

Bais Yaacov Bnos Malka Newsletter

לעילוי נשמת יצחק עקיבא בן אהרן ז"ל

January 2024

Parshas Bo

פרשת בא

שבט תשפ"ד



Lessons from the Four Sons

On the *seder* night, one of the central parts of *Maggid* is the section of the four sons, the *arba banim*. Two of the questions asked by these sons – the questions of the *Rasha* and the *Tam* – appear in *Parshas Bo*. I would like to develop some ideas in *avodas Hashem* based on an analysis of the questions and answers of the four sons. In particular, we will be focusing on the differences between the questions of the *Chacham* and the *Rasha*.

The *Rasha* asks, “מה העבדה הזאת לכם,” “What is all this work for you?” (*Shemos* 12:26). In the *Haggada*, the response given to the *Rasha* is strong rebuke because he excludes himself from the rest of the nation; he says that the *avoda* was commanded to לכם, to you. It is interesting that the *Chacham*, at first glance, asks a similar question. The *Chacham* asks, “מה העדת, לכם, אתכם,” “What are all these *mitzvos* which *Hashem* our God commanded you?” (*Devarim* 6:20). He also excludes himself, and yet the *Chacham* is given a very pleasant, positive answer – the *Haggada* says that we should teach him the laws of *Pesach*. What exactly is the difference between the *Chacham* and *Rasha*? They both seem to exclude themselves, and yet the *Rasha* receives a response of *mussar* and rebuke, while we respond pleasantly to the *Chacham*.

There are several answers to this question. The most basic answer is offered by the *Chida* and others. The *Chida* points to two differences between the *Chacham* and the *Rasha*. First of all, the *Chacham* mentions *Hashem*'s name. That already is one indication that he believes in *Hashem* – he is talking about *Hashem*. He feels a basic connection to *Am Yisroel*. Furthermore, the *Chacham* refers to “ה' אלקינו,” “our G-d.” The word “אלקינו” is clearly an inclusive word. The *Chacham* is, in fact, including himself with the rest of *Am Yisroel*, and is therefore clearly in a different category than the *Rasha*, who deserves to be treated differently.

The *Kli Yakar* presents a second approach to explain the difference between the *Chacham* and *Rasha*. The *Kli Yakar* focuses on the *pesukim* in the Torah that introduce the questions of the *Chacham*, *Tam*, and *Rasha*. (Obviously, there is no *posuk* in the Torah to introduce the question of the *She'eino Yodei'a Lishol* because he does not ask any questions.) The question of the *Chacham* is introduced, “כי ישאלך בנג מחר לאמר,” (*Devarim* 6:20) and the question of the *Tam* is introduced, “והיה כי ישאלך בנג מחר” (*Shemos* 13:14). In contrast, the *Rasha*'s question is introduced, “והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם,” (*Shemos* 12:26). “מחר” is mentioned in the context of the *Chacham* and *Tam*, but not the *Rasha*. Why? What is the significance of the word “מחר”? The *Kli Yakar* explains that the word “מחר” means tomorrow; the *Chacham* and the *Tam* ask tomorrow. What is being hinted to here? The hint is that today they do the *mitzva*, and **tomorrow** they ask. The *Chacham* and the *Tam* follow the crucial *yesod* of *na'aseh v'nishma* – first they do, and then they ask. Since they are asking the right way, they receive a positive answer. The *Rasha*, on the other hand, asks today. The implication is that if he does not get a good answer now, he will not do the *mitzva*. The *Rasha* has the wrong approach to how to ask questions, and that is why he receives *mussar* and rebuke, while the *Chacham* receives a pleasant answer. This is a beautiful approach of the *Kli Yakar*.

Rav Moshe Feinstein *ztz"l* points out that the question of the *Chacham* is mentioned in *Sefer Devarim*, while the question of the *Tam* is mentioned in *Sefer Shemos*. This is striking, as we would have expected that the question of the *Chacham* would be mentioned first, as the *Haggada* does; he deserves a position of prominence.

. Why does the Torah put the question of the *Tam* before the question of the *Chacham*? Rav Moshe writes that the Torah is teaching us the approach a Jew should have in learning and asking questions. First be a *Tam*, and then be a *Chacham*. First accept things on a simple level; do what *Hashem* commands. Then, on top of that, develop into a *Chacham* – ask questions, delve into things more deeply, and try to understand things better and better. This is the correct Torah approach. This idea is similar to the *Kli Yakar* that we saw above. This is *na'aseh v'nishma* – first we do because *Hashem* said so, and then we investigate and analyze and try to search for deeper meanings and ideas.

I once heard a beautiful idea along these lines from Rav Ahron Soloveichik *ztz"l*. Rav Ahron pointed out that the word “טעם” has two meanings in Hebrew – “reason” and “taste.” When we offer a “*ta'am hamitzva*,” we do not refer to the *mitzva*'s essence, but rather provide it with “flavor.” The *ta'am hamitzva* helps us appreciate the *mitzva* more and encourages us to perform it, but it is not the reason that we do the *mitzva*. It is good to ask questions and look for the deeper meanings behind the *mitzvos*, like a *Chacham*, but this only comes after *emuna peshuta*, simple acceptance of *ol malchus shamayim*. I do what *Hashem* commands because *Hashem* said so – “*na'aseh v'nishma*.”

In a sense, *mitzvos* are like vitamins. When a doctor prescribes a vitamin pill, most people don't understand exactly why this particular vitamin is healthy and they don't investigate the details of the medicine's components. The doctor says to take the vitamin, so we take the vitamin; we trust the doctor that the medicine is good for us. If we trust the doctor, we certainly should trust *Hashem*! *Mitzvos* are good for you – religiously, spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. Regardless of whether or not we understand how or why they are good for us, we trust that they are and will certainly take the “medicine.” Nevertheless, the more a person understands a *mitzva* – the more flavor it has – the more likely he is to perform it with enthusiasm. If *mitzvos* are like vitamins, *mitzvos* with reasons are like *gummy bear* Vitamins – because they taste good, you enjoy them.

This is a major *yesod* in Torah *hashkafa* that we can take away from the *seder*, and in particular from the four sons. We believe in *na'aseh v'nishma*; we believe that we should be a *Tam* first and a *Chacham* later. It is good to ask questions, to delve into things, and to look for the deeper meanings behind the *mitzvos*. But all of these questions are supposed to come on top of *emuna peshuta*, simple acceptance of the *ol malchus shamayim*. I do what *Hashem* commands because *Hashem* said so.

The *meforshim* note that there are other differences between the way the Torah presents the questions of the *Chacham* and the *Tam* versus that of the *Rasha*. In the context of the first two, the Torah writes, “כי ישאלך בנך מהר לאמר” – “When your son will ask you tomorrow *leimor*.” By the *Rasha*, the Torah writes, “והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם” – “When your children will say to you.” The *Chacham* and the *Tam* ask questions – “כי ישאלך” – while the *Rasha* simply makes a statement – “כי יאמר.” The *Beis HaLevi* explains that the *Chacham* and the *Tam* want an answer, so we answer their question. The *Rasha*, however, is not asking a question; he is not searching for an answer. Rather, the *Rasha* is making an attacking statement in the form of a rhetorical question – “What is all this work you're doing? Why are you doing this?” This is why the *Chacham* and the *Tam* receive the positive answer they deserve, while the *Rasha* receives *mussar*.

This approach of the *Beis HaLevi* fits well with an idea developed by the *Meshech Chochma*. The *Meshech Chochma* focuses on another difference between the *Chacham* and *Tam* as opposed to the *Rasha*. We find the word “לאמר” in the questions of the *Chacham* and *Tam*, but not in that of the *Rasha*. Why? The *Meshech Chochma* quotes the *Sifri* (*Devarim, perek 6*), which says that the word “לאמר” means, “השיבני תשובה,” “respond with an answer to my question.” It belongs with the quotes of the *Chacham* and *Tam*, who are asking questions and want an answer, but since the *Rasha*, as we explained, is not asking a question, we do not find the word “לאמר” by his quote. These two *mekoros* fit together very well.

We can learn important lessons from each of the approaches of the *meforshim* to the distinctions between the four sons. First, we have to remember that if we have questions about matters in *avodas Hashem*, we must always remember that we are part of *Am Yisroel*. We have our belief in *Hashem*; we have our commitment to serving *Hashem*. We must always remind ourselves, “ה' אלקנו” – we are included among *Am Yisroel* as servants of *Hashem*.

. Second, when a person asks questions he should be sincere; he should be searching for answers. He should not be complaining and attacking the *mesora*, *chas v'shalom*. Rather, he should be asking and delving to figure out and understand the *mesora* more deeply. Finally, a Jew has to remember that when we ask questions, we should always make sure that the basic *emuna* is there. We have to be a *Tam* first, and only then a *Chacham*. We have to say *na'aseh* first, and then *nishma*; we have to do “today” and ask “tomorrow.” These are crucial lessons regarding the appropriate way to ask questions regarding *avodas Hashem* and regarding the *mesora*.

Have a wonderful and peaceful Shabbos!

Chana Ginsburg

This Dvar Torah has been adapted from the sefarim of Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg



Kita Hey
Seudat
Ameinim to
mark 100 days
of war. May
the Tefillot of
Tinokot Shel
Beit Rabban
be answered
speedily in our
days!

Kita Gimmel made friendship bracelets as part of an activity along with a 'Book Review' given by Sara Golan.



Kita Gimmel Kebatz took a trip around the world to England! Judy even showed them her old school uniform!





Thank you to the Iriyah for providing a seudat ameinim to each class, enabling a meaningful activity to mark 100 days of the current war.

