

CHABAD

 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 6 April 2012 - 14 Nisan 5772
 The Seder Nights

At the Seder one reads and discusses the Haggada. Here are some points to add about the Four Sons, based on comments by the Lubavitcher Rebbe. People at the table could take turns at reading them.

EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT THE FOUR SONS: THE WISE SON, THE WICKED SON, the simple son and the son who does not know how to ask. Of course, there are also the same four daughters. These are four types: we may identify with one or the other, or they may all co-exist within us.

THE WISE SON: This person is very happy with his or her knowledge and high standard of Jewish observance. He/she attends synagogue regularly, eats kosher, and has all the answers. The question is: is he keeping his Jewish knowledge all to himself, or is he sharing it with others?

For this reason in the order of the four sons, the wise son is next to the wicked son. The wise son has the duty to talk to him and encourage him. The challenge to the wise son and daughter is to think hard to find a way to make Judaism interesting and exciting for everyone else as well.

THE WICKED SON: Of course, it doesn't mean really *wicked*. Just someone who is doing what most other people do in our society today. In ancient Egypt, the Jew who identified totally with the Egyptians may not have been redeemed. He would not have wanted to

slaughter a lamb, the idol of the Egyptians. He would not have wanted to follow this and the other instructions from Moses which led to Redemption.

However, after experiencing the Giving of the Torah at Sinai we are different. Deep down in every Jew there is our Jewish soul which is really longing to express being Jewish. It just needs the right situation and this soul will wake up and come into action.

Suddenly the person says: 'I've been thinking about things. I want to learn a bit more about Judaism and Jewish life...'. The fact that the so-called wicked son is actually at the Seder shows that he is not as far away as he might seem. He is critical and even antagonistic; but that could be seen as showing a secret desire to know more...

THE SIMPLE SON: The Hebrew word for simple is TAM. This means simple, but it also means pure and straight. Our ancestor Jacob is called 'simple' in this sense. In a devious world there are advantages in being straightforward. It does not mean lacking intelligence. Rather having the power to trust that the path of Jewish teaching is right and being able to commit oneself to follow it. This son or daughter has qualities of seriousness and dedication. When he/she knows something is good, he/she goes straight ahead. The story of Pesach makes good sense to this kind of person: G-d took us out of Egypt. Now we are His people, and we serve Him.

THE SON WHO DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK: This can mean being totally ignorant; or totally complacent. The wicked son is critical and might have aggressive questions. But this fourth son has no questions. He might be far from Jewish observance, perfectly happy with his conventional life-style. Or he may be very 'religious' and well-informed, but keeping Jewish law in a very complacent way.

The Haggada says 'you start talking to him'. The Hebrew text actually means 'open': you have to encourage him to open his eyes to see things in a broader way. Even if you are 'frum' (pious) you have to keep moving. This is true for all of us. And the direction is towards the Torah, towards dynamic and fulfilled Jewish life - and the ultimate Redemption.

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THE SEDER NIGHTS

THE SEDER PLATE

In the Kirsh household the Seder had begun. Dina gazed happily around the table. Seated there were her parents, Grandpa and Grandma from Manchester, who were spending Passover with them this year, and her aunt and uncle with her favourite cousin Miriam. The table itself looked beautiful, with the Seder Plate, with its bone and egg and Bitter Herbs, and parsley, and Charoset, made of nuts, apples, pears and wine, all in little crystal dishes, which matched the crystal goblet each person had in front of them.

“Why do we have all these things on the Seder Plate?” her cousin Miriam asked, gazing at this object. “What do they all mean?”

“Can anyone tell Miriam? Benjy and Rachel, do you know?” Mr Kirsh asked.

“I know!” Dina said eagerly. “Can I say?” Her father nodded and she explained:

“Well, the Bitter Herbs are easy - they remind us of the horrible time we had, being slaves in Egypt. The Charoset also reminds us of our slavery, because it's like the mortar that the Jews had to use to make the stones they needed to build things for the Egyptians. Then there is the bone - that is to remind us of the special Passover sacrifice that was offered up before Passover.”

“Do you mean the lamb which the Jews slaughtered in Egypt and ate on the night of going free?” asked Benjy.

“Yes,” said Dina. “But it also represents the Pesach lamb which was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem, and was then roasted and eaten by each family at their Seder. There was also another offering which was offered up in the Temple, called the Festival Offering, and we have the hard boiled egg to remind us of that.”

“What is the parsley for?” her uncle asked.

“Oh, that's the Karpas - the vegetable that we're soon going to dip into salt water, to make the children ask why this night is different. We dip it into salt water to remember the tears that the Jewish people cried in Egypt, tears being salty. And, then there are the three Matzot, which represent the three types of Jews, the Cohanim, the Levites and the Israelites.”

“Wow, that was quite incredible!” her grandfather said. I am very impressed. Now, I know that at the Seder night the children are supposed to ask the adults questions, but I am going to break with tradition and ask you one, since you are so well informed. I see why we have a bone to represent the Passover lamb, but why an egg to represent the Festival Offering?”

Dina thought hard “Umm, well, I don't know.” she finally admitted.

Rachel said: “I know two reasons for that, Grandpa. One is that an egg is unique in that as you cook it, it gets harder and harder. The Jewish people are just like that - the more they have been persecuted the stronger they become. The second reason is that the Aramaic word for egg, *be'a*, is the same as the Aramaic word for prayer, and we should be praying that next year we will be offering up the real Festival Offering in Jerusalem, in the Third Temple.”

“AMEN!” said her grandfather.

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