

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

CAN YOU TELL WHAT KIND OF ADULT A CHILD WILL BECOME?

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Soon, we will have our seders during which we will investigate the nature of the four sons. It leads to an interesting question: can you tell what a child will be like judging from his/her behavior as a child? The Talmud relates the following story about two of our greatest sages when they were but boys:

A child younger than 13 years old who knows to whom the benediction is addressed (i.e., God) may be counted for zimmun (the invitation to say grace after meals). When Abaye and Rava were boys, once they were sitting before Rabbah. Said Rabbah to them: To whom do we address the benedictions?

They replied: To the All Merciful.

And where does the All Merciful abide? Rabba asked.

Rava pointed to the roof; Abaye went outside and pointed to the sky.

Said Rabbah to them: Both of you will become Rabbis.

This accords with the popular saying, "Every pumpkin can be told from its stalk. (B. Berachot 48a)

Discussion Questions:

1. Can "every pumpkin be told from its stalk"? Or can children turn out to be quite different as adults?
2. What do you make of how the two boys indicated God's location? Does it have any significance?

P.S. I must say that in my experience sometimes the worst behaved teenagers turn out to be the best behaved adults. One of the joys of being a rabbi for as long as I've been one is to see misbehaved teenagers (and you know who you are!) take their place as community leaders.