



Speaking to the Wise Son

The Haggadah speaks of four children. Each one asks his own question, and each one receives a personal response. Education, the Sages taught, is not something that can be mass-produced like a Model T.

The first child, the wise son, is troubled by the Torah's abundance of rituals and minutiae. For the intelligent and rational, everything should be logical. What meaning can there be in these myriad details and rules? "What is the meaning of the rituals, rules, and laws that the Eternal our G-d has commanded you?" (Devarim 6:20)

Why All the Details?

In one brief query, the wise child has challenged the very foundations of a ritual-rich religion. Why do we need all of these details and *halachot*? Why is it not enough to be satisfied with Judaism's basic tenets and fundamental teachings? The Haggadah's response is enigmatic, ostensibly irrelevant to the question:

"You shall explain to him the laws of Pesach: one does not eat any dessert after the Pesach offering."

Are we to explain to him all the laws of Pesach? Or just this one rule about not eating after the Pesach offering – or nowadays, the *afikoman-matzah* – has been eaten at the end of the meal? What is the significance of this particular rule?

The Seder Frog

I recall one year, when my six-year-old daughter was bursting with excitement, watching us unpack the Pesach dishes. The special pots and pans she fondly remembered from last Pesach were back once again!

Then we uncovered a small piece of green felt fabric that fits over a finger. Once upon a time it sported two plastic eyes and even a little red tongue. Our eldest brought it home from kindergarten once, and ever since it has graced our *Seder* table, making a special appearance during the passage about the plague of frogs.

This year, I wondered: would my daughter recognize this lump of green cloth, only on display for a few minutes each year? I need not have worried. Her face immediately lit up as she spied the *Seder* "frog."

Etching the Mitzvah on Our Soul

The detailed laws of *mitzvot* serve a crucial function. They create an atmosphere and enhance the *mitzvah*-experience. They deepen the impression the *mitzvah* makes on the soul. Our intense involvement in all aspects of *mitzvot* leads to deeper love of G-d, the ultimate Source for the Torah's *mitzvot*.

Thus, for the wise and logical child, we specifically mention the rule about not eating after the *afikoman*. Why is *matzah* the very last food we eat on

Seder Night? We want the experience of Pesach to make a deep and lasting impression. We want the taste of *matzah* to remain in our mouths for as long as possible. So we eat the *afikoman* at the very end of the meal, even after dessert.

The detailed laws surrounding each *mitzvah* etch the experience of that *mitzvah* onto our souls. Like the *matzah* on Pesach, we want the taste of the *mitzvah* to stay with us as long as possible. Just as our own personal additions to Pesach customs – even formless pieces of faded green felt – will conjure up images of frolicking frogs and past Pesachs, evoking childhood memories of celebration and thanksgiving will engrave them deeply on our soul.

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