

For this inaugural weekly email d'var Torah I was going to write about the weekly Torah portion Tzav, where Moses holds what we might call a congregational meeting for the Israelites. It is filled with pageantry and ritual and seems to have gone on for (hopefully) far longer than any of our meetings. While I am sure that there are times we would all be interested in bringing ritual sacrifice back to our annual meetings, instead this week's inspiration comes from Passover - specifically the four children that we read about in the Haggadah.

Here is one of my versions of the four children as different types of congregants.

1. The ones that volunteer their time productively and work for the good of the community
2. Those that criticize and never volunteer
3. Those that just show up to programs without offering feedback
4. Those that just show up for the High Holidays

Clearly I am making this up as I go, but I am particularly focused on the wicked child this year. The Haggadah says, "What does the Wicked Child say? "What is this service to you ?" (Shemot 12:26). To you and not to him. And since he has excluded himself from the community, he has denied the fundamental principle. So you should blunt his teeth and say to him, "For the sake of what the Lord did for me when I went out of Egypt" (13:8). For me and not for him--if he had been there he would not have been redeemed."

Even though we are told that the wicked child is to be excluded from our community, the child is still written about and still invited to the table. Rabbi Norman Lamm says that there is a blessing in each of the four types of Jews.

So for us, what is the blessing to be found in the congregant that is all critique? Much like the wicked child, whose very question we spend much of the seder answering, we need to be able to separate the question/comment from the tone/questioner. Even if the critique is unfair, there is often something to be learned.

Much of our society is operating by shutting down and ignoring questions that we disagree with. We all too often dismiss the questions because we don't like the questioner. As synagogues, we need to be a place that welcomes questions, even hard ones. As we enter into Passover, may we all be able to separate out what we can learn from unfair critiques from the person giving and may we all find some time for our own reflection and relaxation.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach,
Ken

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