

**Z-mail Parshas Vayikra**

**Rabbi Dovid Zauderer**

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## **IS JUDAISM FOR KIDS?**

*At the Henry Street Hebrew School, Mr. Goldblatt, the new teacher, finished the day's lesson. It was now time for the usual question period. "Mr. Goldblatt," announced little Joey, "there's somethin' I can't figger out." "What's that, Joey?" asked Goldblatt. "Well, accordin' to the Bible, the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, right?" "Right." "An' the Children of Israel beat up the Philistines, right?" "Er ... right." "An' the Children of Israel built the Temple, right?" "Again you're right." "An' the Children of Israel fought the 'gyptians, an' the Children of Israel fought the Romans, an' the Children of Israel wuz always doin' somethin' important, right?" "All that is right, too," agreed Goldblatt, "So, what's your question?" "What I wanna know is this," demanded Joey. "What wuz all the grown-ups doin'?"*

This might be a cute joke, but for many Jews today, the reality is that the Jewish rituals that they practice are most often done just for the "Children of Israel" - but not for the adults themselves. So, for example, when the Torah, a few portions ago, commands the Jewish people: *"V'Shamru B'nei Yisrael es HaShabbos ... The Children of Israel shall observe the Sabbath ..."* (see Exodus 31:16), those parents who opt to do the Friday Night Shabbos meal with their families will often be doing it "for the kids".

But is Judaism really just for *kids*? What of all the spiritual depth and incredible wisdom that is contained in the Torah – shedding light and giving meaning to all the many rituals and Jewish holidays that Judaism asks us to perform – not to mention the even deeper mystical secrets of the Kabbalah? That can't all be just for the kids. They could hardly understand any of it!

No, Judaism (*unlike* Trix cereal) is not just for kids – it is primarily for Jewish *adults* (over Bar/Bas Mitzvah age) to learn about, thus deepening their understanding of all that the Torah has to offer. But we often make the critical mistake of thinking that the Torah and the commandments are there for our *children* to learn about and do – thereby assuring that our *own* Judaism will always be kept on a juvenile level that our kids can appreciate – with the inevitable result that we miss out on all its inherent depth and wisdom.

*The holy Chassidic Rebbi, Rabbi Bunim of Peshis'cha, once lamented, "I see a person so totally engaged in earning a livelihood that he has little time to devote to his spiritual development. I ask him why he does not devote more time to spiritual pursuits. He says, 'I wish I could, Rabbi. You see, I could get along with much lesser earnings. However, I must provide for my children, and that consumes virtually all my time and energy.'*

*"I understand that. However, when these children grow up, they undoubtedly will do the exact same thing. When asked why they neglect their spiritual development, they give the same answer: They must provide for their children. This is repeated generation after generation. Is there really an ultimate child who is the recipient of all the exertion of countless generations before him?"*

We need to break this vicious cycle *right now* and start learning about and doing Judaism for the people it was primarily geared to ... *ourselves*. This way we will deepen our own understanding of all the Jewish rituals and holidays that we practice, and we will then be able to give that Judaism over to our kids in a much deeper and more meaningful way. [Outside of all the amazing Jewish-content websites you adults can learn from such as *aish.com* and *torah.org* etc., one book I *highly* recommend that will greatly enhance your adult understanding of everything Jewish is *Gateway to*

*Judaism: The What, How, and Why of Jewish Life* by Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Mesorah Publications].

I should add, though, that there is one Jewish holiday on the calendar that truly is geared to the kids ... and that is the upcoming holiday of Passover. As the Torah tells us, “*And you should tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of this that G-d acted on my behalf when I left Egypt’*” (see Exodus 13:8). The Torah thus obligates the Jewish parent to relate the story of the Exodus and to declare to his children that the nation was redeemed only *because of this*, i.e. the commandments of Passover, which are defined in the *Haggadah* as the *matzah* and *maror*. The implication is that the Jewish people owe their existence purely to their allegiance to G-d’s commandments.

And this is why it is critical that every single Jew – *even the youngest child* – be present at the Passover Seder each year to hear the retelling of the foundation story of the Jewish people and the ultimate purpose for which we were redeemed – to bring G-d’s Torah and ethical monotheism to the world through the performance of the commandments and through leading a holy and moral life.

I would like to conclude with a fascinating insight from Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair (on the *Ohr Somayach* website) into the *mitzvah* that we parents have on Passover night to retell the story of the Exodus to our children every year – *even though the events are claimed to have occurred over 3300 years ago!*:

When we think about the vista of Jewish History it seems like an impossibly large canvas for us to relate to. It seems so remote. The events seem so distant from us. But we *can* relate to Jewish History in a way which makes it very real. We *can* connect to our heritage without feeling that it's obscured by the mists of time. *How? Watch!*

Take the average Passover Seder. At a typical Seder there will be three generations at the table: A grandfather, a father, and a son. Let's say that the average generation gap is 30 years. So a typical Seder represents a span of 60 years of Jewish History (3 generations = 2 X 30 years = 60 years). But really if you think about it, there are not 3 generations at the table, but 7. Because the grandfather sitting at our table was possibly a grandson at *his* grandfather's Seder. And similarly, our grandson will probably be a grandfather at *his* grandson's Seder. *So one Passover Seder could contain in it as much as  $7 \times 30 = 210$  years!*

If you divide 210 years into the time elapsed since the first Seder (approx. 3300 years ago), you come out with the following calculation:  **$3,300 \div 210 \sim 14$** .

In other words, we just shrank the vast expanse of 3300 years of history into just over 14 Seders. That's all that separates us from the experience of leaving Egypt - as little as *14 Seders!*

“*And you shall tell your son on that day ...*” The whole of Judaism is founded on 14 fathers *passing-over* the truth of the Exodus to 14 children, witnessed by those 7 generations which each Seder spans. Tradition is only 14 Seders long!

**GOOD SHABBOS!**

[Ed. Note: The math seems a little bit off, but the point is well taken just the same -dz]