

As stated above, the word Tam can mean complete. Usually the text is translated as the simple son. I believe this is because the son asks a very simple question. Unlike the scholarly son, this son is not asking about details and specifics, he wants to know everything he can about what he is already doing.

One can learn a lot from looking at the illustrations of the four sons found in different Hagaddot editions. One of my favorite representations of the tam is that of a couch potato. This is the general image that using simple brings. The problem is that this son is probably just as observant as his scholarly brother, he just needs to be educated as to why we do what we do. I like complete as the definition because as a complete person he not only lives his life with Jewish observance, he does so proudly and willingly. The complete son is probably the son that best describes most of us. We often do what we do without thinking about why we do it. The complete son teaches us that we must always strive to educate ourselves and our children.

Perhaps it is for this paragraph that we have recited everything that has come before. It is clear that teaching your children is the most important part of the Pesah Seder, and here is where we get the specific obligation to teach our children. The text states that you should “open up for him.” Not only are you going to tell the story, but you are going to open up the whole of Judaism for your child. The Pesah story is only the beginning.

As I have stated before the Rabbis often looked at the Seder as a time to enjoy their studies. Here is an example of taking a verse and delving into it as far as one can. It is obvious that the command to tell your child the story of Pesah should apply on Pesah. However, the command was given to Moses on Rosh Hodesh Nisan. So perhaps we should begin on Rosh Hodesh. To make it clear, the Rabbis argue that since the verse states “on that day,” it refers to the actual day that God took the people out from Egypt. Then they even take it further. “That day” can refer to the day-time as well as the night. If the verse states “this is for,” then there must be a “this” in front of you that you can point to. “This” refers to the Matza and the Maror and that is only at night.

This brings us to the end of this section in the Hagaddah. We have learned that we begin with degradation and end with praise. Earlier we saw Shmuel’s understanding of this in that we were slaves in Egypt. Rav’s understanding is that we begin with that our ancestors were idol worshippers. That is what we are coming to now. On a simple level, the four sons serves as a break between these two sections of the Hagaddah. But there are many things that we can learn from the four sons. Most importantly, perhaps there is a bit of each of the children in all of us. We need to nurture the scholar in us, subdue the sinfulness in us, continue on the path of completeness and finally we need to learn how to ask the right questions.

The complete son, what does he say? What is this? And you should say to him, with a strong hand God took us out from Egypt from the house of slaves.

תָּם מַה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה זֵאת? וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו: בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצֵאתָנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים:

And the child who does not know how to ask, you open up for him as it is said, “You shall tell your child on that day saying this is for what God did for me when I left Egypt.”

וְשִׂאֵינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאוֹל, אֶתְּ פֶתַח לוֹ. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בְּיוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בְּעִבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ לִי, בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:

You might think that this obligation would begin on Rosh Hodesh. The verse states “on that day.” You might think that it begins during the day. The verse states “this is for what God did for me...” “This is for...” can only refer to a time when Matza and Maror is before me.

יְכוּל מְרֵאשׁ חֲדָשׁ, תִּלְמוּד לוֹמַר בְּיוֹם הַהוּא. אֵי בְיוֹם הַהוּא. יְכוּל מִבְּעוֹד יוֹם. תִּלְמוּד לוֹמַר. בְּעִבוּר זֶה. בְּעִבוּר זֶה לֹא אָמַרְתִּי, אֶלָּא בְּשַׁעַה שֵׁישׁ מִצָּה וּמְרוֹר מִנְחִים לִפְנֵיךָ: