Reclaiming the Seder for the "Fourth Son"

By Rabbi Tzvi Pittinsky

For a long time, I have wanted to join the "eternal conversation" of our people by publishing a volume of my own Torah insights. I wanted to write, but the time required to produce a high-quality book while teaching full-time was a major hurdle, until I started working with generative AI.

To make the *Signs and Wonders Haggadah* a reality, I built a custom "Gem" called the **TechRav Haggadah Co-Pilot**. A Gem is essentially a mini-app that you can program to act as a specialized assistant. I programmed mine to be my co-author and art director, but never a replacement for the human voice. I used the AI to gather 25 years of my own classroom notes, my "TechTalks" columns from *The Jewish Link*, and my various blogs, and ideas from the world of Torah and educational technology and then help me edit them into a cohesive book format. While the AI suggested modern translations, I meticulously reviewed every line, making sure there were no hallucinations and that the translations matched a high standard of accuracy and clarity. The Torah in this book is mine; with the AI functioning as the most efficient editor I've ever had.

As a visual learner, I've always tried to incorporate multi-media into my teaching, and I wanted this Haggadah to be an "augmented reality" experience for ages 1 to 101. But I am not myself an artist in the traditional sense and did not have the resources to hire one for this project so I decided to create the art "myself" with the assistance of AI. To achieve this, I used my Gemini Gem to help me write the prompts which I then fed into **Google Gemini's Nano Banana** to create a consistent visual style. Initially, the images looked like a "ransom note" where every page was different, but I used my Gem to set a strict art direction: modern Seder scenes use a 3D Pixar-style render for warmth, while ancient Egypt scenes combine that style with archaeological realism. This consistency ensures that when a child's eyes wander from the text, they land on a visual that helps them "see" themselves in Egypt. I worked carefully to ensure that the visuals matched sources from the Hagaddah, Tanach, midrashim, and my commentary on the page so it would function as a visual Midrash to complement and elaborate on the text.

For the modern Haggadah scenes, I included likenesses of a multi-generational modern Orthodox Jewish family that everyone could relate to modeled after my own family, with a little boy and little girl who are in multiple images to lead one through the seder. I wanted everyone at the seder to see themself, their children, their grandchildren, their nieces or their nephews in the characters in the Haggadah. I also used these modern images to augment my commentary. My unique technology-inspired take on the 4 sons includes a

modern interpretation of the Son Who Does Not Know How To Ask as the silent son not because he is too young to ask but because he is so engrossed in a digital screen that he never looks up to see what is going on around him. As I pointed out in my commentary, I welcome all types of students into my class including the "wicked son" who often is my favorite since he is highly engaged even if he usually runs counter to the accepted interpretations. The one child I find hard to reach is the "Silent Student", so immersed in his screen that he tunes out everything going on around him. This is why even in my highly techie classroom, I am averse to screens unless they are a part of the classroom activity on that day.

Perhaps the most practical takeaway for our educator community is how AI served as my technical tutor. I had never used professional publishing software like Adobe InDesign before, but my Gem gave me step-by-step instructions on margins and layout. Today, these custom Gems are free for K-12 schools, allowing any teacher to turn their unique Torah into a physical book. *Baruch Hashem*, the Haggadah hit **#1 in New Releases on Amazon** immediately, proving that when we use the tools of the modern world to amplify the truths of our past, we can reach the "Fourth Son", the one physically present but mentally absent, and bring them back to the table.

I gave a talk about the process and the "Tech-Peshatim" in the book at the YU Seforim Sale, and the recording is on YUTorah. You can purchase my Haggadah on Amazon here: (https://a.co/d/0enUC4RJ)

And access a recording of my talk on YUTorah: (https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/1165762/The-Signs-and-Wonders-Haggadah:-Revealing-the-Eternal-Truths-of-Yetziat-Mitzrayim-in-the-Digital-Age)

As well as a Source Sheet for my Talk: (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D6WoXBU_PUxpHKrGq_RkIgFW8xpv4QZy/view?usp=drivesdk)