

Loving the Wicked Child

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Haggadah Text	
<p>רשע מה הוא אומר: מה העבודה הזאת לכם, ולא לו, ולפי שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל כפר בעיקר, אף אתה הקהה את שניו ואמור לו בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים, לי ולא לו, ואילו היה שם לא היה נגאל.</p>	<p>What does the evil [son] say? "What is this worship to you?" (Exodus 12:26) "To you" and not 'to him.' And since he excluded himself from the collective, he denied a principle [of the Jewish faith]. And accordingly, you will blunt his teeth and say to him, "For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for <i>me</i> in my going out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8)." 'For me' and not 'for him.' If he had been there, he would not have been saved.</p>

1. The Second Child's Question

Shemot 12:25-27	
<p>וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לָכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וְשִׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת-הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת: וְהָיָה כִּי-יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מִהַ עֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם: וְאָמַרְתֶּם זָבַח-פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בְּתֵי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּגֹפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-בְּתֵינֵנוּ הֶחָיִל וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ:</p>	<p>And when you enter the land that God will give you, as promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to God, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when smiting the Egyptians, but saved our houses.' Those assembled then bowed low in homage.</p>

Shemot 13:5-8	
<p>וְהָיָה כִּי-יְבִיאֲכָם יְהוָה אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִיטִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ וְעַבַדְתָּ אֶת-הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצַּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי חַג לַיהוָה: מִצּוֹת יֹאכַל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא-יֵרָאָה לְךָ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא-יֵרָאָה לְךָ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל-גִּבְלוֹךָ: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:</p>	<p>So, when God has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which was sworn to your fathers to be given you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of God. Throughout the seven days, unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory. And you shall explain to your child that day, 'It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt.'</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Rabbi David Silber, *A Passover Haggadah: Go Forth and Learn*, 14

"So you should blunt his teeth and say to him": The wicked child does not merit a genuine answer, only a harsh rebuke, because the Haggadah understands the wicked child to be scoffing and rejecting the tradition rather than inquiring sincerely. But the wicked child's question--"What is this service to you?"--is, in fact, the most basic of religious queries and the very question that the Haggadah as a whole is designed to answer: what is the relevance of the Exodus to our faith and our practice?

2. The Wicked Child Today

David Mamet, *The Wicked Son: Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred, and the Jews*

To the wicked son, who asks 'What does all this mean to you?'; to the Jews who, in the '70s envied the Black Power Movement; who, in the '90s, envied the Palestinians; who weep at "Exodus" but jeer at the Israel Defense Forces; who nod when Tevye praises tradition but fidget through the seder; who might take your curiosity to a dogfight, to a bordello or an opium den, but find ludicrous the notion of a visit to the synagogue; whose favorite Jew is Anne Frank and whose second-favorite does not exist; who are humble in their desire to learn about Kwanzaa and proud of their ignorance of Tu B'Shevat; who dread endogamy more than incest; who bow their head reverently at a baptism and have never attended a bris. To you, who find your religion and race repulsive, your ignorance of your history a satisfaction, here is a book from your brother.

Mishael Zion and Noam Zion, *A Night to Remember*, "Dear Angry Child," 52

Parent: Okay, maybe I have gone overboard with my "tough love." Perhaps I have followed the Haggadah's parents in excluding their "wicked" child. But I know how hurt parents feel because you too have spoken to me at times with such hutzpah, putting down "your whole Seder thing." But I do not know how you feel beneath the skeptical facade. Talk to me--I promise not to be too judgmental...I, too, was a rebel against my parents...

Angry child: Your Judaism is fine for you, but not for me! You still do not hear me: I do not want to be here, at this table. This you call the "Holiday of Freedom"? Huh? Freedom for whom? Not for me! I am here because you make me, and to tell you the truth many of the adults at this table right now feel the same way! This is your Seder not mine!

Rabbi Norman Lamm, "The Second Son," Pesah 5719 (April 24, 1959)

There are those who, in their zeal for Torah, are ready to exclude the Second Son from the Jewish family. They are willing to write off large numbers of our fellow Jews — of this *Rasha-type* — and regard them as outside the fold. Such misguided zeal is doomed to well-deserved failure. Not only is it a dangerous attitude policy-wise, but it is an offense against the whole spirit of Torah. One commentator on the Haggadah explained it as follows: the passage on the Four Sons is preceded by the statement *Barukh Ha-Hakom* . . . "Blessed is God, blessed is He; blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people, blessed is He."

Four times do we say *Barukh* or "blessed" — corresponding to each of the Four Sons. There is a blessing to be found in each of the four types of Jew — including the *Rasha*. Indeed, "Blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people Israel"— if instead of fulminating and excommunicating and excluding, we will teach God's Torah to God's people and thus overcome the tragic lack of *Chokhmah*, then we will have derived an even greater blessing. Learning, learning, and more learning — that is to be our answer to the problem of *Rasha*. That is the way of blessing for our people.