Jewish Tribune – Pesach

**Open minded**

The normal way of understanding our approach to the 4th son is to simply tell him the facts. וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָֹה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

However, I would like to suggest an approach which is critical for any teacher, parent or indeed anyone wishing to impart knowledge, to know.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 65, 22) tells the story of R’Yose ben Yozer who was being led out to be killed by the Romans. R’Yose’s nephew had abandoned his faith, joined the enemy and was antagonising his uncle at this terrible time. Yet, R’Yose ben Yoezer had the fortitude and peace of mind to still attempt to draw his nephew back.

His nephew mocked him by contrasting their fates. R’Yose ben Yoezer was being led to his death while the nephew was enjoying Roman life. R’Yose told his nephew that if that is the fate of those who anger Hashem, imagine the reward due to those who do His will.

The nephew then said to his uncle “but surely no one has served Hashem more than you.” To which R’Yose replied that if this is the lot of those who serve Hashem, how much more so, for those who anger Him.

This argument penetrated the nephew and instantly led him to teshuva.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks why didn’t R’Yose go straight to the second argument? Why was the first stage of the conversation even necessary?

He answers that to impart a lesson, you have to create curiosity in the other person. R’Yose’s nephew was intrigued by R’Yose’s initial comment and his mind was suddenly open and receptive.

This is the secret of good teaching and parenting. Create the curiosity, pique the interest of your listener and then impart your message.

This method was also used by Onkelos who famously converted to Yiddishkeit. The Gemara (Avoda Zara 11a) tells us Onkelos was able to fend off three separate delegations of Romans sent by the Caesar to bring him home. On the third occasion an exasperated Caesar even told the delegation not to engage Onkelos in conversation. Onkelos therefore used another method. On being led out he placed his hand on the mezuzah. Incidentally, this is the source for the custom of touching the mezuzah on passing through a doorway (see Darchei Moshe HoAroch, Yoreh Deah 285:2 and Remo there). The delegation could simply not contain their curiosity, engaged him in conversation and it was all over. Their minds were open and receptive.

And that is why Noach built a *teiva* for 120 years. Rashi (Berishis 6, 14) tells us that HKBH troubled Noach to do this in order to give mankind a chance to do teshuva. Noach’s strange behaviour of endless building would arouse the curiosity of those around him and would cause them to ask him what he was doing. Perhaps they would do teshuva.

This method is instructive to all of us. It is very tempting for a Rebbe or parent to just turn on the tap, speak and feed information. But if we want our students and children to really hear us, we have to pick the right time and ensure their minds are open. If the time is right, ask a question, do something to pique their curiosity and then impart the message.

Perhaps this is what the Baal Haggadah is telling us. For a son who is אינו יודע לשאול, don’t just tell him, but פתח לו, open him up. Get him to start thinking and wondering. You will then have a more receptive audience and the transmission will be more successful.

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