "Well," I began carefully, "*pashtus* the world is five thousand seven hundred and fifty seven years old." "And what" my son asked furtively, "was before that?"

Okay, crime-stoppers, let's think. What is bothering my son? Why would a ten-year-old be pondering the existence of the universe, and be so troubled about it? To me it was obvious, since I knew he was learning *mishnayos Chagiga* in class. In the second perek it says "כל

המסתכל בארבעה דברים ראוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם: מה למעלה מה
"Anyone who looks at these four things it would
have been better if he hadn't been born: What is above the heavens, what is below
the Earth, what was before creation and what will be after the end of the world."
As a rule, there is probably no better way to get a kid thinking about
something than to tell him not to think about it. As Rabbi Ephraim
Oratz, a master *mechanech* once told me:

***"There is no better way to get a child to look at a Rashi than to tell him
not to learn it"***

Understanding why my son was troubled by the question made it easier
for me to explain the *mishna*. Since we human beings are finite beings,
it can drive us crazy trying to grasp the concept of the infinite. Try
spending some time contemplating what an existence devoid of time,
space and matter is like and you will see what the Mishna means.

Now we can understand why the Torah has to explain the concept of
answering the questioner and not just the question in regard to the
Pesach Seder. For on Pesach night, when there is a special mitzva of
לספר ביציאת מצרים, we need to learn how to be professional
storytellers. The secret, the Torah explains, is to tell it to each child **in
his own way**. That's the only way to get the message across.

Do we have anything to tell them?

I was once invited to speak to a group of parents before the Pesach Seder. We
all know that Pesach is a time involving tremendous preparation. The
shopping, the cooking and of course the manic cleaning (or if you're going
away for Pesach, the clothes shopping and packing, which in my opinion is
worse). With all the many preparations we should never lose sight of the goal
- the Pesach Seder.

We parents often complain that our children don't listen to us. If only we
could get our children to listen! Well tonight, I remind them, for one night in

the year, the Torah commands us to talk to them and our children are *commanded* to listen. The question is - do you have anything you want to tell them? How many people spend time preparing what they want to tell their children at the Pesach Seder? Many young people tell me how their fathers say over the same *vortlach* year after year, devoid of enthusiasm. We must ask ourselves, do we have a message that we want to convey to our children, something that will have meaning for them? With all the Pesach preparations, don't forget what we're preparing for, and let's spend some time figuring out what we want to give over to our children.

This is why the Torah needs to go to such length to explain how to do this mitzva. The mitzva is not just to tell a story, but to give a message that will have meaning and relevance to our children. חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים. "Every person has to see himself as though he went out of Egypt." The Seder is not a commemoration of something that happened thousands of years ago. The object is to relive that event today, for our children and for ourselves.

Teach them what they need to know

A friend of mine told me about the time that he had the zchus to spend the Seder at the home of Rav Dov Schwartzman, *shlita*. He and a number of the other bochurim from Bais HaTalmud who were invited to join the Rosh HaYeshiva and his family were very excited by the prospect of the Seder at the home of an Adom Gadol. They began preparing *vortlech* to say and questions to inspire deep discussion. They spent hours researching intricate points regarding *galus* and *geula*, *chometz* and *matza*, and *hilchos Korben Pesach*. When the evening arrived, the Rosh Yeshiva was happy to answer all of their questions, but whenever they tried to say over any of their pre-packaged *vortlach* he would smile and toss nuts to his grandchildren.

The point he was trying to teach my young friend was how to run a Seder. There is an old magic trick involving cutting and restoring a rope. It is a very simple trick and one that most neophyte magicians learn to perform. As such, magicians have since devised hundreds of methods to cut and restore a rope. None of the illusions are better than the original and most are less impressive. But they serve one function - to fool other magicians. This has led to the adage that when performing magic shows "don't do tricks for

magicians." Don't try to impress people at the seder for the sake of impressing them. Teach them what they need to know. Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, ZT"L would often give shiur on the basic *pshat*, because that was what the talmidim needed to hear. He wasn't interested in impressing them with how much he knew but rather in developing their personal capabilities. That's true chinuch.

"What can we possibly gain by teaching our children to steal and blackmail?"

We should never let our children ask the *Ma Nishtana* and then be sent away without an answer. This perhaps is the explanation of a very strange *minhag*. The children are encouraged to "steal" the afikomen and are taught to demand a ransom, for without the afikomen the Seder can not conclude. Now what can we possibly gain by teaching our children to steal and blackmail? The answer might be this very point. Don't invite me to the Seder to ask the *Ma Nishtana* and then ignore me. I deserve an answer. And if I have to "steal" my parents attention in order to remind them that I'm still here, to prove to them that they can not finish the seder without me, then it's a small price to pay.

The Seder is a paradigm for chinuch in general. If we can learn to prepare ourselves to answer each of the different questioners at the Seder, then we can begin to learn how to develop the character and potential of each child for the rest of their lives.

In the articles ahead we will be examining the different types of children and will examine how to teach the *Chacham*, the *Rasha*, the *Tam* and the *Sheaino Yodea Lishol*, each according to his needs.

The Chacham - The Wise Son

*"What does the wise son say?
What are the remembrances,
statutes, and laws that Hashem,
our God, has commanded you?"
– Pesach Haggadah*



In our last article, we discussed the idea of preparing ourselves as parents to perform the mitzva of **סיפור יציאת מצרים** at our Pesach Seder.

The Baal HaHagadda tells us **כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה**, that there are four different types of children, each with his own question. The questions they ask reveal much about who they are as people, and therefore we need to understand the questioner, in order to answer the question.

The first child discussed is the chacham. Let's see how the Haggada describes him through his question.

**חכם, מה הוא אומר? מה העדות והחקים והמשפטים אשר
צוה ה' אלוקינו אתכם**

His question may seem misleading to someone who does not appreciate who is asking the question. The *chacham* says, "What are the remembrances and the statutes and the laws that Hashem our G-d commanded you?" In the question that is asked by the *Rasha*, the wicked son, we conclude he is wicked because he says "what is this service to you" thus excluding himself. Yet the chacham does the same thing, asking, "what are all these laws to you?"

Here is where a *michanech* needs skill to differentiate between two children apparently saying the same thing. For while it's true that the Chacham says "you," he also says "Hashem our G-d." He believes himself to be a part of the people Israel; he just might not be able to personally relate to the particular situation right now.

Intelligent children with questioning minds sometimes encounter difficulties. To those who don't listen closely, they may sound like the *rasha*. Their questions are stated strongly; their intellectual curiosity is searching for the depths of Torah. "How can that be!" they exclaim in a way that makes some teachers shudder. "But that doesn't make any sense!" their untrained minds call out. How can we help the *chacham* find his answers without being called a problem, or worse?

What Teachers Should Not Do

A teacher in a girls school in the New York area told me about a ninth grade girl who questioned one of the fundamentals of Torah. The question wasn't particularly difficult, nothing that hadn't already been dealt with by the Chazal and the Rishonim. But this Rav was incensed. "*Kefira!*" he cried. "We have a *koferes* (heretic) in our school! I will not tolerate such questions!" and went to the office to complain how such a girl could be allowed to remain in the school. The teacher wanted to know what I thought. I told her I thought the Rav should consider a different profession. A *koferes*? A fourteen-year-old *koferes*? Quite an accomplishment.

Consider the seventh grader here in Yerushalayim, from a fine family, and whose father is a prominent Rosh Yeshiva. She was disturbed how Moshe Rabbeynu could kill the Mitzri. After all, she asked, isn't it murder, even if he did use the *shem hamiforesh*? The teacher looked at her with a shocked expression and then said, "bnos, close your chumashim. We cannot continue to learn because of the *Ruach hatumah* in the room from that question." She then had the girls take out their *sifrei Tehillim* and say *tehillim* until the end of the class.

That girl was lucky. Her father reassured her that she was a good girl and then did what the teacher should have done - answered her question. She wasn't fighting, she was curious. Parents of intelligent children find that some teachers love them, and some teachers can't tolerate them. Some love the piercing, intelligent questions, others find them challenging and disturbing. So what is the answer we give to our *chacham*, our intelligent child seeking *emes*? The Baal HaHaggada says, teach him *hilchos Pesach*. Specifically, that you can't eat anything after the *korben Pesach*. Now why is that the best answer to give him? Some *meforshim* understand it to mean that you should tell him

everything - right down to the last detail. Don't leave out anything, in keeping with the *Chazal*: "when they are young, stuff them like an ox."

The Taste of Torah

There is another idea: show him that the taste of Torah has to always be in our mouths. *Hilchos Pesach* are hard; they aren't interesting stories. You have to have intelligence, and through the depth of Torah, you will fulfill all your intellectual cravings. And the taste will stay in your mouth forever, so you won't need any "dessert."

There is a problem in education that every teacher must face. No class is homogeneous. Most of the students in the class will be of average intelligence and ability. Then there will be a minority of bright or gifted children at the top of the class and a group of weaker students at the bottom. Teachers must, of course, teach to the majority of the class, but in the process, they will leave some bored and others overwhelmed.

**"No *class* is
homogeneous"**

This question came up recently when I was addressing a group of teachers on the subject of motivating students. What, they asked, can be done with the children at either extreme? The challenge, of course, is to spend a certain amount of time during the class for each group. It's important to give the more gifted students something "extra." "Oh, like extra assignments?"

Chachomim in Our Classrooms

I am always amazed that the most common response to finding a way to intellectually stimulate a gifted student is with extra work. There is probably no better way to encourage a child to act dumb than to threaten him with extra work, if he dares to be too bright. My suggestion was perhaps more innocuous. Every now and then, throw out an idea that you know to be beyond the grasp of the average students, but is meant as a treat for those who find the regular material too simple. Assure the other students that this is not required, just an interesting point for those who catch it. Don't dwell on it, just let the brighter students know that you remember them and appreciate them. This has the extra benefit of letting the average student

know that there is even more to this Torah than you are revealing in class. We'll discuss the lower echelon of the class in future articles.

Perhaps we should also exempt the brighter students from certain work that we know they know, either substituting it for a more challenging assignment or appointing them to use the time tutoring one of the weaker students. But those who can, should be encouraged to push themselves academically to achieve their full potential. From the first halacha of korben Pesach to the end - leave them with the taste of Torah lingering in their mouths.

There was a fellow who once approached Reb Moshe Solovechik and told him, "I curse your father Reb Chaim every day." "Why?" Reb Moshe asked, taken aback. The man explained, "I work in a lab for Albert Einstein; I don't want to believe in this Torah anymore, but your father filled me with a such a love for the brilliance of Torah, that I just can't stop learning." Someone who learns Torah, as the Ramchal explains in Derech Hashem and Mesillas Yesharim, even if he doesn't keep mitzvos, will ultimately find his way back to HaKadosh Boruch Hu.

"I don't want to believe in this Torah anymore, but your father filled me with a such a love for the brilliance of Torah, that I just can't stop learning"

Don't soft-pedal gifted children. Appreciate their gift and help them develop it, so that as parents, we can all enjoy their greatness. I was learning Navi with my son one Shabbos morning, when he was only eight, and he said over an idea he heard from his Rebbe. I told him I never heard that pshat. He looked at me horrorstricken "But you're an Abba!" he exclaimed. "Yaakov," I told him, "I didn't grow up in a cheder in Yerushalayim. There's nothing that will give me more pleasure than seeing you pass me by in Torah learning. And one day I hope to sit in your yeshiva and listen to your shiurim." Let's help the future chachamim develop their abilities for themselves and all of Klal Yisroel.

Conclusion

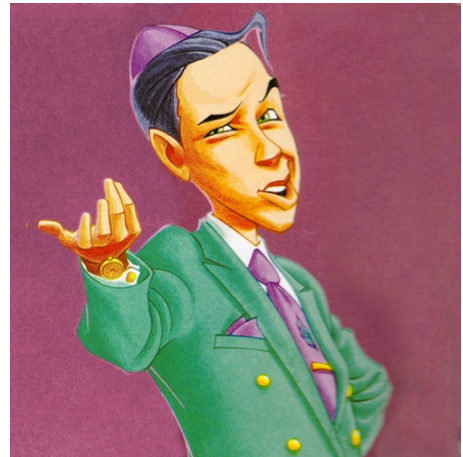
By now every Jewish home is in the midst of the Pesach preparations. In this series of articles I want to encourage parents to prepare for the actual telling of the story of Yetziat Mitzraim. It will be a real tragedy if our children sit at our Seder table waiting for us to take them back in time to that glorious night in Mitzraim and we are unprepared because we have spent too much time cleaning under the aluminum siding.

And so the Baal Hahaggada tells us, *keneged arba'a banim dibra Torah*, there are four types of children, each with his own question. At the Seder we have to answer not only the question, but the questioner as well.

The Rasha - The Wicked Son

"What does the rasha say? "What is this avoda to you?" To you - (he says,) - not to him. Since he has removed himself from the community, he has denied the essence of Judaism. Therefore you should "hakheh" his teeth and say to him, this (seder) is because of what Hashem did for me, when He took me out of Egypt. You, and not him. Indeed, had he been there, he would not have been redeemed."
 – Pesach Haggadah

This seems to be a strange approach to take with a wicked son. Where are all the clever kiruv techniques they are teaching all over the world? Reach out to people, they tell us; care for them and show them you love them. Should we instead, as my father used to say, "Rap 'em in the mouth"?! We're supposed to knock out their teeth and say, "Oh yeah? Well, if you were there you wouldn't have come out of Egypt anyway!"



Besides questioning the effectiveness of the method, I question the effectiveness of the response. The *rasha* says, "I don't believe in all this nonsense. I don't buy the whole story." And we say to him, "Then you wouldn't have come out of Egypt," - which he doesn't believe to begin with!

The Fifth Son

To understand the question of the *rasha* and the response, we have to understand that there is a **fifth** son. The fifth son is the one who doesn't even come to the Seder. The *rasha*, for some reason, wants to be at the Seder - he just doesn't want to follow the rules. He's like a fellow I once met who told me he wouldn't have a problem keeping Shabbos, if it weren't for all the laws. Now why would someone come to a religious event and not participate? If

you don't want to be there, just don't come. Even a *rasha* can understand that it's not nice to come and make fun.

Many of the commentators are troubled by the fact that the *rasha* comes second in the list of sons. The *Tam*, the simple son may be limited intellectually, but that doesn't mean he can't be a good person. Why doesn't he come before the *rasha* in the list? The *rasha* is wicked so he deserves to come last. The explanation given is that a *rasha* is not merely someone who asks disrespectful questions. To be a *rasha*, you need to first be a *chacham*. I've mentioned in the past that that is why it is extremely difficult to find a *rasha* today.

"To be a rasha, you need to first be a chacham."

When I was running a youth organization years ago, I would occasionally be accosted by a fourteen or fifteen-year-old who would tell me defiantly, "I'm an atheist." I would respond, "Have you ever studied classical philosophy? Do you know Socrates, Plato, Aristotle?" He admitted that he had not studied the classical philosophers. I moved up to medieval philosophy, then modern philosophy and then *lehavdil*, to Jewish philosophy. "I mean," I would explain, "people like Maimonides, Yehuda Halevi, or the Ramchal." He said that he had never read the works of any of them. "Have you ever read the Bible," I would finally ask? "The whole thing?" he would ask incredulously. One boy told me he had read a summary of the Old Testament. "Well then," I told him, "forgive me for saying so, but **you're not an atheist - you're an ignoramus!**"

How can a person claim to be an atheist when he hasn't even begun to research the question? He must realize that he isn't the first person to whom the question has occurred. Would he have the audacity to walk into a physics conference and offer an opinion on the theory of relativity without knowing what the theory is? Anyone who develops his theology on the back of a school bus while playing with baseball cards is not a *rasha*. He is just being fatuous.

A real *rasha* is a *chacham*. The reason he is mentioned next to the *chacham* is that if we can turn him around, he **will be** a *chacham*! He needs that potential to be considered and treated as a *rasha*; otherwise, he's just a *she'aino yodea*

lishol, who, by the way, receives the same answer as the *rasha*. Ignorance and evil are closely related.

הכה and הקהה

The *rasha* asks, "Why are we doing this? Who needs it all?" He wants to eat already. Our response to him is *hakheh es shinav* (הקהה את שיניו), which is often mistranslated as "hit him in the teeth". That is incorrect: the word is הקהה, 'dull' (with a *kuf*, ק); not הכה, 'strike' (with a *kaf*, כ). It really means to *dull* his teeth, blunt them, or, as we would say in English, *take the bite out of him*.

The *rasha* says, in essence, that we don't need all this religious stuff: Let's just have a nice family meal together. A little matza, some gefilte fish, and, you know, the cute little traditions that our people have enjoyed for so long. Sort of like a Navajo Indian rain dance. But let's move it along. We don't want to sit here all night and listen to speeches. Our response is simple, and it instantly takes the bite out of him. We ask him, "Why are you here? Do you want to go out for dinner? Well, in two weeks we'll all get together and go out to dinner. But why did you come to a Seder?"

"Jews don't get themselves killed themselves over borscht and kugel"

There is no better way to take the bite out of a *Rasha* than to point out that we Jews belong to something real. When I am accused of inflexibility where religion is concerned, I plead guilty. "What can I do?" I explain. I really believe in this. You know, G-d, the Torah, the halacha - I think it's all real. I and millions of Jews throughout history have been prepared to die for our beliefs. Jews don't get themselves killed themselves over borscht and kugel, for culture's sake, but for the word of Hashem, for the Truth. We would give up our very lives for this.

We may not have children who are *reshaim*, Baruch Hashem, but we do have children who display this quality at times. There is no better way to take the bite out of a *rasha* than to point out that us Jews belong to something that is

real. Hashem, Torah, Halacha - it is all real, and I and tens of scores of Jews throughout history have been prepared to die for our beliefs.

Picking and choosing

"Why can't I pick and choose? Why can't I do what I feel like?" he asks. The answer is because Judaism is real. It is not just a collection of ancient traditions and gastronomical experiences. It's all true. And we need to impress upon our children the sense of mission that is inherent to our way of life.

When we do things, our children have to learn that there *is* a system. We Jews don't pick and choose the right thing to do. If we go to work in a blizzard, but can't make it to minyan, what message are we sending our children? If we don't sing *zemiro*s at our Shabbos table or walk out in shul during the *devar Torah*, then we are picking and choosing.

Among the previous generation there were many Jews who abandoned Shabbos and kashrus, and then were shocked when their children intermarried. They wondered why their children did not know what was really important. They were upset that their children could not figure out which things to keep and which to toss aside. Perhaps those parents should have given more thought to what they were telling their children at their Pesach Seder.

We Jews don't pick and choose the right thing to do. If we go to work in a blizzard, but can't make it to minyan, what message are we sending our children?

A Matter of Priority

Next week, all around the world, nice Jewish families will move out of the simple task of Pesach preparations and move into Pesach insane mode. Over the past few weeks, helpful husbands and determined housewives drew up the family's Pesach battle plans, complete with time charts and diagrams for the room by room assault. The week before Pesach however is based more on the Yiddish expression *mon tracht un Gut lacht*, people can plan all they want, but HaKadosh Boruch Hu has the last laugh.

It is not, obviously, a coincidence that every year we end up going crazy with preparations until the last minute. We are supposed to see ourselves at the Seder as though we ourselves came out of Egypt. There is no better way to experience that than to first go through a period of *avodas porach*, back breaking work. So people may have felt till now that they could take their time, spending a disproportionate amount of their time refolding every object in the linen closet until they sit on the shelf with mathematical precision. Cleaning out one's bedroom shelves must include rereading all old correspondence. But now the realization finally dawns - we have one week left to Pesach! Now is the time for panic.

As I have stressed throughout, that sense of nervous excitement must permeate our preparations for the mitzva of **לספר ביציאת מצרים** as well. We must never lose the **טפל** for the **עיקר**.

The *Tam* - The Simple Son

"What does the simple son say?

What is this?

You should tell him: With a strong hand God took us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery"

– Pesach Haggadah



The *tam* asks a nice straightforward question - "What's this?" He lacks the analytical powers of the *chacham* to discern the difference between *עדות חוקים ומשפטים*. He doesn't challenge or mock like the *rasha*. He observes with a simplistic innocence and asks "What's this?"

Shlomo HaMelech tells us *ישמע חכם ויוסף לקח*, a *chacham* hears what you're saying and adds to it. However, it does not say *ויוסף בינה*; he does not add *understanding*; he does not develop new insights based on it. Rather, the *chacham* has the ability to read *deeper* into what you taught him. His process of questioning and learning is an ongoing experience. The word *tam*, on the other hand, implies a certain degree of completion and perfection. What you tell him he accepts unquestionably. The *tam* won't be doing a lot of manipulation with the information to discover more ideas. He's happy with what he has heard.

"What's this?" he asks. We can see the simplicity of the question and answer him accordingly. Consider this:

Earlier, when asked the *Mah Nishtana*, we answered with *Avadim Hayinu* - a 54-word paragraph.

However, when the *tam* asks, we answer concisely: "With a strong hand - ביד חזקה! G-d took us out of Egypt".

'ביד חזקה!' we tell him, leaving out the phrase "ובזרוע נטויה", "*with an outstretched arm.*" Perhaps that will be too much for him to grasp. "יוציאנו ה'", "Hashem took us out," we leave out the word "*Elokim*," "our G-d," again presenting the minimum. "ממצרים מבית עבדים", "*from Egypt, from the house of slavery*" without including the idea of פרעה, an evil ruler in addition to an evil country. What we have given the *tam* in response to his simple question is עבדים היינו in an vastly easier form.

Say it Simple

One of the great challenges in education is to discover how to give across ideas, even complicated ideas, in a simple way. This is particularly difficult for a people who extol intellectual achievement. The greatest insult a Jew can give someone is not that they are a *rasha*. Saying that someone is a *rasha* implies that there was at least some intellectual achievement. Last week we discussed that this is the reason the *rasha* is listed second. We know that if we can just turn him around, then he will be a *chacham*. Rather the worst thing we can say about a person is that he is an *am haaretz*, an ignoramus.

"One of the great challenges in education is how to give across complicated ideas in a simple way."

This can lead to a situation where a child who was not gifted with an outstanding intellect can be made to feel insecure, or worse. Sometimes they can feel that they don't belong in yeshiva at all and by extension that they don't fit in as a member of the frum community. How many times have we seen the *tam* who struggles unsuccessfully to keep up with the material in *shiur*. Failing at academics he can be seen as a troubled kid, "out of it," unconcerned. How can it be that he can't get this, his rebbe thinks. If he tried harder, if he put in more time, if he didn't fool around so much, then he would excel.

The Simple Students

Perhaps what is needed are schools geared to meet the needs of the *tam*. Where there are rebbeim like the Gemara's Rav Paida who reviewed the same piece with a student 400 times until he understood. Try *that* in a classroom and see what happens. Perhaps in a school or a program that worked with average students, those who simply can't produce "A" work, there would be a lot more possibility to meet their needs.

Of course I know that I'm kidding myself. Some years ago I had to confront a difficult situation. I had a child whom everyone said was gifted. Her playgroup, Pre 1A and kindergarten teachers all urged us to move the child up. Since she was so bright, if she wouldn't be challenged she would become bored and be plagued with the problems that boredom brings to bright children. The situation seemed relatively simple to me - everyone agreed she should move up. As it was, she only missed the deadline for first grade by eleven days. Surely this would be a simple matter.

When I called the Education Ministry, they said first they needed a psychological evaluation. Reasonable enough. "So when should I bring my daughter?" I asked. "Oh, not your daughter, this is for you and your wife" she explained. Only after that would our daughter begin to undergo her three psychological evaluation sessions. This seemed to me to be a little unreasonable until they explained to me that Israel is a Jewish country. And every Jewish child is a genius. Parents are intent to constantly prove that their children are exceptional intellects.

"The Rebbe tried to explain that his son would never be able to keep up, and he will become overwhelmed and depressed."

There was a mother in Canada who complained to me that the schools are elitist. "Why can't they appreciate a "B" or "C" student!?", she demanded. The problem, though, is not with the schools with high academic expectations. The problem is that parents want their "B" or "C" students in schools and classes that are clearly beyond their capabilities. *Chas VaShalom*

that my student should be average. My sons' eighth grade Rebbe told me a story of a good "B" student whose father was using *protektzia* (inside connections) to get him into an "A" school. The Rebbe tried to explain that his son would never be able to keep up, he will become overwhelmed and depressed. Instead the Rebbe suggested a number of excellent yeshiva ketanas for his son. "But" the father said, wringing his hands, "how will I ever face my friends?"

The Mesillas Yescharim in פרק י"ג explains the level of *p'rishus* as separating yourself from things that are permissible. If the right thing to do is to avoid these things, he asks, then why didn't the chachamim forbid them? There are many things that are *Ossur MiD'rabanan*. Why didn't the Sages forbid these things as well? He answers with a powerful idea - because there are different levels in a nation, and not everyone can maintain the same high standards. The chachamim only forbade those things that were possible for the majority of klal Yisroel to keep, not only the exceptions.

The Pashuta Yid

"He answers with a powerful idea - because there are different levels in a nation, and not everyone can maintain the same high standards"

Can parents appreciate a *tam*? Can we delight in a child who struggles to understand and teach him on his level? The simple pious Jew who has kept the Jewish people alive through all these long centuries? One *Simchas Torah* in Vilna, there was an unlearned Jew dancing with tremendous fervor. The Vilna Gaon asked him, "Tell me, what are you celebrating? You don't know any Torah." The man looked at him and said **"I'm celebrating that there are people like the Vilna Gaon who know Torah."**

Can we learn to respect the little "*pashata Yid*"? Once, Rav Nachman Bulman שליט"א was encouraging me to take on a project, I asked: "What do you want from me? I'm just a *pashata yid*!" He got upset at me (in that loving way that only Rav Bulman can):

"A *pashata yid*! Do you know how hard it is to be a *pashata yid*?!"

At the Seder, in our homes, and in our schools there will be many students who ask simple questions. Who may never attain deep understanding. When they come to us, let's be prepared to answer them on their level. And let us learn how to appreciate a *pashata Yid*.

The She'aino Yodeah Lishol - The Son who cannot ask

"The son who does not know how to ask - you must open the topic for him, as it is written:

"You shall tell your child on that day: 'It is because of this that God did for me when I left Egypt'"



The last of the four sons is the *sheaino yodeah lishol*, the son who doesn't know how to ask. There is no need to examine his question because there isn't one. Now we parent/educators (and of course the terms are synonymous) must use our best skills to answer the question that hasn't been asked.

A survey was done some years ago asking people if they believed the two greatest problems confronting our society were ignorance and apathy. One person responded, "I don't know and I don't care." Apathy is often the hardest evil to battle.

"There is no need to examine his question because there isn't one."

The Ramchal in Mesillas Yesharim provides a level by level approach to attaining perfection. The first level he deals with is *zehirus*, which he defines as thinking. Define your values and then examine your actions to see if they are consistent with those values. The Ramchal warns you, however, that this is not easy, because the *yetzer hara* also understands that this is the key to achieving greatness. He says, "the *yetzer hara* knows that if you start to think about your actions even a little, then you would immediately begin to regret

your bad actions. That regret would grow within you until you would abandon the bad behavior completely."

The Last Straw

This is exactly the same method used by Pharaoh in Egypt, he explains. When Moshe and Aharon tell *Klal Yisroel* that the time of redemption had arrived, they believed them. They then appeared before Pharaoh to demand the release of the Jewish people. Pharaoh responded by demanding that the Jews from now must on find their own straw to make the bricks. This way, he says, they won't have time to think about being redeemed.

It seems strange that Pharaoh didn't merely increase the quota of bricks they had to produce. Why make them get their own straw? Pharaoh knew that the work of making bricks is hard, but it still leaves you some time to think. Take away the straw and they will spend all their time thinking only of straw. Where can I find some, maybe there's some left in the other field, what if someone else gets it first? This will insure that they will have no time left to think.

"Who has time to think about redemption when I'm focusing all my mental energy on straw?"

And the method proved extremely effective. When Moshe came to the people for a second time in Parshas Va'era, the Torah tells us that they didn't listen to him because of "the shortness of spirit and the hard work." Who has time to think about redemption when I'm focusing all my mental energy on straw? I heard from Rabbi Avraham Twersky that if Moshiach came today, he would be met with the same situation. People are so busy answering their cellphones, crushing candy on their iDevices, and working overtime at their jobs, that there is little time left for thoughts of *geula*.

Not Thinking

The Mesillas Yesharim tells us a fact - there are people who don't stop to think about what they are doing or where they are going. They never acquire the midda of *zehirus* because the *yetzer hara* never lets them think. The sad

truth is, this represents the majority of people. How many people have you met who really do a *cheshbon hanefesh*, who spend time planning and reviewing their life? Everyone acknowledges that this is worthwhile, so why don't they do it? Simply because the yetzer hara knows it will change your life forever, so he fights valiantly to stop you from thinking. There is a lot of evil in the world that doesn't come from people trying to do wrong. They just don't think.

"A lot of the evil in the world doesn't come from people trying to do wrong. They just don't think."

That's why the answer to the *sheano yodea lishol* is the same as the answer to the *rasha*: "this is because of what Hashem did for me, when He took me out of Egypt." We challenge the apathetic, the overwhelmed and the unthinking with the wonderful thing we have. Hashem, the Creator of the Universe, who sustains the entire world, came to us on this night and carried us away from Egypt in His arms to freedom. On this night, every year, there is a burst of Divine love that we can once again experience. That's why we're sitting at the Pesach seder. Even the most apathetic participant has to look in wonder at such a sentiment.

On more than one occasion I have been challenged by non-observant people in their twenties and thirties. They claim that they live life any way they choose and do whatever they want. I, on the other hand, am forced to live this repressive and restrictive lifestyle. So why, they ask me, obviously troubled, do I seem to be having more fun in life than them? The answer is simple - this is what Hashem did for me when He took me out of Egypt. I have something better. I have a close, loving relationship with HaKadosh Boruch Hu. And, I explain, so can you.

Part 6 - Seder Tips

Before we conclude this series of articles on the fulfillment of the mitzva of telling the story of *yitzias mitzrayim*, I would like to offer a few practical seder tips.

Keep It Moving

I don't mean to rush the important parts, but how many children of all ages need to ask the *Ma Nishtana*, and in how many languages? Past a particular age, say 27, they should be discouraged, or made to say it as a group. Have as much prepared beforehand as possible. My father-in-law, Rav Moshe Ganz, has all the romaine lettuce portions pre-measured in plastic bags. Work out the seating beforehand and make sure all the fighting over who sits where is decided before seder night. Placecards can be an effective device.

Be Relevant

The more you can make the points apply to your children, the more effective they will be. Remember that they have to feel like they came out of Egypt. Use *midrashim* and stories to develop the ideas in the haggada.

Encourage Participation

Try making points that can be opened up for discussion. Ask questions and give candies to the younger children. Play up the *afikomen* negotiations. Older children can be assigned pieces of the haggada to prepare beforehand.

Remember the Little Ones

They might not be able to follow the older children's questions, so occasionally call them over and tell them a little story or *midrash*. Preschoolers love to tell over what they learned and to show their pictures. When the appropriate part comes, call them over to show their pictures.

Watch the Clock

If you want to have the afikomen by midnight, you have a limited amount of time for the seder, the matza, the marror and the seudah. Pace yourself. It's unlikely you'll have enough time for all the things you want to say, all the songs you want to sing and all the things you want to eat. Something is going to be cut out. Decide beforehand what is essential to you and what could be eliminated if need be.

Nirtza is the Destination of the Seder

When we reach the end of the *seder*, we are in a position to experience Hashem's outpouring of love. Enjoy the songs, but don't lose the spirit of kedusha that should pervade this very solemn and joyous time.

There's only One Seder

There are people in *chutz laaretz* who think there are two half seders. Some things today, some things tomorrow. The first seder is not a preview and the second seder shouldn't be a repeat performance. If you live in *Chutz LaAretz*, you have to work twice as hard and prepare two sederim educationally.

Be Happy

A smile is contagious. The more you work to make sure that you are having a wonderful time, the more everyone else will.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you and your family and all klal yisroel a *Chag kasher visomayach*.

About Rabbi Orlofsky

Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky has been involved in the field of Jewish education and outreach for over thirty years.

He grew up in North Merrick, Long Island, one of six boys, of whom he is the quietest. He has studied in Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim and Yeshiva Heichal HaTorah and received smicha from Dayan Kopshitz, the Chief Rabbi of Nevi Tzvi.

For nine years he was the Long Island Director of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth. Under his leadership the region grew from one member into an organization of over 1800 teens and pre-teens involved in its various programs.

In 1988 Rabbi Orlofsky moved to Israel and lives in Jerusalem with his wife Simi and their children and grandchildren. He teaches in various yeshivas and seminaries in Israel.

His lectures have attracted thousands of people internationally and tens of thousands have read his column on Jewish education and listened to his radio program on the parshas hashavua. His book "The Last Book You Read Before You Assimilate" is awaiting publication.

To contact Rabbi Orlofsky, visit www.rabbiorlofsky.com, where you can download audio shiurim, read articles, get event dates, ask questions and more!

Acknowledgments:

A version of this series originally appeared on Chazaq.org.

Illustrations adapted from the [Katz Haggadah](#) © 2017 Rabbi Baruch Chait & Gadi Pollack. Used with permission.