

The Guest Toward The End of the Seder

Shabbos Hagodol

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

One of the reasons this Shabos is called SHABOS HAGODOL is that the Haftorah speaks of Eliyahu's role in heralding the GREAT day of Moshiach's coming: "Behold, I send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd" (Malachi 3:23). The very fact, too, that more people spend time on this Shabos studying laws and concepts of Pesach, and listen to the Rav's Droshe, adds to the greatness of the day (see Drisha on Tur, laws of Pesach). "Those who love its words have chosen greatness" (Musaf of Shabbos). This refers to words about Shabbos and Torah learning in general.

Eliyahu's role before the coming of Moshiach is given more emphasis during the Seder, when we fill a special cup for Eliyahu symbolizing our invitation to him and our eagerness for his appearance. Why tonight? This is customarily done following the grace after meal, when we open the door symbolically for Eliyahu. It is further bewildering that this invitation to Eliyahu is not extended before the Kiddush at the beginning of the Seder, similar to the Sholom Aleichem welcoming the angels on Friday evening before Kiddush.

Upon pondering the special task of the Seder night one readily sees the distinction. The angels on Friday night only come to offer a blessing. That can be relegated to the angels from the start. The responsibility of Seder night, however, is to educate children, to ponder and share thoughts, to enlighten and instruct. Eliyahu's appearance, indeed, is connected with the mission to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (ibid 3:24) But the main thrust of the job of uniting the hearts is ours to fulfill. Only following our zealous and arduous efforts regarding the future generation, Eliyahu will evoke the final turn of children to the prompting and stirrings of parents.

Eliyahu will complement and supplement our efforts, and succeed in areas where all our attempts have failed. But the bulk of the responsibilities is ours to fulfill.

So it may be gleaned from the juxtaposition of the above passage about Eliyahu and the immediately preceding passage which reads: "Remember ye the law of Moshe My servant, whom I commanded on Horev for all Israel, statutes and ordinance" (3:22). This demand is addressed to us, and is to be complied with prior to Eliyahu's mission.

The parents must become not only educators but also psychologists knowing how to reply to each child according to his ability. The Torah requires individualized instruction. "The Torah speaks to four different types of sons, one who is wise, one a Rosho, one simple, and one who does not even know to ask (Hagadah). Each one deserves special attention. Individualized instruction, which modern research espouses has already been taught in the Chumosh. The wise son is entitled to receive instruction on his level, and the simple one on the simple level. The Rosho is treated with a unique approach which is suited to this type. Each approach is aimed to evoke a positive response.

While the instruction takes place in an intensified manner at the Seder table, before the invitation to Eliyahu is extended, a paramount lesson is learned from Eliyahu's approach. His method is to first "turn the hearts of parents to children" and then "the hearts of children to their parents." This is the most advanced theory in modern education, where learning is not book centered or teacher centered but child centered. First the parent, the guide, must listen to the inner yearning of the son or daughter. "The Chochom what does he say?... The Rosho what does he say?" This is the cornerstone of the Hagadah. Listen and study the question. Analyze the children's queries, their longings, their inner feelings. One will find that above all they want authority. They want parents to look up to.

The wise son knows the address of the libraries. He has an inquisitive mind and ability for self research. He has a wealth of resources of wisdom to draw from. But he prefers to learn from parents. The commentators note that the wise son does not mean to exclude himself though he says "Eschem", you, instead of "Osonu", us. For he already included himself by saying "our G-d". Why then does he say "Eschem"? It is because the wise son wants to learn from his parents. What is YOUR custom? How did YOU understand this particular Mitzvah? In addition to all available sources open to the wise son from which to elicit solutions, he wants answers from his parents, whom he needs to look up to as teachers, counsels and guides. Therefore "and you, too, tell him". Coming from

his beloved parents, its meaningfulness, as the taste of the Afikomon which lingers on, will remain with him forever.

The Rosho what does he say? The first stipulation in the attempt to bring the rebel back to Yiddishkeit, to turn his heart to that of his parents, is to turn to his heart and listen to its prompting and its pulsating. With patience and a sagacious approach he can be won back. The question identified with that of the Rosho is introduced in the Chumosh as follows: "And it shall come to pass when your children will say unto you" (Shemos 12:26). The word "Vehoyo" (it shall come to pass) is an expression of joy, say the rabbis (Psichta Midrash Esther). This prompts the sages to say that "Good tidings were heralded to the Israelites, that they will have children and grand children" (Mechilta ibid). Obviously, even children of this type, which the Hagada identified as Rosho, can make parents happy and joyous. This can be so when parents, Eliyahu-like, first turn their hearts to the children, so that they can transform the hearts of children to the parents. Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch explains that by aiming "at the teeth" of the Rosho it is meant to impress upon him who refuses to observe a Mitzvah because he doesn't fully understand it, that teeth are for slowly chewing to help digestion. By tasting the Mitzvah and observing it, chewing it and rehashing it, with patience, he will begin to appreciate it. One should add that the parent, too, must learn the lesson of the teeth, and the chewing, and be patient with a son of that type, rather than eschewing him. With patience and understanding a parent can heal a child's "wisdom teeth". There is an approach unique to the simple son too. The child who cannot ask out loud also has feelings of the heart to which the parents must turn, in order to be able to turn him "on" to theirs.

Upon conclusion of our performance on the night of opportunity to assure the spiritual welfare of our children, Eliyahu is invited to seal the covenant of unity of hearts of parents and children. At his appearance he will herald the GREAT day of redemption.

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