

# Why?

How do you pass on any tradition, specifically Judaism to the next generation? This week's reading from the Torah puts it in a nutshell. As the Children of Israel are about to leave Egypt they are commanded to respond to their children's thirst to know "why." Why should we be different? The answer is our history, our heritage, our spirituality and commitment to our value system. But how do we pass this on?

"When your children ask you" is the obvious command not just to educate but to engage with one's children on matters of Jewish identity. Without knowing why one is different one will inevitably resent what it is that sets one apart. But simply telling, commanding, is not enough. Actions speak louder than words.

"You must make it a sign" is the second element. Without signs we do not know where to go. Without symbols, rituals and actions all one has is vague sentimentality, slogans that can be blown away at the first sign of difficulty or temptation.

The emphasis in the Torah is on doing specifically Jewish things; Jewish actions and Jewish rituals. Actions are how we show what really matters to us. This is the equally essential way of reinforcing values and loyalty.