

“And it shall be when your son shall ask you at some future time, ‘What is this?’” (13:14)

In the *Haggadah*, this question is attributed to the *ben tam*, simple son. How does the author of the *Haggadah* know this? Indeed, who says this question is the result of a curious, sincere and innocent mind; perhaps he is asking this mockingly, in an attempt to ridicule the *mitzvos*. Interestingly, regarding the simple son, the *Torah* says, “And it shall be when your son shall ask you at some future time,” while regarding the *ben rasha*, wicked son, the *Torah* says, “And it shall be when your children say to you, What is this service to you?” (12:26). It seems as if they are both asking the same question; just the timing is different: The *rasha* does not wait, he asks immediately, while the *tam* asks at some future time. Is there a rationale for this?

In responding to these questions, the *Kli Yakar* first focuses on the simple son's question, “What is this?” What does he see that prompts this query? Indeed, this chapter does not even address the concepts of *matzoh* or *marror*. It is about *Pidyon B'chor*, redeeming the first-born. Evidently, the *tam* is not questioning the *mitzvos* of *Pesach*, but rather, the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon B'chor*. What is there about this *mitzvah* that provokes his curiosity?

Apparently, such is the nature of the simple son. When he is told to eat *matzah* and *marror*, he does not ask questions. He is told to perform a *mitzvah*; he listens and acts upon the request. After all, why not? It does not hurt to act properly. Questions? He will ask those later. The *rasha*, on the other hand, cannot tolerate even a “convenient” *mitzvah*. If an act even alludes to tradition or *Torah* in any way, he must fight it. He is so pugnacious, he must immediately question the source, the rationale, the authority for this *mitzvah*. Heaven forbid that he be influenced into performing a “*mitzvah*”!

When the *tam* is asked to reach into his wallet to redeem the firstborn, then he has questions. One might err and compare the *tam* to the *rasha*, since they both question the *mitzvah* prior to accepting it. The *Torah* “explains” that there is a distinction between the two. The *rasha* asks immediately, he will do nothing if it in any way alludes to *Torah*. The *tam*, in contrast, readily accepts the *mitzvah* that does not impose itself too heavily on his time, his person, his wallet. The difference is clear: The *tam* acts, then questions. The *rasha* seeks every reason not to act. The questions are just his way of justifying his arrogance and inaction.