

It is a Pesach feast-offering to Hashem. (12:27)

The above *pasuk* is used as the response to the wise son in the *Haggadah*. The highlight of the *Seder* for many people is the recitation of the section addressing the *arba banim*, four sons. It allows us to reflect upon the individual natures and proclivities of different people and to analyze “what went wrong.” Why does one boy become a *chacham*, wise man, while another boy in the same class, from a similar family, becomes a *rasha*? It is in the genes, or is there more to it? I do not think that anyone has a definitive answer to this question. I did see an inspiring story in Rabbi Yechiel Spero’s *Haggadah*, which I present to the reader, along with my personal take on it.

The author of the *Haggadah* states: *K’neged arba banim dibrah Torah*, “Concerning four sons does the Torah speak: *echad chacham*, “one is wise;” *echad rasha*, “one is wicked;” *echad tam*, “one is simple;” *v’echad she’eino yodea lishol*, “and one is unable to ask.” The correct grammatical formula would be to say simply that the Torah speaks about four sons: a wise son, a wicked son, a simple son, and a son who is unable to speak. Why is the word *echad*, one, placed between each son?

The story is told that on *Pesach* night, **Horav Tzvi Elimelech, zl, m’Dinov**, commonly known by his brilliant *sefer*, the *Bnei Yissachar*, would take time out from conducting his own *Seder* in order to walk the village streets and observe how the *pashute Yidden*, simple Jews, were conducting their *Sedarim*. Going from house to house, he peered into the windows and was satisfied that the Jews of his community were doing it right. Their *Sedarim* were carried out in accordance with Jewish law and tradition. After his little excursion, he began to make his way home, to conduct his *Seder* with his family. It was at this point that he saw a strange “ritual” being enacted in the home of Moshe, the tailor.

Moshe was a good Jew, a trusting soul, who, albeit not intellectually inclined, was concerned about how he observed the *mitzvos*. Tradition was an important part of his life, and he made sure never to veer from the past. This is why the *Rebbe* was so surprised. Moshe recited the *Arba Banim*, but, instead of just reading it as is common with most people, he stopped at each *echad*, stretching out the word and concentrating on every letter, much like one would do concerning the *echad* of *Shema Yisrael*. In other words, to observe Moshe at that moment, he was changing *Arba Banim* into *Shema Yisrael*!

From a cursory glance by the average person, it seemed that Moshe, the tailor, was making a mistake, mixing up the *echad* of Hashem’s unity – which must be emphasized and vocalized correctly to stress its proper meaning – and the *echad*, individuality, of each one of the sons. The *Bnei Yissachar* was thoroughly fascinated. Moshe concluded his “reverie,” and the *Bnei Yissachar* went home to conduct his *sefer* with a new perspective on the *arba banim*. What was it?

Horav Yehoshua, zl, m’Belz, explained what took place and suggested its practical meaning for us. Every child has his own individual issues and challenges in life. Growing up is not a simple feat.

Raising one's children is far from simple, and the "one size fits all" approach does not work. Every child requires *tipul meyuchad*, his own individualized form of attention. One should expend the same sincerity and effort as he does being *mekabail ol malchus Shomayim*, accepting the yoke of Heaven upon himself, in raising his own children. Every child is an *echad*, individual, with specific talents, personality, tendencies and emotions. Each parent and teacher must take care to ensure he or she treats every child in such a manner.

Indeed, when a child realizes his special place in a parent's heart and mind, the reciprocity is incredible: the learning is different; the attitude is changed. In order for this transformation to occur, the parent or teacher must perceive that exclusive quality in the child. While any parent sees the uniqueness of his child – or, at least, should see it – it is quite different in the classroom. A secular writer once said, "Every person is gifted in some areas. We just have to find out what." While this, of course, is the ideal, it does not always happen, resulting in the lack of self-confidence and self-esteem evinced by some people. These people are the victims of adults who did not bother "looking" for that special quality, that unique gift, which each one possessed.

I recently read an anecdote which is quite appropriate for this message. While its ending is funny, it is what I would render a *bittere gelechter*, sad joke, since it is all-too common for many of us – both as parents and teachers – to ignore each child's distinct quality. A new teacher – young, idealistic, and quite inexperienced – was assigned a teaching position in an inner-city classroom in the middle of the year. Had she been given the job in September, she might have had a chance; January was an entirely different story. A job is a job, however, and she needed the experience and the money. Apparently, the "starting" teacher had left the position midyear because the discipline was an impossible task, as the principal had informed her that this was a class of "special students." Learning was not an essential requirement, as long as the students were kept off the streets and out of trouble.

The young teacher walked in on bedlam: feet were on desks, radios blaring, spitballs flying, the noise in the room deafening. She walked to the front of the room, opened up the attendance book and noted the number next to each name. The numbers ascended from 140 to 160 – quite an impressive lot. No wonder these students were impossible. Their IQ's all bordered on the genius level. As gifted students, they had reason to be high-spirited. They were probably bored by the level of education they were receiving. She called the room to order and began to teach.

At first, the students ignored her, failing to turn in work, with those assignments that were completed done hastily and thoughtlessly. She did not give up, talking to them about their innate gifted qualities, their abilities to succeed, to grow and become wonderful, contributing members of society. "As your teacher, I expect nothing short of excellence from each of you," she said. "You are all quite capable, and to expect less would be demeaning your inherent potential. Therefore, get with the program!" This went on regularly, as she reminded them of their G-d-given talents and added intelligence.

As she kept on encouraging them, they slowly began to respond. Their assignments were well-written; their test scores improved considerably; and their total demeanor was altered for the better. Their work was creative, precise, original – something which they had previously been deemed incapable of achieving. One day, the principal walked by the classroom and saw that the “new” teacher kept the students spellbound. He reveled in the rapt attention they gave her. He later read some of their essays and could not believe that these were the same students who had driven out the last teacher.

The principal called the teacher to his office and asked, “What have you done with your students? Their work has surpassed anything we have ever had from them. You are literally a miracle worker!” he declared.

She looked at him and said, “Well, what do you expect? They are gifted, aren’t they?”

“Gifted? This class is comprised of special-needs students – both behaviorally disordered and emotionally challenged. How can you call them gifted?”

“If so,” she asked, “why are their IQ’s so high?”

“Where did you see their IQ’s?” the principal asked.

She showed him the attendance list. The principal smiled and then began to laugh. “Those are not their IQ’s! Those are their locker numbers!”

It sounds like a funny story, but, in reality, it is sad. People often view themselves through the mirror of public sentiment. If you call someone a derogatory name long enough, he will begin to believe it. On the other hand, when a parent/teacher expresses praise and positive feeling towards their child/student, it will encourage, empower and inspire his/her living up to our expectations of them. We must remember the significance of *echad*.