



Does it Matter How we Eat the Matza on Seder Night?

Preparing for the Moment

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*Four times in the Torah we are commanded to relay our miraculous story of the Exodus. In the Haggadah the number four is a "magical" number. It materializes in the four cups of wine, the four expressions of redemption, the four questions, and **the four children...***

Who are these four children?

On a broad spectrum, most consider these four typologies to represent **different children with distinct attitudes. Wise. Simple. Rebellious. Disengaged.** They maybe be thought of as **diverse students with dissimilar learning styles**, like the ones competing for attention in our heterogeneous and multi-personality classrooms, whether here in Pardes or in any classroom in the world! In life, we are all teachers – with our family, our peers, our chevruta partners and friends, our community members. We were given the responsibility to 'teach them [the words, the concepts and the commandments of Jewish tradition] to our children - "as you sit at home, and walk on the way, as you lie down and as you rise up." They are to be written on the entryways of our homes and gates, encompassing all of our social life.

But zooming in on one individual, the 'four children' can also symbolize the evolving **developmental phases of every one of us**, since all four times the Torah charges us: **"Tell your child..."** and not "Tell your children."^{*} If this is the case, then this fourfold charge lays out an educational guide, tracing the developmental stages of every person – from earliest childhood – "who doesn't know how to ask" – to high school and beyond – where all grown children, **ourselves included**, would be considered "wise."

What do these phases look like?

Let's consider the matter of **matzah** at each phase:

1. **אינו יודע לשאול** – When you were a toddler, someone probably handed you a piece of matzah at the seder. You probably bit it, poked it, crumbled it, and scattered it all over the table and floor. You didn't have questions about it. You may not have end up eating it, but you definitely experienced it.
2. **תם** – Years later, a young child, you were probably excited to be eating matzah at your seder. Why? Literally, it is because we were saved from Egypt and didn't have time for our bread to rise and also because everyone around you that night was doing it. Simple.
3. **רשע** – During your rebellious or cynical phase, you may have thought, or said aloud, "Are you kidding? I'm not going to eat this whole matzah with nothing on it! And without talking! They were slaves in Egypt, but I'm not! What does this have to do with me? Pass the charoset..."
4. **חכם** – Gaining maturity and perspective, you may now be asking for details. "How do I eat the matzah at the Seder –reclining? With a certain intention? A specific amount?"

It seems that these 'four stages' are a fitting paradigm for the ascending and evolving phases of human development. But are they? When education is quantifiably measured by points and grades, by degrees and achievements, perhaps the answer is yes.

When, however, we as people and educators address others (and ourselves!) in all our human wholeness – **maybe not.**

Conventionally, developmental stages are something we grow out of, but perhaps as we move through each stage – like the oral stage of an infant, for example – we actually **retain** what we have learned in that stage and move on to **'collect'** the experience of the next stage, and the next, **adding each one** to our human repertoire.

What do we do, then, when we reach the top of the ladder? Having attained the status of the 'wise child,' **we must begin our "descent,"** as it were, revisiting our own "inner voice" of the wise, the cynical, the simple and the speechless, until we sense that our education is not only 'stuck in our head,' and not only impressive on our resume, but rather flows through our hearts and is acquired through our senses as well.

This, I believe, is the path to becoming a more authentic person and necessarily a more authentic 'educator'. We are probably all aware that **authenticity inspires.** We know this from the lives of those who have inspired us. **The only way we can transmit this to others with integrity is to model it ourselves.**

How do we descend?

4. **הכב – Accepting our responsibility as transmitter of a tradition,** we must ask ourselves: Are we pursuing wisdom, in order to 'claim we know the answers'? Or are we doing it to objectively to 'lay out the unanswered contradictions' - in either case to be perceived by others as clever?

Or do we seek knowledge in order to become more committed to it? With this latter attitude, we can learn and transmit how the matzah is to be eaten on Seder night with the **passion of one who wants to help preserve this knowledge forever.**

3. **רשע – Recognizing the value of the cynic within ourselves,** we cannot rely on what eating matzah meant to us last year! Our inner cynic won't let us get away with that. If we can admit to the spiritual emptiness we feel when we consider eating matzah once again, **we will be compelled to rediscover – before the Seder – if and how eating matzah is relevant to us this year.**

2. **תב – Affirming the historicity of our unbroken tradition,** are we able to accept – without sinking into a quagmire of narratives and complexities – that we really were saved from the miserable experiences of bondage by the very G-d who created the world? Can we accept that this pitiful bread of affliction became for us, in one brilliant night –and day -, the bread of our long awaited redemption? What are we really doing here on this Seder night, in the company of our loved ones, and in the company of our entire nation worldwide? We are **bearing witness** for the 3,600th time to the source of our very existence – by holding our very own piece of matzah.

1. **אינו יודע לשאול – Can we become 100% alive in the moment, like a child,** for whom no words or questions surpass the need to kinesthetically experience the matzah? Closing our eyes for a moment as we chew, can we become fully present to experience, with our senses, the presence of G-d in this miraculous instant?

This is my vision of living with authenticity: **First I seek authenticity as a person** by listening to these four coexisting voices within myself. Then I can attempt to model this for my family and friends, my community members and others, and transmit tradition with more genuine passion.

This is my daily struggle and challenge in a reality where, as a teacher and a person, a mother and a wife, a community member and a friend – there are simply never enough hours in my day!

I welcome your thoughts and advice. ~TLN (tovahleah@pardes.org.il)

Questions for Personal Reflection:

1. Who is one of the most **"authentic"** people you know? In what way have they **inspired** you?

2. When do you feel most authentic?

3. Choose a topic you are interested in transmitting. See if the following questions help you to more deeply engage with your topic before relaying it to someone else:

- What does your **'wise inner child'** want to know about it?
- How does your **'healthy cynic'** challenge you to find meaning in it?
- In what way does your **'simple child within'** feel connected to it historically or socially?
- How can you experience it **kinesthetically** in some way, with one or more of your **senses**?

4. **Think of a particular person who is challenging for you.** Has wanting to stimulate this person ever forced you to address one of the four 'inner voices' within yourself? **Each person who challenges us becomes our teacher, if we let them.** The more we are challenged by their needs, the more we must seek to satisfy our own needs in that same area or stage of development. Do you have an example of this from personal experience?

[This concept of the descending rungs on a ladder, as related to the Four Children, is inspired by *The Holistic Haggadah: How Will You Be Different This Passover Night*, by Michael Kagan.]

*Shemot 12:26; 13:8; 13:14; Devarim 6:20



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