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The Four Questions about the Mitzvah of *Chinuch*

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The Haggadah informs us כנגד ארבעה – בניים דברה תורה – we communicate the story of Pesach in different ways to different children to get the message across, in accordance with the imperative of “teach every child according to his way” (*Proverbs* 22:6). Our Rabbis explain that we do many things this night in a peculiar fashion, like washing hands before eating a vegetable (*karpas*), to provoke the attention and the interest of the children. We even have the children steal the *afikomen* to keep them engaged. The Seder night is grounded in *chinuch* – the mitzvah of educating our children. As the Haggadah states prior to the recitation of the *mah nishtanah*, “here the son asks.” Only then are we ready to begin the Seder experience. Indeed, the Pesach Seder, arguably the most observed ritual amongst the Jewish people, stands for the notion that *chinuch* is the epicenter of our lives.

In the spirit of the *mah nishtanah*, we will explore four questions about the mitzvah of *chinuch*.

QUESTION #1:

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE MITZVAH OF *CHINUCH*?

Answer: The terminology employed by Chazal (see, e.g., *Nazir* 29b) is להנכו במצוות. We train our children to perform mitzvot. There are two aspects to this training: one is initiating the child now to live a life of religious observance, and the other is preparing the child for the future as an adult. Rashi in his commentary to the Torah (*Bereishit* 14:14) emphasizes

the first aspect, noting that the word *chinuch* indicates one’s initiation to a new enterprise, in our case into the enterprise of keeping mitzvot. On the other hand, the Rambam, in his commentary to the *Mishna* (*Menachos* 4:4) emphasizes the second aspect, that of preparation for the future. He writes that *chinuch* connotes practicing a trade or discipline so that one is equipped to do the job perfectly in the future.

These dual explanations pave the path towards resolving the question of whether the mitzvah of *chinuch* is rabbinical or a Torah obligation.

The Talmud in many places (e.g., *Nazir* 29b, *Sukkah* 28b, *Chagigah* 4a) states explicitly that the mitzvah of *chinuch* is a rabbinical obligation.

For example, the Talmud (*Sukkah* 42a) states that as soon as a boy can shake a *lulav* on Sukkot, he should shake a *lulav*. As soon as he is old enough to wear *tzitzit*, the father should buy him *tzitzit*. Similarly, the Rambam (*Chametz u’Matzah* 6:10) writes that a boy capable of eating bread becomes obligated in the mitzvah of eating





matzah. But clearly the boy is not obligated in mitzvot until he becomes *bar mitzvah*, so the fulfillment of these mitzvot is only rabbinic in nature.

However, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in the *Meshech Chochma* notes that there is a verse in the Torah (*Bereishit* 18:19), regarding Hashem's praise for *Avrohom Avinu* because he would transmit his traditions to his children and household after him (למען יצוה), that indicates the mitzvah of *chinuch* is of Biblical origin.

Based on our explanation of the dual aspects of *chinuch*, we can suggest that there is no contradiction. As my rebbe, Rabbi Hershel Schachter *shlit"l* explains, only the aspect of *chinuch* as an initiation for the minor child to perform mitzvot is rabbinic in nature, since he has not yet reached the age of mitzvot. But there is also the notion of preparing one's child for a lifetime of mitzvot in the future, reflected in the Torah's expression of למען יצוה – which is a Biblical requirement.

Armed with the understanding of this dichotomy, we can also resolve a separate conundrum. The *Gemora* (*Nazir* 29b) indicates that once the son leaves the domain of the father (i.e., becomes *bar mitzvah*, as explained by the *Rosh*), there is

no longer a mitzvah of *chinuch*. However, elsewhere the *Gemora* (*Kiddushin* 30a) states that a father's obligation to rebuke his son continues into adulthood.

The *Mishna Berura* concludes (225:7) that the mitzvah of *chinuch* ends after a son becomes *bar mitzvah*, and that the *Gemora* in *Kiddushin* that indicates otherwise is talking about the mitzvah of rebuke, which is different. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein in the *Dibros Moshe* (*Shabbos* 26:82) disagrees and derives from the Talmudic passage in *Kiddushin* that the mitzvah of *chinuch* continues into adulthood. We can suggest based on our analysis that maybe it depends on which aspect of *chinuch* we are discussing. With respect to the rabbinic obligation of regulating one's son in mitzvot, once the son becomes a *bar mitzvah*, the father no longer has that obligation of *chinuch* because now the son is obligated to perform mitzvot on his own. However, as far as the Torah obligation of *chinuch* is concerned, namely of ensuring that the child will receive the tools necessary to observe mitzvot in the future, which sometimes takes the form of constructive "rebuke," that aspect of the mitzvah continues even after the age of *bar mitzvah*.

QUESTION #2:

DOES THE MITZVAH OF *CHINUCH* APPLY TO MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS?

Answer: The *Gemora* (*Sukkah* 42a) references only the father's obligation to prepare his son for mitzvot. Certainly, this is true with respect to *Talmud Torah* where only the father has the obligation to teach his son Torah (see *Kiddushin* 29b). But is there a mitzvah of *chinuch* to prepare one's daughters for mitzvot that they need to perform? The Talmud (*Nazir* 29b) surprisingly indicates (according to *Reish Lakish*) that neither women nor daughters are included in the mitzvah.

Despite this passage, however, the *Gemora* elsewhere (*Yoma* 82a) states that there is an obligation to perform *chinuch* with respect to minor daughters in terms of training them to fast on Yom Kippur. Additionally, the *Gemora* in *Gittin* (25a) describes how once a father orchestrated a foot race between his sons and daughters and decreed that the winners would be the first to be counted in his Pesach offering (the daughters won) and he did this "to increase their alacrity for mitzvot," thus also indicating that the mitzvah of *chinuch* pertains to both sons and daughters.

Nonetheless, these sources might only teach that *chinuch* applies to daughters, but not that the obligation is incumbent upon the mother. However, the *Gemora* (*Sukkah* 2b) states that *Hilni* the *Malkah*, who had converted to Judaism, scrupulously fulfilled the rabbinic obligation of *chinuch* to ensure that her children of *chinuch* age (i.e., 5 or 6 and above) would sit in a kosher *sukkah*.

Thus, while there are some dissenting views, it appears that both mothers and fathers are obligated in *chinuch* (although the Steipler Gaon writes that the nature of their mitzvah is different; see *Kehillos*

Yaakov, Sukkah, section 2). Additionally, as demonstrated from the passage regarding Yom Kippur, the mitzvah of *chinuch* indeed applies to both sons and daughters. See *Mishna Berurah* OC 343:2.

QUESTION #3:

WHEN A MINOR CHILD PERFORMS A MITZVAH BASED ON THE PARENT'S MITZVAH OF *CHINUCH*, DOES THE CHILD GET CREDIT FOR THE MITZVAH OR IS IT REALLY THE PARENT'S MITZVAH?

Answer: It turns out that the answer to this question is also a dispute amongst the rabbinic authorities. According to *Tosafot* (*Berachos* 48a) the child himself fulfills an obligation on a rabbinic level. However, according to the Ramban (*Milchamos Berachos* 12a), there is no such thing as a minor child having any obligation, but rather the mitzvah is only upon the father to see to it that his child performs mitzvot.

The Steipler Gaon (*ibid.*) avers that even *Tosafot* would agree that there is a mitzvah fulfillment for the father, but that there is also a mitzvah fulfillment for the child. In this sense, *chinuch* both informs the child and enriches the father.

QUESTION #4:

WHEN WE TRAIN A CHILD TO DO MITZVOT, DOES THE MITZVAH NEED TO BE PERFORMED IN THE EXACT SAME WAY THAT IT IS PERFORMED BY AN ADULT?

Answer: This question has relevance to the obligation to own the *lulav* and *esrog* on the first two days of Sukkos (outside of Israel). The *Gemora* (*Sukkah* 46b) records that there is a problem with giving a child the *lulav* and *esrog* as a gift on the first day of Sukkos since the child has the capacity to acquire a gift transferred to him by an adult, but he does not have the capacity according to Jewish law to reconvey the

item. Therefore, if a father gave his *lulav* to his minor son on the first day of Sukkot, even if it was after the father fulfilled his own obligation, the father would not be able to properly reacquire the *lulav* to observe the mitzvah of *lulav* properly on the second day.

The *Ritva* (*Sukkah* 2b), based on the story of *Hilni the Malkah*, who needed to ensure that her children sit in an impeccably kosher *sukkah*, rules that the mitzvah of *chinuch* requires that the child be trained to perform the mitzvah to perfection. It would follow that a child needs to have his own set of *lulav* and *esrog*, and indeed this is what the Rosh states explicitly (*Sukkah* 3:30).

However, the *Mordechai* (*Sukkah* No. 759) disagrees with the *Ritva*, and rules that so long as the child observes the essential elements of the mitzvah, the mitzvah of *chinuch* is fulfilled. Therefore, he recommends that the father not let go of his own *lulav*, but rather shake it together with his son, even though the son will not acquire the *lulav* and *esrog*.

We may suggest that the *Ritva* and the *Mordechai* disagree about whether the emphasis of *chinuch* is on the present or the future, as discussed above. According to the *Ritva*, the focus is on the present, and therefore the mitzvah must be done correctly, even if only on a rabbinic level. According to the *Mordechai*, the focus is on the future, and therefore so long as the child gets the feel for how to do the mitzvah in the future, it doesn't need to be perfect in all its details.

Let us now return to the special mitzvah of communicating the Pesach story to children at the Pesach Seder.

Like the mitzvah of *chinuch* in general, the special mitzvah of teaching children at the Pesach Seder (see *Rambam, Hilchos Chametz v'Matzah* 7:2) is both present and



forward looking. As the Rambam teaches (*Laws of Chametz and Matza* 7:6), each person is obligated to relive the experience of leaving Egypt (*Yetzias Mitzrayim*) in the present. However, it is also a time to underscore the values that we want to impart to our loved ones for the future.

According to the late Klausenberger Rebbe (*Divrei Yetziv, OC* 206), the reason why the Seder night is called “the night of guarding” (*Shemot* 12:42), is because the mitzvah of *chinuch* that is observed at the Seder is what has guarded and preserved the Jewish people throughout the generations (see also *Aruch Hashulchan OC* 472:15). As someone who lost his wife and eleven children in the Holocaust and then passionately rebuilt his family and Hasidic community afterwards, the Klausenberger Rebbe's words have special resonance for us.

In this sense, the Pesach Seder engages fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters and all extended family members of the Jewish community alike, and both informs and enriches. When we recite the Haggadah and observe the special mitzvot of the Seder with meticulous precision, we set the tone in terms of reinforcing the flame of Torah and Jewish tradition both in our lives and in the lives of future generations. ■

Seize the Moment!

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One of the most basic aspects of the *Yom Tov* of Pesach is the mitzvah of matza. But the mitzvah is not simply eating matza. When describing the laws of the *chag*, the Torah says (*Shemos* 12:17) ושמרתם את המצות (“You shall guard the matzos”). Guarding the matzos means being extremely careful that they don’t become *chametz* in the process of producing them, which would render them useless for Pesach and forbidden to eat or even own. Much thought and energy is invested in fulfilling this Torah obligation. From the time the grain is harvested (and even earlier) until the finished product emerges from the oven, no effort is spared in making sure a perfect product is produced, and that it is done specifically for the purpose of the mitzvah. One of the critical aspects is working with זריזות, alacrity, to make sure the matzah dough doesn’t turn sour. Special *chaburos* (groups) of G-d fearing individuals are formed by those wishing

to oversee and be personally involved in the baking of the matzos so as not to leave this important matter entirely in the hands of others. And it all stems from the phrase “ושמרתם את המצות”.

However, שמרתם את המצות doesn’t end there. A glance at Rashi’s commentary on this *pasuk* shows that he cites the words of the מכילתא which says: רבי יאשיה אומר אל תהא קורא את המצות אלא את המצוות. That is to say, the word מצות (matzos) can also be read מצוות, commandments. כדרך שאין מחמיצין מצוות, את המצות, כך אין מחמיצין את המצוות *chametz*, in a literal sense, by not exercising sufficient alacrity in their preparation, so must we be careful not to allow any mitzvah opportunity to become *chametz*. אלא אם בא לידך עשה אותה מיד. When an opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah comes your way, grab it and fulfill it immediately. Don’t allow it to turn sour by pushing it off for later.

If we were to walk away with the words



of the מילתא simply as cited we'd have a tremendous message and a task to live up to. The message is clear. We all tend to push things off if we think we can get away with doing so. The Torah here is teaching us that if it's a mitzvah we shouldn't do that or the mitzvah may turn sour.

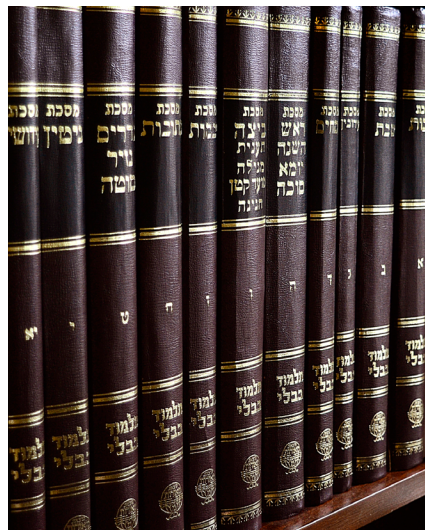
The Ksav Sofer adds another dimension to this lesson. The *pasuk* continues by saying כי בעצם היום הזה הוצאתי את צבאותיכם ממצרים - "For on this very day I took you out of *Mitzrayim*." The Midrash famously states that as a result of living in the decadent Egyptian culture for so many years, the Jewish people suffered a tremendous spiritual decline. So severe was this decline, that had the Almighty delayed their redemption even just a short while longer, there would have not been anyone to redeem, for they would have sunken so low and become so thoroughly immersed in the Egyptian lifestyle and value system to the point of no return.

This, explains the Ksav Sofer, is part of what the *pasuk* is trying to convey - the importance of a single moment. Anytime we have a mitzvah to perform, the *Yetzer Harah* (Evil Inclination) endeavors to mix in and stop us from what we need to do by pushing us off until our enthusiasm dies down, the mitzvah turns sour, and we lose the opportunity to properly fulfill it. We, on the other hand, cannot allow that to happen. We have to imagine at all times that if we don't grab the opportunity and immediately do what we should, the next second might be the point of no return for this particular mitzvah. This can be accomplished by recalling what happened in *Mitzrayim*. If we remember how close we were to losing everything and never meriting a *Yitzias Mitzrayim* (an exodus from Egypt) and a *Kabalas HaTorah* (receiving of the Torah), we will be inspired to grab every mitzvah and not allow the point of no return to arrive

for even one of Hashem's commandments. Grab the moment!

The *sefer Otzros HaTorah* tells of the gaon Rav Reuven Bengis, a great Yerushalmi Rav in the early 1900's, who learned through the entire Babylonian Talmud no less than one hundred and one times in his lifetime. To celebrate a *Siyum HaShas* was obviously not a rare occurrence for him. Yet one time he celebrated the event in a more grand manner than usual. When questioned about this, he explained that this *siyum* was indeed unique, for all the learning for this *siyum* was done on "stolen" time. That is, aside from his regular learning regimen, Rav Bengis was careful to learn in any spare moment, such as when waiting for a bus or at a doctor's appointment or the like. Utilizing all those otherwise wasted moments, he managed to complete the entire *shas* an additional time!

This year as we prepare to fulfill the mitzvah of matza, let's try to internalize the lesson of ושמרתם את המצות and learn to value our time more, to derive the greatest benefit from it that we possibly can. Hopefully by doing so we will enrich our days and years with significant spiritual growth. ■



An Iron Crucible

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IRON OR GOLD?

In *Parshas Vaeschanan*, Moshe Rabeinu refers to Hashem taking the Jews out of Egypt as being taken from the כּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל, which most translations render as an iron furnace or crucible.

כּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל does not mean a crucible made of iron, since crucibles were typically made of clay (see *Rashi* and *Radak* to *Melachim I* 8:51). The Rambam (*Perush HaMishnah, Keilim* 8:9) explains that it refers to a crucible used to melt iron. *R. Yonah ibn Janah* notes that iron requires much higher melting temperatures than gold or silver, and Moshe therefore uses the image of an iron crucible specifically as an analogy for the intense suffering that the Jews were subjected to in Egypt (*Sefer HaShorashim*).

However, *Rashi* quotes the word כּוּר and explains that כּוּר is something used to refine gold! His approach may be based on the *pasuk* (*Mishlei* 17:3; 27:21) מְצַרְף לְקֶסֶף וְכוּר כּוּר, which implies that a כּוּר is unique to gold¹. Why then does the *pasuk* refer to it as a כּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל, a crucible of iron?

The *Radak* explains (*Melachim I*, 8:51) that the word ברזל is employed here to describe the intensity of the refining process. He may be suggesting that the word ברזל, iron, functions as a metaphor for strength

or hardness, and this is the approach adopted by the *Malbim* (*Yirmiyahu* 11:4). However, this remains somewhat puzzling, as one would expect *Rashi* to comment here on the word ברזל and explain that it means 'hard' or 'strong'.

Perhaps, according to *Rashi*, ברזל does indeed mean iron, and כּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל is translated as if to say: "Imagine a crucible capable of withstanding the heat needed to refine iron" - that would be a fitting metaphor for the suffering of the Jews in Egypt. This may be why *Rashi* quotes only the word כּוּר from the *pasuk*, explaining that it is a crucible used for gold, and leaving us to infer that when the *pasuk* speaks of a כּוּר הַבְּרֹזֶל, a crucible used for iron, it is using an exaggerated figure of speech to emphasize the severity of the suffering.

SUFFERING OR REFINING?

On a basic level, Moshe is describing the extreme hardship of the slavery in Egypt comparing it to being in a furnace (*Metzudos to Melachim I* 8:51). *Rabbi Akiva* interprets it as a reference to the Egyptians using Jewish children as human sacrifices (*Yalkut Shimoni*). *Midrash Lekach Tov* understands it as alluding to the hot climate of Egypt.

On a deeper level, the analogy to a

1 ראה פרש"י למש"י שם. ולהעיר מיוחזקאל כב, כ: 'קבצת כסף ונחשת וברזל ועופרת ובדיל אל תוך כור לפחת עליו אש להנתיך כן אקבין באפי ובהמתי ונהחתי והחכתי אתכם', ולפנ"ר משמע דכל מיני מתכות מכניסים לתוך הכור. אך באמת גם שם (פסוק יח) נקט רש"י 'כור', שצורפין בו זהב'. ונראה מהמשך דבריו שם שכאשר הזהב מעורב במינים אחרים, מכניסים את הכל לתוך הכור כדי לברר את הזהב מתוכם. ולהעיר גם מפרש"י (ישעיהו מח, י) כור הוא כלי שמתוכו בן כסף וזהב. (וראה מה שהציע המלבי"ם (משלי כ"ז:כ"א) לבאר בזה: "מצרף לכסף וכור לזהב ואיש לפי מהללו - הכסף צורפים במצרף, והזהב שהוא יקר מן הכסף טובו ממנו צריך כור לצרפו, שהכור אשן גדול יותר מן המצרף, כי לא יותר ולא יסירו הסיגים ממנו בקל כמו הכסף, וגם לפי יקרו מקפידים יותר שיהיה מצורף מכל סיג").

crucible suggests that the slavery and suffering the Jews endured in Egypt served to refine them, like a crucible purifies metal by removing its impurities and dross (see for example Alshich, beginning of *Shemos*. Or *Hachaim Shemos* 1:12).

In reference to גלות אדום, the current *galus*, the Prophet Yeshaya says (48:10) בְּתַרְתִּיד בְּכּוֹר עָנִי, I have chosen for you the crucible of poverty / affliction (*Torah Or Shemos* 49b²). The pressure to 'cover the bills,' the all-encompassing burden of our responsibilities and the distractions we constantly encounter can, at times, feel like a slave-master, dictating how we behave, what we do, and when and how we do it, leaving us with little freedom or agency to make our own choices.

Just as the bondage of *Mitzrayim* prepared the Jewish people for the revelation of *Matan Torah*, so too the

hardships of our current *galus* ready us for the great revelation of the days of *Mashiach*. In Egypt, the people were refined through the crushing burden of physical labor; in our time, we are refined through the unrelenting challenges of daily life (*Torah Or Yisro* 74b).

וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֹר רוּחַ וּמַעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה (*Va'era* 6:9). The Torah tells us that the difficult conditions in Egypt prevented the Jewish people from being receptive to Moshe's words. Likewise, our own struggles can make it hard for the Torah's teachings to penetrate our minds and hearts. But when we push ourselves to overcome distractions and stay focused on learning Torah, the challenges themselves become a source of refinement, that deepen our connection with Hashem (based on מאמר ד"ה ויאמר ה' מי) *Sefer Hama'amarim* 5658 pg. 80). ■



Children at the Seder

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It is astonishing how much emphasis is put on children's involvement in the Pesach Seder. Not every Seder has children present but with respect to those Sedarim where children can and should attend, they play an oversized role. They must be present and alert and they must be coaxed, cajoled and stimulated to ask questions.

This is sourced in the Torah itself and amplified by the *Gemora*. The Torah tells us “*V’higadta Lvincha Bayom Hahu*”; “and you should tell your son on that day” (*Shemos* 13:8). Also, “*V’haya Ki Yishalcha Vincha Machar Laimor*” and “it will be when your son asks you tomorrow” (*Shemos* 13:14). The *Gemora* in *Pesachim* 109a relates the importance of ensuring one's children are well rested on *Erev* Pesach to ensure they are awake and able to participate in the Seder to ask questions.

This dedication to the education of the next generation is a direct response to the schemes of Pharaoh who made every effort to rob us of the children who are our future by attempting to murder newborns, throw

them into the river and build them into the walls of *Pisom* and *Raamses*. In addition, Pharaoh interfered with the family life of the Jewish people, and at the very end tried to keep the children from going with the adults out of Egypt to serve Hashem (*Artscroll Haggadah* by Rabbi Joseph Elias p. 82). Pharaoh, like so many of our enemies, understood the power of continuity and it is that continuity we stress on Seder night by passing on our sacred legacy to our children.

It is interesting to note that at the Seder many different tactics are done to engage the children and stimulate their curious questions beyond just the classic four questions of the *ma nishtanah*. What is the true *mitzvas halaila* to elicit questions from children?

R' Chaim Soleveitchik, based on the Rambam, suggests that the main mitvah is that they should ask “why is this night different” about unusual things (*shinuyim*) we do on Seder night, not just the unusual things mentioned in the “four questions.” That explains why *Chazal* instituted additional unusual practices at the Seder, such as removing the table or Seder plate and giving children *klayos v'egozim* (roasted grain and nuts - olden day “candy”) that they enjoyed which the Rambam (*Chametz U'matza* 7:3) states are *shinuyim* to be done at the start of the Seder.

This understanding of the mitvah is clear from the Rambam in *Hilchos Chametz U'matza* 8:2 who says, “we remove the table from the Haggadah reader (Seder leader), then pour the second cup; here the son asks



and the reader says the *ma nishtanah*.” The son is to ask. What is he to ask? Not the *ma nishtanah* since the Rambam says the reader says that! The answer is that the son should ask about any of the *shinuyim* he already saw - the giving out of “candy” not normally done before a meal, the removal of the table, the leaning after the first cup of wine, the dipping of *karpas*, etc. - why is this night different?! That is the goal of all these *shinuyim*! Then the reader reiterates, “*ma nishtanah* - why indeed is this night different” to establish the Haggadah in a format of questions and answers.

The *sefer Derech Pekudecha* echoes this idea in saying that it is a mitvah to do, “*dvarim masmihim sheyitameh haben v’yishal*” - “things that are wondrous so the child will be in wonder and ask...” Then the author adds a beautiful thought: The *pasuk* states, “*V’haya ki yishal bincha...*” Why does the *pasuk* start off with the word “*V’haya*” - “and it will be”? He answers that the word “*V’haya*” is an expression of *simcha* (see the *Or HaChaim* regarding *bikurim* in the

beginning of *Parshas Ki Savo*). The child’s asking should be done in a way that is most effective and brings *simcha* to Hashem. That happens best when the child identifies a problem on his own, seeks a resolution and then understands it. That’s how it becomes established in his heart and ingrained in his essence, much more than when it is lectured to him.

More importantly, this method of learning brings *simcha* to the inquiring child. And children who feel happy and fulfilled in their *derech* of Torah learning and mitvah observance are successful children who will love *Yiddishkeit* and bring *simcha* to their parents and their Creator. This happiness and fulfillment is critical to the transmission of the *mesorah* because in due time that starry-eyed, inquisitive and happy child sitting at the end of the table will swivel his chair around and become the patriarch of his family Seder, excited and equipped to fulfill the mitvah of *V’higadta Lvincha* to the next generation in the same pedagogic format that inspired him. ■



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RAV YONA REISS

Seize the Moment!

RABBI EPHRAIM FRIEDMAN

An Iron Crucible

RABBI ELIYAHU RAPOPORT

Children at the Seder

RABBI SHMUEL L. SCHUMAN



Chicago Rabbinical Council

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו