

Bo

AND YOU SHALL TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

Exodus 13:14

(Upon leaving Egypt, before crossing the Red Sea, God commands:)

When your son shall come to you, saying: “What is this?” You shall say to him, “With a strong hand God brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.”

Mishnah Pesachim 10:4

They poured him a second cup of wine at the seder. And here, the son asks his father the Four Questions (and if he does not know what to say, his father teaches him what to ask):

Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we eat leaven and matzah, but tonight it is all matzah? On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, but tonight we eat bitter herbs? On all other nights we eat meat roasted, cooked, and boiled, but tonight we eat only roasted meat? On all other nights we don't dip even one time, and tonight we dip twice?

And according to what his son can understand, his father teaches him.

Mekhilta on Exodus 13:14, Piskha 18

The Torah refers to four children: one wise, one ignorant, one evil, and one who does not know how to ask. What does the wise son say? He says, “What are these testimonies, statutes, and judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?” (Deuteronomy 6:20).

So you begin to explain to him the laws of Passover and continue telling him these laws until you have explained that the group that has eaten the seder together does not disband until after eating an *afikoman* dessert consisting of a piece of the Passover offering....

What does the ignorant son say? He says, “What is this?”

And you say to him, “With an outstretched hand God brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Exodus 13:14).

Discussion Questions

1. In Hebrew, the word for “Egypt” is *Mitzrayim*, which comes from the root *tzar*, meaning, “narrow place”. Have you ever had a personal escape from a narrow place? Did God’s hand play a role in the experience? What happened?

2. The mishnah’s third question about meat refers to the Passover offering. The Mishnah has an idealistic view of reality, and does not recognize that the Temple service is no longer being practiced. By contrast, the Passover *haggadah* omits this question and reflects the reality of Passover rituals in a post-Temple world. Which vision do you prefer?

Can you think of questions you might ask in a retelling of your journey out of your own personal Egypt?

3. Who are the four sons today? Can you see each son as the embodiment of a distinct stage of human development (Toddler=can’t ask; Simple = young child; Wicked = adolescent; Wise = adult)? If so... what would it mean to teach your child at each of these distinct stages of development?

Do you find that when you yourself reach a new stage in your life, you learn things over again, as if for the first time? Or do you simply add a new perspective to what you already know?