

## ***Pesach Celebrates Our Freedom to Grow***



The psychologist Carol Dweck, in her bestselling book *Mindset*, draws a distinction between what she calls the “fixed mindset” and the “growth mindset.” In an interview,

Dweck explained that “In a fixed mindset students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that’s that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look

dumb. In a growth mindset students understand that

their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence. They don’t necessarily think everyone’s the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.” Dweck’s main thesis is that a person with a growth mindset will be happier and more successful in life.

We tend to think of the four prototypes of children introduced at the seder, the “*arba’ah banim*,” as fixed personalities. Some commentaries suggest, however, that these “*arba’ah banim*” can be perceived as one person going through four phases in life, reflecting the trajectory of a “growth mindset.” An infant doesn’t know how to ask (*she’ino yodea lishol*), and then grows to be a wide eyed curious and innocent child (*tam*). From there, the young teen enters the adolescent phase which often includes an aspect of rebelliousness (*rasha*) as he or she tries to establish independence. Finally, the young adult, hopefully having received the right messages and influences, reaches the maturity and wisdom of the

chacham. (The chacham is listed first at the seder because, particularly through the Pesach experience, we have reached the level of a chacham and now we reflect back on the different phases.)

The “*arba’ah banim*” thus convey that a human being is a work in progress. Education is a continuum. It’s not black and white that the *rasha* is bad. People should never be labeled and dismissed, but rather always given a chance. He may be a *rasha* today (*rasha* = gematria of 570), but if you remove his cynicism, if you are “*hakheh et*

*shinav* (shinav = gematria of 366), by showing him

love and care, he can transform himself into a *tzaddik* (gematria of 204, which is the result of subtracting the cynicism from his previous *rasha* personality).

We should also never fall into the trap of labeling ourselves in a fixed manner. We should rather always see ourselves as having the capacity to climb to the next rung. Judaism indeed celebrates the growth mindset for the individual and the community. The principle of “*ma’alin bekodesh*,” of going upwards in holiness, which is the reason we light one candle on the first night of Chanukah and increase until 8 on the last night, animates our tradition. More important than who we are is who we are striving to become and what type of community we’re striving to create.

Pesach is the holiday of freedom. We celebrate our freedom to grow. May the blessing of growth be enjoyed by you and our Beth Jacob community. **BJ**