

In the current issue of the Jewish Week, Yedidya Gorsetman and Gary Rosenblatt report on both the profound admiration many of Rav Aharon Bina's alumni feel toward him, and the persistent allegations by some of his alumni that they experienced his behavior toward them as emotionally abusive. The Modern Orthodox community owes Mr. Gorsetman, Mr. Rosenblatt, and the Jewish Week tremendous gratitude for their courage in publishing this. While the article raises many issues of educational philosophy and judgment about which reasonable halakhic people may disagree, there can be no doubt that it conveys information that the public has a right and even obligation to know. How can anyone argue that educational institutions should not be accountable for their educational failures, or that parents should not know the risks involved in sending their children to specific institutions? There is no issue of lashon hora here – rather, the question is whether those of us, myself included, who knew these stories for years and didn't publish were in violation of halakhah, perhaps under "Do not stand idly by your neighbor's blood", perhaps under other rubrics.

I hope to address many of the properly controversial issues next week, but thought myself obligated to make this statement of support immediately. Here, though, are some very preliminary perhaps tangential musings in the guise of a fragment of a dvar Torah.

The haggadah famously sees the Rabbis as seeing the Torah as addressing four sons, of whom the youngest "does not know how to ask". There is a rich interpretational history regarding the identities of the other three sons, and of which verse is associated with which son. Rashi to Shemot 13:5-8 claims that both the wicked and the "does not know how to ask" are addressed in the verse. The wicked son is addressed by the statement "for the sake of this G-d acted on my behalf in Egypt" - on my (righteous) behalf, and not on your (wicked) behalf. The "doesn't know how to ask" is implied rather than outright mentioned, as seems appropriate. 13:8 is not preceded by a question; the command "and you must tell this over to your son" appears without preamble, from which we conclude that the son is unable to ask.

The problem with this reading is that it ends up with the wicked and not-asking sons receiving the same answer. Rashi therefore concludes that the response to the not-asker is also implied rather than stated: "*vehagadta lebincha*" means that you should open him up via *words of aggada* that attract the heart.

This is the rare comment of Rashi that seems to me obvious eisegesis, as I'm not convinced the Biblical "*vehigadta*" has an essential semantic relationship with the Rabbinic "*aggada*", and therefore Rashi here should be evaluated in terms of educational philosophy rather than as Biblical interpretation. The claim here is that the best way to approach those who don't know how to ask is via *aggada*, which attracts the heart.

Now this does not seem to me a claim about how best to educate young children, but rather ignorant adults. In that sense it may seem trivial – of course the best way to reach the ignorant is to teach them something attractive. Note that Rashi in at least two other places warns against being too caught up in addictively pleasant Torah – on Berakhot 28b he understands the caution against *higayon* as referring to Tanakh study "that attracts", and on Shabbat 115a he explains that study of *Ketuvim* on Shabbat distracts laymen from the public halakhic lecture, which is better for them. So the purpose of *aggada*

here is to open up the ignorant until they can ask questions, at which point one begins to teach them halakhah instead, such as the laws of the afikomen.

The initial educational goal, then, is to engage students' interest to the point that they have questions. When that point is reached, however, is the point to get them to ask more questions, or rather to give them answers? And is it clear that, once the students are opened up, that their questions will be good and wise, rather than wicked?

The response to the wicked son is direct and harsh, and yet I tend to assume, I think most of us would, that its purpose is to force him to ask questions of himself – whether he really wants to be the kind of person whom G-d would not redeem, or differently, whom his own parents would see as unworthy of redemption. When is this educational technique effective? And by wicked, do we refer to an overall evaluation of the person, or to any aspect of personality that is under the sway of the yetzer hara? Does Rav Moshe's radical claim that we are all tinokot shenishbu, infants raised in an alien culture, and therefore in a sense not fully responsible for at least some of our sins, mean that we cannot be truly wicked for these purposes?

I welcome your input in advance of what I hope will be a more extended response next week.

Shabbat shalom!

Aryeh Klapper

רש"י שמות פרק יג פסוק ה

את העבדה הזאת - של פסח. והלא כבר נאמר למעלה (יב כה) והיה כי תבואו אל הארץ וגו', ולמה חזר ושנאה, בשביל דבר שנתחדש בה. בפרשה ראשונה נאמר (שם כו) והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבודה הזאת לכם, בן רשע הכתוב מדבר שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל, וכאן (פסוק ח) והגדת לבנך, בן שאינו יודע לשאול, והכתוב מלמדך שתפתח לו אתה בדברי אגדה המושכין את הלב:

רש"י שמות פרק יג פסוק ח

בעבור זה - בעבור שאקיים מצותיו, כגון פסח מצה ומרור הללו:
עשה ה' לי - רמז תשובה לבן רשע לומר, עשה ה' לי ולא לך, שאלו היית שם לא היית כדאי ליגאל: