

Thoughts From The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Pesach - The Fifth Son

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

During the Seder service we read in the Haggadah that "...the Torah speaks of four sons, one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask a question." The Haggadah then proceeds to tell us the questions posed by each of these 'sons', and the reply which we are to give to each of them.

The Wise Son inquires about the special Mitzvos of Passover and we are to tell him in detail all the laws and customs of the festival. The Wicked son asks: "What is this service to you?" By saying "to you" he excluded himself from the Jewish community, and we are told to reply to him sharply. The Simple Son asks: "What is this all about?" In reply we are to tell him of the Exodus from Egypt. As for the son who does not know how to ask, it is for us to open the conversation with him, as the Torah says, "You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'This is on account of what the L-rd did for me when I went forth from Egypt'."

While the Four Sons differ from one another in their reaction to the Seder, they have one thing in common: they are all present at the Seder. Even the "Wicked" son is there, taking an active though rebellious, interest in what is going on in Jewish life around him. This, at least, justifies the hope that some day also the "Wicked" son will become wise, and all Jewish children attending the Seder will become conscientious, observant Jews.

Unfortunately, in our time of confusion and spiritual bankruptcy, there is another kind of a Jewish child - a "fifth son" who is conspicuous by his absence from the Seder; the one who has no interest whatsoever in Torah and Mitzvos, laws and customs, who is not even aware of the Seder-shel-Pesach, of the Exodus from Egypt and the subsequent Revelation of Sinai.

The 'Fifth Son' is the result of an erroneous psychology and misguided policy on the part of some immigrants arriving in a new and strange environment. Finding themselves a small minority, and encountering social and economic difficulties, some parents had

the mistaken notion, which they transmitted to their children, that the way to overcome these difficulties is to become quickly assimilated into the new environment by discarding the heritage of their fore-fathers and abandoning the Jewish way of life. Finding that this process leads to the discomfort of inner spiritual conflict, some parents resolved to spare their children this conflict altogether. They simply gave their children no Jewish education or training.

To justify the desertion of their religion and appease their stricken conscience, it was necessary for them to devise some rationale. They persuaded themselves, and in turn their children, that the Jewish way of life, with the observance of the Torah and Mitzvos, was incompatible with their new surroundings. They sought, and therefore found, faults with the true Jewish way of life, while in the non-Jewish environment everything seemed to them only good and attractive.

By this attitude these parents hoped to assure their children's existence and survival in the new environment. But what kind of existence is it, if everything spiritual and holy is traded for the material? What kind of survival is it, if it means the sacrifice of the soul for the amenities of the body?

The tragic consequence of this utterly false approach was that thousands upon thousands of Jews have been

severed from their fountain of life, from their true faith, and from their fellow Jews. Deprived of spiritual life, there has risen a generation of children who no longer belong to the "Four Sons" of the Haggadah, not even to the category of the "Wicked" one. They are almost a total loss to their fellow Jews and to true Judaism.

The Exodus from Egypt and the Festival of Pesach are forceful reminders that an attempt to emulate the environment does not lead to survival, deliverance and freedom. These come from staunch loyalty to our traditions and the Torah way of life. Our ancestors in Egypt were a small minority and lived in the most difficult circumstances. Yet they preserved their identity, and with pride and dignity, tenaciously clung to their own way of life, traditions and uniqueness. Precisely in this way was their deliverance from every slavery, physical and spiritual.

Anti-Semitism From Page 8

posted on occasion outside the synagogue to deter neo-Nazis from disturbing services. The Jewish community feels that Jewish organizations and installations in Rome do not receive sufficient protection from the Italian police.

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