

## Passover Issue – The Four Sons - One Pager Series

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- **The (Cynical) Wicked son:** Ex12-25:28. *Your sons (1), when they (1) say (2) to you, “What is this service to you”*
  - ❖ Key points: (2) The wicked son *says (2) his* question; other children *ask* their question.  
We have here *tone*: *Saying a question* connotes cynicism. In fact, the *cynical* son might be a better translation
  - ❖ Note the plural (*They, sons (1)*). All other children’s questions are singular  
A crucial point for children who *go off the path*. Their problems are not intellectual. Rather their problem is their plurality. They have joined groups which sway them
- **The Apathetic son:** Ex13-1:10. (1) *Tell your son on that (2) day as follows: Because of this (2) God saved me from Egypt. And it will be for you a symbol (2) on your hands and an ornament on your head.*
  - ❖ Key points: (1) Every other biblical paragraph with children begins with a question (or a statement in the case of the cynical son). This paragraph has no opening question → This is the *apathetic* son who doesn’t care to ask
  - ❖ The translation *apathetic* is due to my teacher, Rabbi Soloveitchick, *the Rav*. The Rav pointed out that
    - There are not just 4 sons; there are a rich variety of sons; but the four sons are typologies which mix in each individual to give their unique personality. Since the 4 sons are 4 types you can’t call this son, *who can’t ask*, because that would make him identical with the *simple son*. Also, it is well known that the Biblical verb *to know* means to feel and experience (biblical *know*). Hence, we translate *who doesn’t care to ask!*
  - ❖ (2) Emphasis in the response to apathy is a symbolic experiential approach (not cognitive). You reach out with symbols (2) which are done on *that day* and are physically present *because of this*.
- **The Simple/Wise son:** Ex13-14:16 versus Dt06-20:25.
  - ❖ The questions of these two children are differently formulated
    - The simple son says *what is this (1)*
    - The wise son says *what are these testimonials, statutes, and civil laws (1)*
  - ❖ A known principle of artificial intelligence is that human intelligence is recognized by a superior and more detailed vocabulary:
    - The wise son has at his command words for many types of laws: *testimonials* which commemorate historical events, *statutory* laws, and *civil laws* (for example the laws that house staff must rest on holidays)
    - Contrastively, the simple son can only *ask* and *point* (what is *this*) He doesn’t yet have a vocabulary

### Haggadah formulation of the four sons. Why does the Haggadah mix up responses to the sons?

The four sons are understood as manifesting extremes of two dimensions: *Wisdom* (detailed vocabulary) and *respect*. (See my article *The Educational Pedagogy of the Four Sons*, **Shofar**, 22.4, (2004)). The following table summarizes

Respect \ Vocabulary	Rich vocabulary ( <i>testimonials, civil laws</i> )	Weak vocabulary ( <i>this</i> )
Respect (Respectfully asks)	Wise – <i>What are the testimonials...</i>	Simple – <i>what is this</i>
Cynical (Says questions)	Wicked – <i>cynically says what is this?!</i>	Apathetic – <i>not concerned; doesn’t ask</i>

Remember when we study Rashi how a hypernym like *honey* can refer to the parent category, the hypernym, of *sweet things*. This parent-child (category – detail) interplay applies to the Haggadah which *mixes up* children in the same category.

**#Haggadah mix-up of the Biblical wicked and wise (both in the high vocabulary column):** The Haggadah answers the *wise* son’s question with the biblical answer to the *wicked* son – “It is a Passover offering to God” (Ex12-26) on which the Haggadah states *teach him the laws of Passover*.

**#Haggadah mix-up of the Biblical wicked and apathetic (both in the lack of respect row):** The Haggadah answers the *wicked* son’s question with the biblical answer to the *apathetic* son – “Because of this God took me out of Egypt”.

**Response to mix-up:** In both these cases the Haggadah *declares* its intention. Ordinarily the Haggadah simply says, *answer this son’s questions*. In the above two cases the Haggadah says *you also (af atah) answer*, thereby explicitly indicating that extra (*also*) biblical text is used