

MORASHAH
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Rabbi Shlomo Segal

Parashat HaShavuah Series

Parashat Hol Hamoed

The haggadah of Passover places great emphasis on the Four Children: the wise, the wayward, the simple and the mute. The order of the Four Children, with the rasha (the wicked one) following right after the chacham (the wise one), seems rather odd.

In the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria (the great 16th - century Kabbalist from Safed) it is stated that the four cups drunk at the seder correspond to the Four sons: the first cup relates to the chacham, the second cup to the rasha, and so forth. Interestingly enough the principle part of the Haggadah is recited over the second cup (i.e. the cup of the wicked. It is poured just before the four questions and is not drunk until shortly before the meal). Now the rasha is one of whom it is said that "If he had been there, he would not have been redeemed"; why, then, is the principal part of the Haggadah related to the wicked son?

The answer is that Judaism teaches that every Jewish soul is precious. Every Jew is a child of God regardless of whether they are wise, wayward, simple or a mute.

It seems to me that there is a most significant lesson that emerges from all of this, a lesson of perennial relevance. A synagogue must be a place that is welcoming to every Jew. A synagogue ought to be a place where we value each other as Jews and value each other's contributions to the fabric of Jewish life. A place where we learn from one another and be inspired by one another and collectively share a vision and fellowship. In this way we will all achieve the ultimate goal of being the wise son.

As the mishna in Avot puts it: Ben Zoma would say: Who is wise? One who learns from every person. (Avot, 4:1) The wise son is the one who uncovers the unique attributes inherent in every single Jew. Every single Jew should be regarded as precious.

I am reminded of an exquisite passage in the Talmud (Berachot 6a), in which the rabbis imagine that God wears tefillin, and they proceed to discuss which biblical texts God would place inside the divine tefillin. The following words would be placed in God's tefillin "And who is like Your people Israel, unique throughout the world?" (This passage is borrowed from Samuel and recited weekly in our liturgy for Shabbat afternoons.) The texts are presumably about love and appreciation for all of the children of Israel. Every Jew manifests an aspect of the divine image regardless of whether that Jew is the most pious or whether that Jew is an avowed atheist.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of the British Mandate for Palestine, once said "Everyone must know that within them burns a candle, and no one's candle is identical with the candle of another. It is our obligation to work hard to reveal the light of our candle and make of it a great torch to enlighten the whole world."

Hag Kasher V' sameah
Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Segal serves as the Rabbi of the Flatbush Jewish Center, Brooklyn, NY.

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