

Our Four Inner Children

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Pesah

Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810-1883) says that each individual contains within himself or herself each of the four children of the Haggadah – *hakham* the wise, *rasha* the “wicked,” *tam* the simple, and *she’eyno yode’a lish’ol*, the one who does not know how to ask.

Hakham, the Wise One

Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, in his *Likkutei Moharan*, speaks of the *hakham*. Speech conveys the essence of a person, he tells us. What one says and how one says it reveals what one has in one’s heart.

“*Hakham, mah hu omer*, the wise one, what does s/he say?” Thus begins the Haggadah’s description of the four children.

“*Mah hu omer*,” what is s/he really saying? We must learn to listen, truly to hear, to feel, to relate. The wise one listens when others speak. The wise one does not apply preconceived notions, does not judge, but listens to the underlying message, in order to be able to assist those in need – whatever their need may be.

We must also listen to our own inner voice, our own silent speech, as well as our outer voice, that which we speak aloud. What does our inner essence say to us? And how do we speak about ourselves? What we say about ourselves becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Call yourself unworthy and you become unworthy. Call yourself good and you become good.

“*Hakham mah hu*,” how do we identify the wise one? “*Omer*,” by what the wise one speaks.

“*Hakham mah hu*,” how do we become the wise one? “*Omer*,” through our speaking.

Rasha, the “Wicked” One

The *Akeidat Yitzhak* says that the *rasha* is called “wicked” because s/he has the ability to see the “wickedness” in others. When s/he says “What is all this work *lakhem*, to you,” s/he is suggesting that there are those who make all their Seder preparations for their own reasons – to show off, or even just to fill their bellies – and not for G*d (reading the Haggadah’s response, “*lakhem v’lo lo*; for you and not for him” as a reference to G*d rather than to the *rasha* him/herself).

Tam, the Simple One

Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz was known as the master of humor; he could cleverly find a way to inject humor into virtually any situation. Once, his master, Rebbe Yaakov Yitzhak, the Seer of Lublin, said to him, “Naftali, the Torah tells us to be simple before our G*d. Simple, Naftali, simple; not clever!”

“Indeed, Master,” Naftali replied, “that is so. But, you know, it takes great cleverness to be truly simple.

She’eyno Yode’a Lish’ol, the One Who Knows Not How to Speak

Rebbe Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev interprets the *she’eyno yode’a lish’ol*, not so much as the one who does not know how to speak but rather as the one who, at the highest level of spiritual development, knows how not to speak.

The Four Children

The wise, who is able to listen. The so-called “wicked,” who can see the deficiencies in others and in herself or himself and so take the first steps toward correcting them. The simple, who shows great wisdom in his or her very simplicity. And the one who knows how not to speak.

This Pesah, may we all find all four of our inner children.

Hag Same’ah, a Joyous Pesah.