



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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There are many interesting perspectives and insights into the texts and symbolic foods associated with the *Seder Layl Pesach*, but one of the most interesting sections of the evening's dialogue and various rituals, is the discussion regarding the 'Four Children.'

The opening paragraph of this section of the *Magid (Telling of the story)* contains an interesting turn of phrase. We read:

“Kineged arba vanim dibra Torah, echad chacham, v'echad rasha, echad tam, v'echad sh'eino yodea lishol...”

“Kineged four children the Torah speaks, one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask...”

The word *kineged* in this context is often translated as regarding, or as referring to. The **Slonimer Rebbe zy'a** explained that the word *kineged* is actually more accurately translated to mean opposing or in contrast to. The text is telling us that the *Torah* speaks in contrast to many different opinions and personalities, as if to suggest that the *Torah* has a relevant response to diverse challenges, questions and perspectives. The *Torah* has a relevant eternal message for each of us, no matter our individual perspective.

We see this interpretation clearly depicted in the subsequent paragraphs describing

each of the four children. There are many profound lessons and interesting themes alluded to in these few sentences. One challenging point is that one of the children is referred to as a *rasha*-literally a wicked or despicable individual. This is a very strong term, much harsher than many of the familiar translations-(the contrary child, the mischievous child, etc.) connote. What is the significance of the use of the term *rasha*? How is it that one of the children is labeled as wicked, yet the other extreme, a *tzadik*, a righteous individual is not represented as being present at the *Seder*, rather a wise child, a wicked child, a simple child and a child that does not know how to ask?

Perhaps we might take a moment to explore and accurately define the term *tzadik*, before we can determine why a *tzadik* is seemingly omitted from this cast of characters. There is an interesting teaching in the *Mishna (Oral Tradition)*, the first entry in the Tenth Chapter of the Tractate *Sanhedrin*. There we read:

“Kol Yisrael yesh lahem chelek L'olam Habaa, sheneemar, v'ameich kulam tzadikim...”

This is classically translated as “All of Israel has a place in the World to Come, as it is written- ‘And your nation are all righteous...””

It's interesting to note that the letter ***lamed***,

used as a prefix in the word, *L'olam*, literally means to or into. *The Slonimer Rebbe zy'a*, clarified this teaching to mean that there are many different pathways, different portions which can lead us to the world to come. Each member of Israel has their own unique pathway, their own unique set of merits that can secure them a place in the world to come. According to the Rebbe, there are many different paths to goodness, different types of righteous individuals.

With this perspective in mind, let's now re-visit our four children of the Seder. There are many pathways to righteousness. One pathway is through *Torah* scholarship. A true *Torah* sage personifies not only wisdom, but piety. Thus the *chacham*, the wise child, could potentially represent our missing *tzadik*.

There is also a tradition that in each generation there are 36 hidden *tzadikim*, 36 righteous individuals who quietly, humbly and privately go about making the world a better place. These 36 hidden righteous ones are not from among the great scholars or public leaders, rather simple, humble individuals that quietly leave a lasting imprint upon all those who are fortunate to come in contact with them. Perhaps our *tam*, our simple child, personifies such an individual, not, as it would appear, someone who is limited in their intellectual achievements, rather someone who quietly contributes to the good of mankind, in simple humility. So perhaps, the *tam* too could represent our missing *tzadik*.

Another sign of piety is the capacity to remain particularly careful with the mode

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in which we communicate and interact with others. All too often, people find themselves asking cynical, inappropriate or condescending questions. The **Amshinover Rebbe zy'a** posits that perhaps the *she'eino yodea lishol*, is not the child who does not know how to form a question to be asked, rather the child who does not know how to ask the types of challenging questions which could insult or embarrass another human being. This child is not immature, rather, the most mature, a child who cannot bring himself to impugn the status or reputation of another person. Perhaps it is this child who personifies the highest level of righteousness.

Ok, so maybe each of these three children represents a certain profile that could be categorized as being a *tzadik*. But that still leaves us with a lingering question. What is the rationale behind the harsh label used to depict the remaining child, the *rasha*, the wicked child? How could our Sages have used such a harsh label in their depiction of a child?

There is a beautiful custom attributed to the Chasidic Master **Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov zy'a** (as cited in the important work *Eim Habanim Semeicha*, written by **Rabbi Yissacher Shlomo Teichtel zy'a**). When it came to the recitation of this section of the *Haggadah*, the Rebbe

of Rimanov refused to refer to the second of these children as the *rasha*. In fact, tradition has it that the Rebbe actually crossed out the word *rasha* in his text, and replaced it with these two words written in the column of the *page-bein hasheini*; literally the second child, or the different child, the child with a different perspective than all the others.

Find a way to reconnect this child to the relevance of the very message of Pesach

The Belzer Rebbe zy'a, taught a similar idea, based on the actual *Haggadah* text. Included in the response to the *rasha*, is the instruction:

'hakeh et shinav... literally, *'strike out, push forth his teeth...*

Many interpret this to mean that we hold nothing back; we are to be firm and strong in our reply to this child. However the Belzer Rebbe offered a slightly more creative interpretation. *Hakeh et shinav*, not push forth his teeth, rather push forth the **shin**, the middle letter of the three letter word *rasha*. When we remove the middle letter *shin* from the word *rasha*, we are left with the two outer letters *reish* and *ayin*,

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which together spell the word *ra*, bad or evil.

The Belzer Rebbe taught, *hakeh et shinav*, means push forth his *shin*, bring out his inner self, so we're left to recognize that this child is only outwardly *ra*, his outward appearance is wicked, but his essence is personified by the letter *shin*. The letter *shin*, is comprised of three stems, which the Rebbe suggests, represent Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are thus instructed, when that challenging, outwardly "bad" child is present at the *Seder*- find a way to bring forth his essence, find a way to reconnect this child to the relevance of the very message of Pesach, the incredible gift of Freedom, and the enrichment that Torah can bring to each of our lives.

The *Hagada's* Four Children, and really the entire *Seder* experience is full of symbolism. Essentially we are meant to realize that throughout our history there have always been different pathways to finding meaning and growth within our tradition, that even those that seem furthest removed can also find that inspiration which is alive innate within each of our hearts, and that each of us, no matter where we are physically, professionally, or emotionally, can find true freedom- freedom to really bring forth our inner self through the eternal relevance of *Torah*.

May each of us be blessed to truly celebrate the beauty that is Freedom, and may this be the year that brings us to see the redemption that the Jewish People have longed for ever since that very first *Pesach* as we went forth from Egypt. ■