

## ⌘ 13. The Four Sons: A Miniature *Maggid* ⌘

The section of the Haggadah commonly known in English as *The Four Sons* is likely the best-known passage of rabbinic biblical exegesis. It famously contrasts four Torah passages associated with recalling the Exodus<sup>1</sup>, framed as a guide for parents to respond to four archetypal children at the Seder. But it isn't only about personality and pedagogy: The Four Sons also functions like a miniature *Maggid*, covering all the same bases as the instructions for Maggid found in Mishnah Pesachim 10. Those instructions are in turn extrapolated from the verse that is the source of the mitzvah, Exodus 13:8: ***Tell your child... on that day... saying... for this... God did for me... as I went out of Egypt.*** Thus, The Four Sons may be considered an early (perhaps the earliest) complete version of Maggid, predating written Haggadahs by centuries.

### 1. The Mishnah's Blueprint for Maggid—Exodus 13:8

To make the case that The Four Sons is a miniature *Maggid*, we should recall the program for Maggid laid out by the Mishnah (see chapter 5). More than one author has noted the correspondence between the parts of Maggid and the order of phrases in Ex. 13:8<sup>2</sup>. The bridge that explains this correspondence is the set of instructions in *Pesachim* 10. The Haggadah was built up from those brief instructions, and the instructions themselves are a phrase-by-phrase exposition of Ex. 13:8. From the twelve words of that verse, the Mishnah wrested three complete and independent approaches to recounting the Exodus story, and each of those evolved into one of the major sections of the Haggadah, i.e., 1) the Avadim Hayinu / Four Sons section, 2) the exposition of the declaration of the first fruits, *Mikra bikkurim*, and 3) the section of Rabban Gamliel. To better understand how Ex. 13:8 translates into a full Maggid program, we will first break down the verse as the Mishnah and Haggadah read it before returning to The Four Sons.

#### 1.1. תְּהַגִּיד לְבִנְךָ Tell Your Child

The extrapolation of the opening phrase of Ex. 13:8, *tell your child*, into the initial instruction of the Mishnah, *according to the child's understanding, his father teaches him*, is straightforward. The exposition stresses the specificity of *your child* and the flexibility it extends to tailor Maggid to each child's disposition. Given the open-endedness of this assignment, the earliest written Haggadahs, preserved in Cairo Genizah manuscripts, simply included the Mishnah's instruction, *according to the child's understanding* etc. without elaboration. The ancient traditional opening line of Maggid, *Avadim Hayinu, We were slaves*, appears to suggest improvisation by

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 13:8, 12:26-27, 13:14-15, and Deuteronomy 6:20-23.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Naftali Maskil LeAison, מאמר יסוד מוסד והוא הצעה כוללת לסדר ההגדה מן עבדים היינו עד גאל ישראל (Minsk, 1894).

mixing together biblical verses. And the comparison of verses framed as children in The Four Sons also embodies this interpretation of *tell your child*. As the Maggid section of the written Haggadah evolved from a bare-bones guide into a more elaborated fixed text, versions of *Avadim Hayinu* and The Four Sons were included in the Haggadah in place of the Mishnah's instruction, *according to the child's understanding, his father teaches him*.

### 1.2. **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא** Expound *Mikra Bikkurim*

The Mishnah's second approach to Maggid—and *he expounds from Arami Oved Avi* (Deut. 26:5)—is suggested by the language of Ex. 13:8, *tell...on that day, saying*. The initial verses of Deut. 26:1-11 describe the obligation of farmers in the Holy Land to bring their *bikkurim*, first fruits, to the Temple and make a public declaration called *mikra bikkurim*. This declaration includes a five-verse synopsis of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the farmer's obligation parallels the obligation on Seder night, except that *mikra bikkurim* employs a prescribed text. The language of Ex. 13:8, **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר... וְהִגַּדְתָּ**, *tell...on that day, saying* also mirrors the language of the introductory verse of *mikra bikkurim* in Deut. 26:3: **וּבָאתָ אֶל הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו הִגַּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם**. *And go to the priest who shall be in those days and say to him, I will tell on this day...* Therefore, the phrase *tell... on that day* in Ex. 13:8 is a textual hook for the Mishnah's second approach, expounding *mikra bikkurim*.

### 1.3. **בְּעֵבֹר זֶה** Seder Plate Symbols

The Mishnah's third approach to Maggid, attributed to Rabban Gamliel, is inferred from the clause, *for this* in Ex. 13:8, i.e., *tell your child on that day, saying, for this God did for me*. The exposition understands *this* as referring to the three symbolic mitzvot of the Seder—the Pesach offering, the matzah and the maror (bitter herbs). Each connotes a stage of the Exodus narrative via its etymology<sup>3</sup> and Rabban Gamliel asserted that one must reenact the story by mentioning the three symbols. The connection he made between *for this* and the three Seder *mitzvot* is also made by the Mechilta<sup>4</sup>. One exposition from the Mechilta declares: *for this God did for me as I went out of Egypt—so long as the body of the paschal offering remains*. Another exposition adds: *we learn, as it is stated, for this—in the hour that matzah and maror rest before you on the table*. These two statements define the timeframe of Maggid, from the introduction of the Seder plate symbols on Passover night until the end of the period of the offering's consumption. The latter explanation also became the last section of The Four Sons. But, importantly, while the Mechilta gleaned the when of Maggid from the phrase *for this*, Rabban Gamliel's third approach in the Mishnah also extracted the how.

<sup>3</sup> The connections between the bitter herb and enslavement, and the sacrifice and redemption are obvious from the verses cited by the Haggadah, Ex 1:14 & 12:27. Regarding the connection between the etymology of matzah and the ascent from Egypt referenced in Ex 12:39, 'uggot matzot' i.e. 'dried-out cakes' contains the etymology מִרְץ, "to squeeze dry" cf. Lev 1:15, 5:9, per Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah*, p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> DRY Pischa 17:19 & DRSBY 13:7. Mechilta D'Rabbi Yishmael is abbreviated DRY and Mechilta D'Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai is abbreviated DRSBY.

#### 1.4. לי בצאתי ממצרים Identify with the Exodus

The closing instruction for Maggid in the Mishnah is an exposition of the final three words of Ex. 13:8, for *me* as *I went out of Egypt*, emphasizing the personal imperative to identify with the Exodus: *In every generation, a person is required to see himself as if he went out of Egypt.*

#### Parallel sections of the verse, Mishnah & Haggadah

Exodus 13:8	Pesachim 10	Haggadah
וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ <i>Tell your child</i>	<i>According to the child's understanding, his father teaches him</i>	Avadim Hayinu / Four Sons
בְּיוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר <i>on that day saying</i>	<i>And he expounds from Arami Oved Ari (Deut. 26:5) etc.</i>	Exposition of Mikra bikkurim (Deut. 26:5-8)
בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה <i>for this</i>	<i>Rabban Gamliel etc.</i>	<i>Rabban Gamliel etc.</i>
עָשָׂה יי <i>God did</i>		
לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם <i>for me as I went out of Egypt</i>	<i>In every generation etc.</i>	<i>In every generation etc.</i>

#### 2. The Four Sons: Same Verse, Different Method

Ex. 13:8 is one of four passages in the Torah that command parents to inform their children about the Exodus. But unlike Ex. 13:8, the other three passages are initiated by children's questions. Mishnah Pesachim 10 addresses this in two ways: first, it prefaces its instructions for Maggid by saying *'here the son asks his father'* followed by a list of rhetorical questions. Modern editions of the Mishnah include four questions like our Haggadah (but not the same four questions). However, the original text of the Mishnah, and the earliest Haggadahs, included only three questions<sup>5</sup>, like the three question passages in the Torah. Second, the Mishnah expounds *your child* (Ex. 13:8) by specifying that *according to the child's understanding, his father teaches him*, apropos the diversity of the Torah's answers.

Like the Mishnah, The Four Sons expounds the phrases of Ex. 13:8. Each of these expositions can also be found *individually* in the Mechilta, collections of legal Midrash contemporaneous with the Mishnah. In addition, The Four Sons compares Ex. 13:8—the source of the mitzvah to recount the Exodus—with the three other segments that similarly describe parents speaking to children: Ex. 12:26-27, Ex. 13:14-15 and Deut. 6:20-25.

<sup>5</sup> As found in the Talmud Yerushalmi Pesachim, in the earliest extant copy of Bavli Pesachim, the Munich Codex Hebraica 95 (c. 1342), and early-medieval Haggadahs and Mishna MSS from the Cairo Geniza.

### 2.1. *Wicked*, the First Son

The striking contrast between the language in Ex. 12:26 and Ex. 13:8 is likely the original seed from which The Four Sons sprouted. These two verses are compared in two complementary passages in the Mechilta<sup>6</sup>. The first begins by commenting on the phrase **לכם** *to you* in Ex. 12:26:

והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם עתידין לומר לכם: מה העבודה הזאת לכם. זה בן רשע שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל, אף אתה הוציאו מן הכלל ואמור לו בעבור זה עשה ה' לי עשה ולא לך עשה

And it will be when your children will say to you in the future: “What is this service *to you*” (Ex. 12:26). This is a *Ben Rasha*, a wicked son, who excludes himself from the community. Therefore, you exclude him from the community and tell him: “For this, God did *for me*” (Ex. 13:8). For *me* he did it, not for *you*.

The second passage is nearly identical except that it begins from Ex. 13:8:

בעבור זה עשה יי לי למה נאמר לפי שהוא אומר: מה העבודה הזאת לכם אלא זה בן רשע הוא שהוציא את עצמו מן הכלל אם אמר מה העבודה הזאת לכם אמר לו בעבור זה עשה יי לי ולא לך אלו היית אתה שם לא היית נגאל

“Because of this, God did *for me*” (Ex. 13:8)—why does it say this? Because he says: “what is this service *to you*” (Ex. 12:26). This is a *Ben Rasha*, wicked son, who excludes himself from the community. If he says, “What is this service *to you*”, you reply to him: “For this, God did *for me*”, not for *you*. If you had been there, you would not have been redeemed.

This comparative exposition of two verses establishes the format for all of The Four Sons. It examines one of the *questions* from the four key passages (Ex. 12:26) and responds to it by expounding part of Ex. 13:8, thereby fulfilling one of the requirements of Maggid—in this case, personal identification with the Exodus per **לי** *God did for me*. The other three sections of The Four Sons framed as archetypal children follow this basic pattern. The characterization of the questioner in Ex. 12:26 as *wicked* also likely inspired the parallel treatment of the other three Torah passages.

<sup>6</sup> DRSBY 12:26 and DRY Pischa 17:20

## 2.2. *The One Who Does Not Know to Ask and the Obligation to Tell*

Another passage in the Mechilta<sup>7</sup> also begins with a rhetorical difficulty in one of the three question passages (Ex. 13:14) and answers it by expounding part of Ex. 13:8:

שנאמר והיה כי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר יכול אם שאלך אתה מגיד לו ואם לאו אי אתה מגיד  
לו ת"ל והגדת לבנך אעפ"י שלא שאלך

It says, “It will be when your child *asks* you in the future, saying” (Ex. 13:14)—one might have assumed one only tells him if he asks, therefore it says, “Tell your child” (Ex. 13:8), i.e., tell him even if he doesn’t ask you.

The exposition of *tell your child* relies on the contrast between Ex. 13:8, which is not preceded by a question, and the three other passages that are all preceded by questions, exemplified by Ex. 13:14. It is also repeated more succinctly later where the Mechilta expounds Ex. 13:8 alone: שאלך, והגדת לבנך אעפ"י שלא שאלך, “Tell your child”—*even if he doesn’t ask*<sup>8</sup>. In The Four Sons, this comment was inverted to create a second archetype, *the child who doesn’t know to ask*, which it assigns to Ex. 13:8 itself. Interestingly, whereas the exposition of The Four Sons focuses on *tell*, the exposition in Pesachim 10 is preceded by questions and focuses instead on *your child* by specifying the answer as *according to the child’s understanding*.

## 2.3 *From the Beginning of the Month Provides the When*

The fifth major section of The Four Sons, beginning **יכול מראש הדש**, is sometimes mistaken for a separate section of Maggid. It is also found as a stand-alone passage in the Mechilta<sup>9</sup>. It completes the exposition of Ex. 13:8 in The Four Sons by explaining both *on that day* and *for this* to specify the time for recounting the Exodus—Seder night, when matzah and maror are present. The version of this exposition in our Haggadah does not mention the Pesach offering because the phrase *on that day* is understood to mean on the day of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan when the Pesach is sacrificed. Thus, the Exodus is recounted when matzah and maror are present *in addition to* the sacrifice. However, it would not be incorrect to mention the Pesach when expounding *for this*, and some versions of the exposition do mention it.

<sup>7</sup> DRSBY 13:2

<sup>8</sup> DRSBY 13:7

<sup>9</sup> DRY Pischa 17:19

## Parallel sections of The Four Sons and Exodus 13:8 with their original sources

Exodus 13:8	Four Sons	Sources
וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ <i>Tell your child</i>	<i>The One Who Does Not Know to Ask</i>	Mechilta DRSBY 13:2 & 13:7
בְּיוֹם הַהוּא <i>on that day</i>	<i>It could be from the beginning of the month</i>	Mechilta DRY Pischa 17:19
לֵאמֹר <i>saying</i>		
בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה <i>for this</i>	<i>It could be from the beginning of the month</i>	Mechilta DRY Pischa 17:19
עָשָׂה יי <i>God did</i>		
לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם <i>for me as I went out of Egypt</i>	<i>The Wicked</i>	Mechilta DRSBY 12:26; Mechilta DRY Pischa 17:20

## 3. A Missing Link in the Development of The Four Sons

The provocative association of the question in Ex. 12:26 with a *wicked child*, and the comparisons made in the Mechilta, laid the groundwork for the depiction of all four Torah passages as four archetypal children. To understand how those sources were ultimately adapted and combined into a complete package, it is instructive to dissect a simpler version of The Four Sons preserved in the *Midrash Sechel Tov*<sup>10</sup>:

וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ. זהו שאינו יודע לשאול, שהרי כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, ולכל אחד ואחד  
נתנה תורה דרך להשיב לפי עניינו, שהרי העולם נברא בארבע מידות של בני אדם אחד חכם  
ואחד רשע, ואחד תם, ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול  
וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ. שומעני יתחיל מראש חודש להגיד לו הלכות הפסח, ת"ל ביום ההוא, אי ביום  
ההוא שומעני יתחיל מבעוד יום, ת"ל בעבור זה בשעה שמצה ומרור מונחים לפניך על  
שלחנך הגביהם ואמור לו בעבור זה  
עָשָׂה יי לי. למה נאמר, לפי שהוא אומר בן רשע מה העבודה הזאת לכם, ולפי שהוציא את  
עצמו מן הכלל שלא אמר לנו בידוע שכפר בעיקר, אף אתה הוציאהו מן הכלל, ואומר לו  
בעבור זה עשה יי לי ולא לך שאילו הייתה לשם לא הייתה נגאל אלא כבר היית מת בשלשת  
ימי אפילה

“Tell your child”—This is the one who does not know to ask. Because the Torah spoke of four children, and for each one, the Torah provided a way to answer

<sup>10</sup> Ex. 13:8. The parallel text in the *Midrash Lekach Tov* is also similar but may be more contaminated by the text of Maggid, e.g., it employs יכול מראש חודש rather than שומעני יתחיל מראש חודש per the Mechilta.

according to his inclination. For the world was created with four types of people, one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know to ask.

“*Tell your child*”—I would learn that one begins telling him about *hilbot ha-Pesach*, the laws of the Passover offering, from the first of the month. But the verse states *on that day*. If it is on that day, I would learn that one begins during the daytime. But the verse states *for this*, i.e., at the hour when matzah and maror are placed before you on your table. Lift them and say to him: “*For this*”.

“*The Lord did for me*”—Why does it say this? Because thus says the wicked child: “*what is this service to you?*” And since he excludes himself from the community because he did not say *to us* it is evident that he rejects basic religious principles. Therefore, you also exclude him from the community by saying “*For this the Lord did for me*”, but not for you. Because if you had been there, you would not have been redeemed, i.e., you would have already died during the three days of heavy darkness.

The *Midrash Sechel Tov* may have been compiled centuries after the completion of our contemporary Haggadah, but it is unlikely that the above version of The Four Sons stemmed from the Haggadah. The language of the *Midrash Sechel Tov* reflects the original passages in the Mechilta. It interprets the initial phrase of Ex. 13:8 according to the obsolete Seder program of discussing *hilbot ha-Pesach* (explained below) and it is generally improbable that a later editor would discard the sections of the Wise and Simple and reorganize the Haggadah’s well-known text in this way. Rather, the *Midrash Sechel Tov* appears to preserve a transitional version, a key steppingstone along the path of The Four Sons’ development.

Crucially, the version of the *Midrash Sechel Tov* confirms that the chassis hidden beneath The Four Sons’ four-way comparison is indeed a phrase-by-phrase exposition of Ex. 13:8. This is the context in which these segments are recorded, and they reiterate the Mechilta’s expositions of the phrases *tell your son*, *on that day*, *for this*, and *the Lord did for me* according to their order in the verse. It also introduces the system of the four archetypes primarily as support for inverting the exegesis of *tell your son* as an archetype (akin to the wicked son). This is an important step beyond the Mechilta’s simple instruction to the parent: *even if he doesn’t ask*. Notably, in this early version, the concept of the four types does not further specify the Wise and Simple sons. Thus, the association of those types with their corresponding Torah passages appears to have preceded their explicit incorporation into a four-part structure like the one we know today.

#### 4. Two Seder Programs: Law and Story

The verse Ex. 13:8, *Tell your child on that day etc.*, is the traditional source for the commandment of Maggid on Passover night. However, the content of the *telling* was not a settled matter in early sources. Indeed, two Seder programs—either conflicting or complimentary—are evident.

One was focused on a legal discussion of *hilchot ha-Pesach*, the laws of the Passover offering; the other focuses on recounting the Egyptian Exodus story, *sippur yetzaiat Mizrayim*.

#### 4.1 The Tosefta's Seder: A Night of *Hilchot ha-Pesach*

According to the Mishnah, *tell your child* certainly includes recounting the Exodus story, as evident in the instructions to expound *mikra bikkurim* and the extrapolation of *for this* to convey the story in the section of Rabban Gamliel. However, unlike Rabban Gamliel's employment of *for this*, the section of *It could be from the beginning of the month* in The Four Sons<sup>11</sup>, only understands *for this* as specifying *when* Maggid is accomplished, not its content. And the version preserved in *Midrash Sechel Tov* (Ex. 13:8) adds yet a further wrinkle:

*Tell your child*—I would understand that one should begin telling him about *hilchot ha-Pesach* from the first of the month, but the verse says *on that day*, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, according to this version (and perhaps the Mechilta as well), the subject of Ex. 13:8—and thus Maggid—is not the Exodus story, but *hilchot ha-Pesach*, the laws of Passover.

A well-known contrasting approach to the Mishnah's description of Maggid is found in the parallel section of the Tosefta:

המצה החזרת והחרוסת אע"פ שאין חרוסת מצוה רבי אליעזר ברבי צדוק אומר מצוה במקדש  
מביאין לפניו גופו של פסח  
אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן כגון אגוזים תמרים וקליות  
חייב אדם לעסוק בהלכות הפסח כל הלילה אפילו בינו לבין בנו אפילו בינו לבין עצמו  
אפילו בינו לבין תלמידו  
מעשה ברבן גמליאל וזקנים שהיו מסובין בבית ביתוס בן זונין בלוד והיו עסוקין בהלכות  
הפסח כל הלילה עד קרות הגבר הגביהו מלפניהם ונועדו והלכו להן לבית המדרש  
איזו היא ברכת הפסח ברוך אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לאכול הפסח

They brought the matzah, the *chazeres* (bitter herb) and the *charoset* even though *charoset* is not a mitzva. Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Tzadok says it is a mitzva. And in the Temple period, they brought before him the body of the Pesach offering.

We do not add *afikoman* after the Pesach, for example, nuts, dates or roasted wheat.

One is obligated to engage with *hilchot ha-Pesach*, the laws of the Pesach sacrifice, all night, even discussing it with his son, by himself, or with his students.

<sup>11</sup> And the stand-alone version of that exposition found in Mechilta DRY Pischa 17:19.

<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere the *Midrash Sechel Tov* on Ex 12:20 specifies that the subject of questions and answers at the Seder is the laws of Passover.

It happened that Rabban Gamliel and the Elders were dining in the house of Beitos ben Zunin in Lod, and they were engaged with the laws of the Pesach all night until the rooster crowed. They raised the covering of the window, convened, and went to the house of study.

What is the blessing on the Pesach sacrifice? Blessed... who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to eat the Pesach.

The Seder procedure in the Tosefta (Pesachim 10) makes no mention of the Exodus story. Instead, it instructs the father to discuss *hilchot ha-Pesach* with his son or others and reinforces this with an anecdote about the Sages. It is also notable that the key phrase, *we do not add afikoman after the Pesach* directly precedes this instruction, a juxtaposition that evokes The Four Sons' use of that phrase as a byword for initiating a broader legal discussion. The reference to the *afikoman* in the Haggadah's version of Four Sons seems enigmatic, but its purpose is clear from the version of the Mechilta<sup>13</sup>, i.e., *you open (a conversation) with him about the laws of Passover by saying to him, we do not add afikomen etc.*<sup>14</sup> The use of *we do not add afikoman after the Pesach* as a byword for the legal discussion may be understood as parallel to the establishment of *Avadim Hayinu* as a byword for the Exodus story. Both traditions likely predate the codification of the Mishnah (and Tosefta) by several centuries<sup>15</sup>.

## 4.2 The Wise Get the Law

The origins of The Four Sons' approach to the legal/narrative dichotomy may be preserved in another illuminating passage from the Mechilta<sup>16</sup>:

רבי אליעזר אומר מנין אתה אומר שאם היתה חבורה של חכמים או של תלמידי חכמים צריכין לעסק בהלכות הפסח עד חצות לכתך נאמר: מה העדת והחקים והמשפטים אשר צוה יי אלהינו אתכם

Rabbi Eliezer says: Whence does one derive that a company of the *chachamim* (wise) or *talmidei chachamim* (disciples of the wise) must occupy themselves with *hilchot ha-Pesach* until midnight? For it says: “*What are the testimonies and the decrees and the ordinances that the Lord our God commanded you?*” (Deut. 6:20)

As in the version of The Four Sons in our Haggadah, this teaching connects the study of *hilchot ha-Pesach* by the wise to the question/answer passage in Deut. 6. But unlike the other sources

<sup>13</sup> DRY Pischa 18:24

<sup>14</sup> The tradition of using *we do not add afikomen* as a standard opening to the Passover legal discussion may be because the *afikomen* (meaning dessert) is naturally interesting to children or because the meaning of the word *afikomen* itself was the subject to a well-known dispute affording opportunity for discussion.

<sup>15</sup> Guggenheimer, *The Scholar's Haggadah*, p. 256 & 271.

<sup>16</sup> DRY Pischa 18:25

for The Four Sons in the Mechilta, this statement of Rabbi Eliezer cannot stand alone; it necessarily presupposes a comparative framework like that of The Four Sons. Because, in its private context, Deut. 6:20 is not about Passover. Therefore, the connection made between that verse and Seder night depends upon the network of similarities between the four passages. So, in order to understand why each ‘Son’ gets his answer, we need to recognize their similarities and differences.

### 4.3 The Four Passages Head-to-Head

Below is an abridged comparison of the four passages cited by The Four Sons. **The key difference to focus on here is the language of their questions.**

	Ex. 12:26-27	Ex. 13:8-9	Ex. 13:14-16	Deut. 6:20-25
<b>Question</b>	What is this service to you?		what is this?	What are the testimonies, the decrees and the ordinances that the Lord our God commanded you?
	say to them	Tell your child on that day, saying	say to him	say to your child
<b>Answer</b>	It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt as he struck Egypt, and our households he saved	for this the Lord did for me as I left Egypt.	With the strength of his hand the Lord took us out of Egypt, house of slavery...	We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord took us out with a strong hand...

The most similar pair is Deut. 6:20-25 and Ex. 13:14-16. Their questions and answers are both essentially generic (unlike Ex. 12:26-27 which refers to the Passover offering), and they both provide fair synopses of the Exodus with initial sentences that read like mirror images. The unique feature of Deut. 6:20-25 that the Mechilta appears to focus on is the elaborateness of the question (distinguishing the querist as *wise*), and its focus on law. The passage from Deut. 6 also includes a section of its answer extolling the commandments using the phrases *all these ordinances* and *all these commandments* (Deut. 6:24-25). Thus, according to the exposition of the Mechilta—and in the Haggadah’s version of The Four Sons—the priority subject of the *wise* on Seder night is the law<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Note, however, that *Avadim Hayinu*, the traditional byword for initiating *sippur yetzivat Mitzrayim*, is also based on Deut. 6:21.

The Mishnah may also be understood as beginning Maggid with a legal discussion before moving on to the narrative. The rhetorical questions concern the laws and rituals of the Seder (matzah, dipping, roasted meat) and the line *according to the child's understanding, his father teaches him* may refer to a legal lesson rather than the Exodus story. That ambiguity in the Mishnah may even be intentional, mirroring the alternatives presented by The Four Sons. But whatever the Mishnah's original intent, the legal discussion has since been entirely eclipsed by the narrative program. In our modern Haggadah this is emphasized by the praise of elaborating on *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* and the anecdote about the Five Sages following the Four Questions<sup>18</sup>. That anecdote sharply contrasts with the Seder story about Rabban Gamliel and his comrades recounted in the Tosefta. In fact, nowadays virtually all that remains of the *hilchot ha-Pesach* program in the Haggadah are the Four Questions and the answer to the Wise son.

#### 4.4 The Four Sons Broadcasts Both Programs

Building upon the version preserved in *Midrash Sechel Tov*, the final steps in The Four Sons' development were the inclusion of the two sections citing Ex. 13:14 (Simple) and Deut. 6:20 (Wise), and reordering the segments according to the hierarchy of the archetypes rather than the order of the original verse, Ex. 13:8. Importantly for our thesis, the inclusion of these two sections also transforms The Four Sons into a complete version of Maggid, fulfilling the requirement of Ex. 13:8 according to both the *hilchot ha-Pesach* program (answer to the Wise) or the *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* program (answer to the Simple). Appropriate to a mini-Maggid, it also recounts the Exodus story in the briefest possible language—just seven words from Ex. 13:14. And by raising *hilchot ha-Pesach* it also conveniently fulfills Rabban Gamliel's dictum of mentioning all three Seder symbols. However, pulling everything together was not without complications.

#### 5. Difficulties and Remedies in Variants of The Four Sons

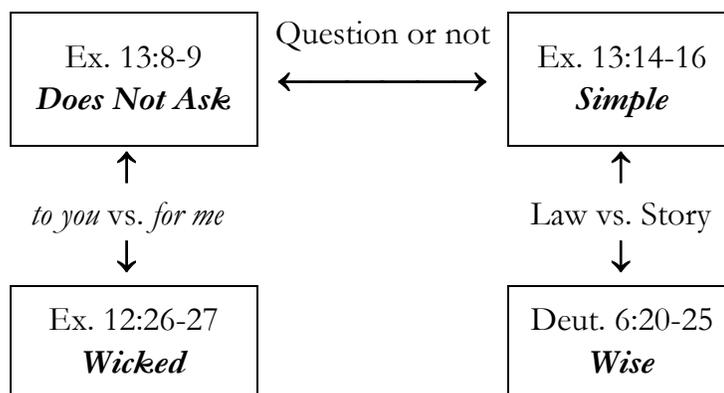
The introduction of Ex. 13:14 and Deut. 6:20 and the reordering of The Four Sons' segments left **יְכוּל מֵרֵאשִׁית חֹדֶשׁ** *It could be from the beginning of the month* as a conspicuous odd man out. It is therefore not surprising that extant variants of The Four Sons in the Mechilta and the Talmud Yerushalmi omit that section. Editors either lost track of its connection to the rest of the midrash, or they consciously chose to focus only on the 'sons' comparison. The Haggadah's composers evidently understood The Four Sons' dual structure, but that has not prevented later commentators, copyists and publishers, from mistaking its final segment for an

<sup>18</sup> The oldest formulations of the Haggadah, attested by Cairo Genizah MSS, do not include *Avadim Hayinu*, but simply quote the Mishnah's instruction *according to the child's understanding* etc., and thus retain this ambiguity. However, in a crucial Talmudic dispute that shaped the subsequent development of the Haggadah (Pesachim 116a), one opinion (Shmuel) connected the Mishnah's instruction *according to the child's understanding, his father teaches him* to the subsequent modifier *begin with disgrace and conclude with praise* and to the traditional byword *Avadim Hayinu*. Since *begin with disgrace and conclude with praise* is difficult to understand as applying to a discussion of *hilchot ha-Pesach*, the triumph of Shmuel's interpretation foreclosed any lingering ambiguity about the subject of *according to the child's understanding* etc. The dispute recorded in Pesachim 116a likely occurred many decades before the development of a written Haggadah.

independent chapter. That is despite the intervening shared citation of Ex. 13:8 that firmly locks the last two segments together.

### 5.1 Accidental Opposition: Wise vs. Wicked

The inclusion of the segments of the Wise and Simple also created at least two novel textual difficulties addressed in different ways by different versions. The first difficulty was the creation of an inadvertent comparison between Ex. 12:26 (Wicked) and Deut. 6:20 (Wise), the fourth edge of the square connecting the four Torah passages together:



The Mechilta's comparison between Ex. 13:8 vs. Ex. 12:26<sup>19</sup> effectively 'created' the *Wicked* and its comparison of Ex. 13:14 vs. Ex. 13:8<sup>20</sup> similarly created the *One who does not know to ask*. The comparison between Ex. 13:14 and Deut. 6:20<sup>21</sup> assigns the identities of the *Wise* and *Simple*. But the comparison between Ex. 12:26 (*Wicked*) and Deut. 6:20 (*Wise*) is not by design. Placing those two opposite each other creates unintended tensions. Commentators often point out one of them: why is the first son called *Wise* instead of 'Righteous' in contrast to the *Wicked*. A second difficulty is the language of Deut. 6:20, *God commanded you* (אתכם), which superficially appears to echo the term the *Wicked* is criticized for, *to you* (לכם), in Ex. 12:26.

Versions of The Four Sons handled this tension in different ways. The early *Midrash Sechel Tov* version does not quote Deut. 6:20 and therefore it can safely say: *he excludes himself because he did not say "to us"*. Texts found in the Mechilta<sup>22</sup> and in many Haggadahs from Medieval until recent times, paper over that problem by paraphrasing Deut. 6:20 as *God commanded us*. But most modern Haggadahs, and the majority of early-medieval manuscripts found in the Cairo Genizah, simply ignore the superficial contradiction and cite Deut. 6:20 correctly. The version in the Talmud Yerushalmi<sup>23</sup> takes more dramatic evasive action. It deemphasizes the original

<sup>19</sup> DRSBY 12:26 and DRY Pischa 17:20

<sup>20</sup> DRSBY 13:2

<sup>21</sup> DRY Pischa 18:25

<sup>22</sup> DRY Pischa 18:24

<sup>23</sup> Pesachim 10:4

comparison of *to you* and *to me* in the segment of the Wicked and trains its fire on a different word in Ex. 12:26: *What is this service to you: what is this labor you burden us with every year?* Thus, the Yerushalmi slid even further away from the original function of The Four Sons, the exposition Ex. 13:8.

## 5.2 Naming the Last Son

The second textual difficulty created by combining all five segments concerns the characterization of the questioner in Ex. 13:14. The versions of the Mechilta and the Yerushalmi refer to him with the pejorative טִיפֵשׁ *tipesesh*, *simpleton* or *fool*, while the Haggadah and *Midrash Sechel Tov* use the more ambiguous תָּם *tam*, meaning simple in the sense of *plain*, an adjective applied to the the Patriarch Jacob in Gen. 25:27. This child's original alias is unknown because the language of the *Midrash Sechel Tov* might have been amended to match the Haggadah and the contemporary text of the Mechilta might have been changed to reflect the Yerushalmi.

Based on its monosyllabic question, 'what's this?', it is easy to see how Ex. 13:14 earned the title 'simpleton'. But importantly, although it made an implicit comparison to the other verse, Rabbi Eliezer's exegesis of Deut. 6:20<sup>24</sup> did not explicitly mention Ex. 13:14 (Simple). Thus, when the Wise questioner from Deut. 6:20-25 was awarded the discussion of *hilkhot ha-Pesach*, the fourth archetype, Ex. 13:14-15 (Simple, the universal comparator) essentially received the story, *sippur yetziat mitzrayim*, by default. And because Ex. 13:14 is quoted without elaboration, the naming of the questioner in Ex 13:14 is the only exposition of that verse.

If the child in Ex 13:14 was originally considered a simpleton, this may have sounded too harsh once it was incorporated into a complete version of The Four Sons. After all, the wise questioner of Deut. 6:20 also receives the Exodus story as part of his answer in Deut. 6:21-23. A straightforward solution might have been to soften the contrast and rebrand Ex. 13:14 as the *Tam*, an *everyman*. This is especially appropriate in the context of our Haggadah where the *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* program firmly took charge. Alternatively, Ex. 13:14 may have begun as a *Tam* until he was rebranded a fool by the version of the Yerushalmi.

## 6. The Yerushalmi's Version Objects to the Haggadah's

Because the codification of the Talmud Yerushalmi likely preceded the written Haggadah by centuries, it is often assumed that the significantly different version of The Four Sons found in the Yerushalmi<sup>25</sup> is an antecedent of the version in the Haggadah. However, several features of the Yerushalmi's evidence that it is derivative and arranged in response to versions like the Haggadah's. The Yerushalmi diverges from the original sources in the Mechilta by omitting the final segment of יְכוּל מְרֹאשׁ הַדָּשׁ and by deemphasizing the original exegesis of *to you* in Ex.

<sup>24</sup> Mechilta DRY Pischa 18:24

<sup>25</sup> Pesachim 10:4

12:26.<sup>26</sup> But most importantly, the Yerushalmi reverses the answers given to the Wise and Simple sons, contravening the Mechilta's exegesis of Deut. 6:20 that connects the wise to the laws of Passover.

בן חכם מהו אומר מה העדת והחקים והמשפטים אשר צוה יי אלהינו אותנו אף אתה אמור לו  
בחווק יד הוציאנו יי ממצרים מבית עבדים

What does the wise child say? *What are the testimonials, the ordinances and the laws that the Lord our God commanded us?* (Deut. 6:21) You say to him, *With a strong hand the Lord took us out of Egypt, the house of bondage.* (Ex. 13:14)

In short, the Yerushalmi's version appears to object to 'The Four Sons' assignment of *hilkhot ha-Pesach* to the Wise and *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* to the Simple. It makes no attempt to conceal its origins, quite the opposite. If the Yerushalmi's arrangement were the original, then the proper narrative response to the question in Deut. 6:20 would be the answer in Deut. 6:21. And Deut. 6:21 is in fact the basis for the traditional opening of the Seder narrative, *Avadim Hayinu*. Instead, the Yerushalmi creates a non sequitur by simply transposing the latter half of Ex. 13:14 (which adds nothing, being nearly identical to Deut. 6:21), as if to underline rather than obscure the reversal of the original. And it ignores the Tosefta's understanding of *afikomen* (nuts, dates or roasted wheat), turning away from the traditional legal discussion byword.

טיפש מהו אומר מה זאת אף את למדו הילכות הפסח שאין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומון מהו  
אפיקומון שלא יהא עומד מחבורה זו ונכנס לחבורה אחרת

A fool, what does he say? *What's this?* (Ex. 13:14). Therefore, you teach him the laws of the Passover. That we do not add *afikomen* after the Passover. And what is meant by *afikomen*? That he should not leave one company and join another company.

According to the Yerushalmi, *hilkhot ha-Pesach* is discussed at the Seder mainly to prevent the ignorant from trespassing (by party-hopping), rather than because it is the proper occupation of the learned. Inclusion of this version in the Yerushalmi may evidence that the *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* program had completely triumphed over the legal program by the third or fourth century. Nevertheless, the inversion of 'The Four Sons' formula in the Yerushalmi is drastic. It is therefore understandable that, despite their unequivocal embrace of *sippur yetziat Mitzrayim* for Maggid, the Haggadah's later composers chose to preserve the original reference to the *hilkhot ha-Pesach* program in the more familiar version of 'The Four Sons' we know today.

<sup>26</sup> It nevertheless retains the paraphrase of Deut. 6:21 as *אותנו* found in many early versions.