

FROM THE EDITOR

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What would we think of a teacher who pitched up for teaching a class without having done any preparation whatsoever?

A teacher who hasn't studied the material that's meant to be covered for at least a year, if ever, who hasn't taken a minute to think about how he's going to present the information, or get the kids interested, or what he hopes to accomplish in the short amount of time that he has to cover the required material, or even what he hopes the kids will walk away from his lesson having learned?

But, when we pitch up to the Pesach Seder – the night on which we're all teachers, the night on which we're meant to give over to our children the story of how we became a people and implant faith in Hashem in their hearts, telling them all about the miracles and wonders that Hashem did for our forefathers in Egypt – without having done an ounce of preparation, are we really any different than a teacher who pitches up to class without having done any preparation for teaching his students?

I know it's only January, but Pesach will be here before we know it and the weeks just before Pesach are often consumed with the physical preparations for the Yom Tov itself: cleaning, kashering, shopping, cooking, even planning the table décor, menu, and, for some, the wine list, etc. So now really is the time to go pick up a new Haggadah with an interesting commentary or to dust off an old one from the shelf...or even to go online (try visiting, for example, chinuch.org), where there's plenty of material, or simply ask your Rabbi to start a class devoted to just this topic. Pick a part of the Haggadah that you'd like to know more about. Make some time. Take some notes. Learn something new and prepare things to share with your family and guests. Maybe even make up a game to play at the Seder in order to keep everyone interested and engaged. *(To help get you started, I've assembled some materials that you can download here: goo.gl/MNHFpG)*

Think about what you'd like to share with your family, maybe you can even spark a discussion by asking some questions. After all, the Seder is the time for questions – so much so that we actually fulfil the obligation of telling over the Pesach story by doing so in a question/answer format. The well-known Four Questions from the Seder are meant to be just four of many more questions that come both before and after them. And, many things are done at the Seder just "so the children will ask" for this very reason, to encourage and prompt questioning. Pedagogically speaking, we know that people learn and retain things better when they ask or are prompted with questions rather than just given information via lectures.

As much as our children may have plenty to share at the Seder, having worked long and hard in school over the last couple of months in preparation for it, it's really our mitzvah to teach them that night – and the more we do it and the longer we spend on it, the better. And that's the point behind the story included in the Haggadah of the gathering of the famous Rabbis in Bnei Brak, leaders of their generation who stayed up all night discussing the exodus from Egypt until it had reached the time for the recitation of the morning Shema and they had fulfilled the mitzvah of telling over about the exodus to its absolute utmost. Rabbi Azriel Chaim Goldfein, ztz"l, would often point out that although we usually think of the time for staying up all night studying Torah as connected to Shavuot, doing so then is only a custom, but staying up and discussing the exodus from Egypt all night on Pesach is actually a mitzvah from the Torah.

Like most things in life, we get out of the Pesach Seder what we put into it. The more we learn, the more we have to say and share, the better the experience will be. May we be blessed with constantly seeing the events of the Seder through the fresh and innocent eyes of children; with taking note of the many different subtleties and nuances that our Sages included in the Seder and the Haggadah; with constantly asking questions by which we will better understand and appreciate the incredible events of the exodus from Egypt, as well as deepen our own understanding and faith in Hashem.

You have your assignment, so get cracking...your homework will be due before you know it!

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