

BRINGING SEDER to CHAOS



Freedom in Quarantine

DAY 8 - MAH NISHTANA



My mother made me a scientist without ever intending to. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school, So? Did you learn anything today? But not my mother. Izzy, she would say, did you ask a good question today? That difference - asking good questions - made me become a scientist.

(Isidor Isaac Rabi)

Have you ever thought about the oddity of *Mah Nishtana*? We prepare our children for weeks, from the youngest age, to recite these four questions regarding the seder...and we never really give them a straightforward answer! Children ask questions about matzah vs. chametz, marror vs. other vegetables, leaning, and dipping twice; and we never respond to any of these details. Instead, we

go right into a discussion about our slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt.

It seems that the goal is to train our kids to ask questions. Receiving cogent, thoughtful answers is obviously ideal, but it is also not always the reality. As Jews, **we train our children to ask and know that there will not always be clear answers to life's questions.** As the famous Yiddish saying goes: *foon a kasha shtarbt men nisht*, you don't die from a question.

The Talmud (Ketubot 42b) records that Rabbah and Rav Yosef had difficulty regarding a law for twenty-two years before they had a resolution. R' Shlomo Zalman Braun z"l in his commentary *Sha'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha* points out that despite these great rabbis not understanding the law for twenty-two years (!), they remained persistent and did not reject the law. That is the hallmark of a Jew; being able to live with questions.

There is a statement of the talmud in a few instances that we do abnormal things at the seder "so the children will ask." Again, it seems odd that all we are trying to do is peak the curiosity of our children, especially if our answer to the question will be - "I just wanted you to ask." Doesn't seem very satisfying! It is clear that the Rabbis were seeking to embed within the educational experience of the seder the importance of having a discerning eye and voicing our questions. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks writes in his Haggadah, "In Judaism, to be without question is not a sign of faith, but a lack of depth." **We want our children to be seekers, thinkers and investigators, even if they don't come up with all the answers!**



Join the Conversation

What is done at your seder to get the kids engaged and asking questions?

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