

And it shall be when your son will ask you at some future time, “What is this?” You shall say to him, “With a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt from the house of bondage.” (13:14)

Rashi explains the above *pasuk* as presenting the question of a foolish child who is unable to ask a question in depth. Therefore, he is vague and simply asks, “What is this?” Elsewhere, the Torah presents the question differently: “What are the testimonies, statutes and judgments, etc.?” This is the question of the wise son. Thus, the Torah speaks with respect to four sons: the wicked one; the one who is unable to ask; the one who asks in a vague manner; the one who asks in a wise manner. **Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, derives from the Torah’s addressing four different types of sons that a father must be acutely aware that he could quite possibly be in such a predicament in which he has four different personalities sitting at his table. He must, therefore, be attuned to their questions and be prepared to answer them – each commensurate with his level of cognition, ability and proclivity to listen. In other words, the father must maintain a *shprach*, conversation, with each son – regardless of his spiritual affiliation. Even if for some reason one has a *ben rasha*, whom we will define as a misguided son, he must find a way to reach him. One achieves nothing by writing off a child, viewing him as non-existent, simply because he is not spiritually on the same page with the rest of the family.

The Torah refers to the questioner as *bincha*, your son. Likewise, the *Baal HaGaddah* reiterates, “Concerning four sons does the Torah speak.” We must remember that the *rasha* is *bincha*, your/our son. He is not a stranger, an uncivilized, recalcitrant human being lost in the shuffle of humanity, deferring to his base passions. He is ours! Therefore, we must respond. If our response is to be effective, we must know how to speak to him in such a manner that he will understand.

It is important that we delve into the psyche of the *ben rasha*, so that we have a better way of understanding what motivates his negativity. Unless we understand what makes him “tick,” we will have no idea on how to respond to him. We must do this because, as parents, we may not write off a child as being irrevocably wicked. If we are unable to forgive our child, how can we expect our Father in Heaven to forgive our infractions? One more issue concerning the wicked son must be addressed. I know I tread on shaky ground when I pose the following question: What role did the parents play in their son’s distancing himself from Judaism? Did they send mixed messages, emphasizing one thing while they did another? Were they present for their child when he or she was acting up, which essentially was his or her way of crying out for help? The topic is hurtful, so I will not pursue it. Let it suffice to say that, as parents, we must respond, and we must know what to say. The dialogue must continue, or else we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

The response we give a child must be honest. We may not avoid the issues. We must explain what we can and apologize for what we did not do. When a child alludes to a parents’ hypocrisy, it is

best that the parent not cover up the truth. It will only make it worse.

Regrettably, some parents are so hurt that they refuse to allow the wicked son at their table. They do not realize that the mere fact that he is willing to join the *Seder* table is in and of itself an indication that he is not really wicked. He has strayed; he is lost; he simply does not know how to return. He needs direction, guidance, fueled by love and sensitivity.

The Torah distinguishes between one who has completely revoked his relationship with Judaism – the *mumar*, *mi shenisnakru-maasav l'Aviv she'baShomayim*, the apostate who has turned himself totally away from his Father in Heaven – and one who is a *chotei*, sinner: *Yisrael, af al pi shechata. Yisrael hu*; A Jew, although he has sinned, remains a Jew. The *ben rasha* is at the *Seder* table. He might be a *chotei*, but he is not a *mumar*.

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates that, one day in the winter of 1967, the fellow who delivered fruits and vegetables to the *yeshivah* in Chadeira, appeared with puffy, red eyes. It was clear that he had been crying profusely. “What happened?” *Rav* Galinsky asked him. “My daughter ran away with an Arab from Baka Al Garbiah,” he replied. “How will I bear this terrible shame?” Apparently he was more concerned about his personal humiliation than his daughter’s decision to cut herself off from her people spiritually. Be that as it may, the situation was tragic, and the man certainly had reason to weep. *Rav* Galinsky needed very little prodding to encourage him to do something about the unfolding tragedy. The problem was that, for a Jew to enter an Arab village in 1967 was beyond dangerous: it was suicidal. *Rav* Galinsky said that he would take his chances. He had confronted death a number of times in his life. He did not fear Arabs. He feared only Hashem.

Rav Galinsky ordered a taxi. When he stated his destination, the driver flatly refused to take him. “You will be killed if you go there. That is an Arab village whose inhabitants have very little love for their Jewish neighbors.” The *Rav* was undeterred. He was going to save a Jewish life. He was a man on a mission; thus, he feared nothing and no one.

The taxi driver was adamant. If the *Rav* insisted on going he could not prevent him, but he was not going along. The taxi stopped about a mile from the village, and *Rav* Galinsky walked the rest of the way. As he neared the village, he was greeted by a stone which barely missed him. He was not deterred. He entered the village and asked the first Arab that he saw to direct him to the *Cadi*, who was the religious leader in charge of the village. As soon as the *Rav* indicated that he had business with the *Cadi*, the attitude changed from derision to respect.

The *Cadi* seemed to be a reasonable man. The best approach was to be direct. The *Cadi* spoke Hebrew, so the two were able to converse without the help of an interpreter. “I am a *Rav*,” *Rav* Galinsky began, “and, by the Jews, the *Rav* performs the marriage ceremony. I assume it is no different in the Moslem faith.” The *Cadi* agreed. “If a Jew would come to me and ask me to officiate at an interfaith marriage, I would refuse to do so,” *Rav* Galinsky said. “I would insist that there be a proper ritualistic conversion supervised by a court of Jewish Law.” The *Cadi* replied that

it was not much different in his faith. They varied in the requirements for one to be accepted for conversion. *Rav Galinsky* said that it would be a minimum of one year of learning, while the *Cadi* said that they required a revocation of their previous faith.

"I am very happy to hear this," said *Rav Galinsky*. "I have a member of my faith, a Jewish girl, who plans on marrying an Arab boy. I would like to inform her that both religions negate interfaith marriages." The *Cadi* actually walked the *Rav* outside and pointed to the home of the boy, wished him well, and bid him a good day. The Arabs looked on with venom in their eyes, but could do no harm out of respect for their *Cadi*.

Rav Galinsky knocked on the door and asked for the girl who spoke Hebrew. The young lady came to the door and was shocked to see a *Rav* standing there. "I have best regards for you from your father," *Rav Galinsky* began. "You have left him with such grief. Indeed, I am afraid your abandoning the family will kill him."

"What! Now he is troubled? For one year I was seeing a boy from *Kibbutz HaShomer HaTzair* (a secular settlement). The boy neither believed in G-d, nor observed any of His *mitzvos*. He ate on *Yom Kippur*. None of this seemed to bother my father, because, after all, he was Jewish. Now, I am seeing a boy who is religious, adheres to his faith, believes in his god, and I am accused of killing my father! *Rebbe*, explain to me, what is better: marrying an agnostic or a believer?"

The girl presented an argument which, albeit filled with holes, needed to be refuted. The *Rav* countered, "Let me explain the difference. If someone is in an accident and his hand is cut badly, barely hanging on by a thread, as long as the arteries have not been severed, there is hope that the hand can be attached and saved. If, however, the arteries are cut and there is no blood flow from the elbow to the hand, it is hopeless (modern medicine has made incredible strides in the last forty-five years, but the lesson is still obvious). A Jewish boy who has turned on his observance, who claims not to believe and does not maintain an active participation in *mitzvos*, is still a Jew. He has not completely reneged his faith. He might be a casualty of contemporary society, but his children and grandchildren still have the chance of returning to the faith of their ancestors. An Arab can proclaim belief in the Creator; he can even pray to Him, but he is still an Arab! One who marries him severs her bond with the Jewish People!"

The girl listened respectfully and said, "Thank you, but I do not agree with the *Rav*." *Rav Galinsky's* parting words to her stung, but anything less than the truth would have been ineffective: "I cannot remain here any longer. My life is at stake. Let me leave you with one last thought. If a war were to break out between the members of your faith, your family, the Jewish People, and your adopted family, what do you think would happen? Your ex-boyfriend from *HaShomer HaTzair*, the secular, agnostic Israeli, would join the army, fight for his country and save your father's life. Your Arab boyfriend would grab his sword and slaughter your father! Think about that!"

Rav Galinsky left. This was his "good-bye" to the girl: "Remember who you are and from where

you come.” Little did he know that within a few months, the Egyptian president would close the Straits of Tehran which effectively would seal Israel off from the Red Sea. The United Nations peacekeeping force would be sent packing. War with Israel became imminent. The entire world waited to see who would make the first move. One day, the delivery man came to the *yeshivah* in Chadeira, sought out *Rav* Galinsky, and with great emotion, whispered, “She came back!”

The father explained that the *Cadi* had refused to perform the marriage for her until after she had contemplated for some time, changing her faith to that of Islam. He also wanted her to become more acquainted with its culture and doctrine. During her waiting period, she overheard her fiancé commenting that he had already sharpened his sabre with which he would slaughter the Israelis. She then remembered what the *Rav* had told her months earlier. She imagined her fiancé slicing her father’s throat. She then realized the error of her ways, escaped, came home. Apparently, *Rav* Galinsky knew precisely what to say and how to convey his message persuasively.