

Children

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

In talking about the Exodus this week, children play a central role. On the one hand the first born of Egypt are condemned because of their parents' actions, something that is unfair legally and contradicts Biblical law where one can only be punished for one's own actions. But in terms of history we are all the products of our homes one way or another, for better or for worse.

The other feature of the Torah this week is that three times it says either "When your children ask you" "And you shall explain to your children" and you shall "Engage with your children." It is all to do with education, with passing on a tradition but doing it by being involved. On Passover in the Hagadah, there are four different types of children, good, intelligent, apathetic and inexperienced who all need engaging with differently, to each according to his or her capacity. That is a sign of good and caring parents.

We tell the history of the Exodus, just as nowadays we tell the story of how we moved from one world and culture to another. So we tell. That's pure history. But history, important as it is, is in the past. What parents need to do, is to give their children ways of living their lives in the future. The most powerful way of transmitting value, religion, culture is in the present, if the parents are not just telling how it used to be, but living it in their lives now. That is good education. It is concerned with transmitting values and the best way to do that is by example.

Our children pick up very quickly what our priorities are and if we do some things halfheartedly or without involvement they soon pick up this message and do the same. Pharaoh's children learned the dismissive condescending attitude to spirituality their parents exuded and they paid the price. The model the Torah gives us is of homes in which parents are involved, talking, discussing with their children and living a Jewish way of life with them. That is why our tradition has survived.