

The Four Children Around and Inside of Us

Traditional Haggadah Text:

<p>The Torah speaks of four children:* one wise, one rebellious, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask.</p>	<p>כַּנְגַד אַרְבַּעַה בְּנִים דְּבָרָה תּוֹרָה. אֶחָד חָכָם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד תָּם, וְאֶחָד שְׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאוֹל.</p>
<p>What does the wise child say? "What are the testimonies, statutes, and laws that Hashem our God, commanded you?"⁵</p> <p>You should thus reply, [teaching] the laws of Pesach [until the final concept]: one may not eat any dessert after the Paschal sacrifice.⁶</p>	<p>חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶתְכֶם? וְאִי אֶתָּה אָמַר לוֹ כְּהַלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח: אֵין מִפְטִירֵינוּ אַחַר הַפֶּסַח אֶפְיָקוּמָן.</p>
<p>What does the rebellious child say? "What is this service to you?" [By saying,] "to you," [the child implies]: "but not to me." Since the s/he does not include him/herself in the people at large, this child denies the foundation of our faith.</p> <p>Therefore, you should bluntly wipe the smirk off their face and say: "It is because of this, what God did for me when I went out of Egypt." [By saying] "for me," [you imply]: "but not you." Had this child been there, s/he would not have been worthy to be redeemed.</p>	<p>רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה הָעֵבֶדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם? לָכֶם - וְלֹא לוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׁהוֹצִיא אֶת עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּלל כְּפָר בְּעֶקֶר. וְאִי אֶתָּה הַקְּהָה אֶת שְׁנֵינוּ וְאָמַר לוֹ: בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ- יְיָ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לִי - וְלֹא לוֹ. אֵילוּ הָיָה שָׁם, לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל.</p>
<p>What does the simple child say? "What is this?"</p> <p>You should answer: "With a strong hand, God brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage."</p>	<p>תָּם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה זֹאת? וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו: בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם, מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.</p>
<p>The child who does not know how to ask, you must open her/him up, as the verse states: "You shall tell your child on that day: 'It is because of this, what God did for me when I went out of Egypt.'"</p>	<p>וְשְׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאוֹל - אֶת פֶּתַח לוֹ, שְׁנֵאָמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ- יְיָ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם.</p>

*It's actually the Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 10:4

Assignment for JEWL: Answer the questions below, in writing or recording, or tell us about trying the family activity on page 3 at your Seder?

1. What do you appreciate about this text? What do you find problematic?
2. Notice the differences between the children's questions: What distinguishes wise from rebellious? Is wisdom/rebellion in the eye of the beholder?
3. How does your response change if you understand these to be aspects within each person, rather than separate children, or if you understand them to be different generations, like in the texts below?
4. Are there any other types (than wise, rebellious, etc...) that you think should be listed?

The Four Children Around and Inside of Us

Four Children and Food Justice by Merle Feld:

The Wise One: I want to know where this matzah, this brisket, this chocolate cake came from. Is the food at this feast truly sanctified? Has the meat that is giving me pleasure been processed by someone who is too young to be working? By someone who is paid the wages of a slave? With what research tools and by what methods may I identify food which is in every way kosher?

The Wicked One: How is it my problem if the animal whose flesh I enjoy tonight suffered as it lived and died? Why should I be concerned if the woman my parents have hired to serve and clean up our large gathering cannot go home until after the buses have stopped running?

The Simple One: Who harvested all the produce at our seder table and how are their lives blessed or plagued? What dishes can we make from fruits and vegetables grown near our home or frozen in season and stored for tonight? What is a carbon footprint?

The One Who Does Not Know How To Ask A Question: I just want to celebrate this happy holiday and not disturb myself with large issues I cannot possibly understand or problems that are too vast to be solved.

Does putting the Four Children in conversation about today's issues give new meaning to this text for you?

Alternative understandings, from *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*

Four generations in North America- by Paul Cowan

One might identify four generations – since the great migration of Eastern European Jews to the New World began in the 1880s.* The first generation of immigrants is the WISE child who knows and feels comfortable with Jewish tradition. The second generation is the REBEL who in the name of progress and Westernization rejects their parents' Judaism after having imbibed it at home. The third generation is assimilated. There is little knowledge and little resentment, but there is still a SIMPLE curiosity about the customs of their grandparents. Finally, a fourth generation, without knowledge or even mild acquaintance, is born. They DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK. They might be called "orphans in history," lacking any of the resources of Jewish wisdom against which to struggle and from which to draw personal meaning.

*This is a very broad generalization, and it particularly ignores the non-Ashkenazi Jews from Spain and Portugal who were in America before the Eastern European wave. – Rabbi RS's note.

1. Does this describe a trajectory that resonates in your family? Which generation(s) do you identify with?
2. Do you think there is a way for a generation (or a person) to change their status in this analogy?

The Four Children Around and Inside of Us

STARTER CONVERSATIONS: THE PARENTS' FOUR QUESTIONS

*The Haggadah suggests various types of children that ask questions of their parents. Tonight let us reverse the process and ask our children about **how they feel and think**.*

To get started, imagine you have just overheard a snippet of a parent-child exchange.

Ask a pair of volunteers to read responsively one exchange. Now open the forum to anyone who wishes to step in and speak to or in the name of the child or the parent.

DEAR CURIOUS CHILD

Parent: You are always asking such great questions. You are so curious and eager to learn about Judaism and about your family history. But I have a question or two for you. First, what or who turned you on to learning? Second, is it a secret burden to be the family's "good kid"?

Wise child: First, Grandma was my inspiration to learn something new every moment. She was so patient-listening to me and looking things up. Together we wondered about the mysteries of the world. Second, I guess I can reveal to you that it is not always easy to be the studious "goody goody." Sometimes I just want to be ordinary. I try to sidestep unwanted praise - being spoken about in proud superlatives is embarrassing. I do not want to be a nakhas-producing machine. But I do appreciate your quiet pride in my achievements.

DEAR ANGRY CHILD

Parent: Okay, maybe I have gone overboard with my "tough love." Perhaps I have followed the Haggadah's parents in excluding their "wicked" child. But I know how **hurt** parents feel because you too have spoken to me at times with such hutzpah, putting down "your whole Seder thing:" But I do not know how you feel beneath the skeptical facade. Talk to me - I promise not to be judgmental. After all, I too was a rebel against my parents and their Judaism.

Angry child: Your Judaism is fine for you, but not for me! You still do not hear me: I do not want to be here, at this table. This you call the "Holiday of Freedom"? Huh? Freedom for whom? Not for me! I am here because you make me, and to tell you the truth many of the adults at this table right now feel the same way! This is your Seder, not mine!

DEAR SWEET CHILD

Parent: I must tell you what a joy (and a relief) it is to have a child as easy as you. I am always happy to listen to your questions. Still sometimes I worry: will you ever become more critical and independent minded like your older siblings?

Simple child: I love you too, but it is not always so simple to be your "simple" child. In many Jewish families kids like me are considered a disappointment. But not all of us can be "the best and the brightest." I cannot read the Hebrew and probably never will. So please do us both a favor and stop asking me to read out loud at every Seder. I see what my siblings have achieved, but I have my own way of doing things. Please do not compare us, neither positively nor negatively.

DEAR QUIET CHILD

Parent: Talking comes so easily to me that I don't always understand what is hidden in your head and in your heart. How do I get through to you?

The child who does not know how to ask: If I were suddenly to open my mouth I would tell you: Remember, still waters run deep. At this table verbal dueling dominates too often. I would ask you to learn my language in which I am quite articulate. I am comfortable in the physical language of art and dance ... Listen to me speaking the language of movement, of music, or color. Can you learn the eloquence of silence? You may discover that I too am a "wise" child whose deepest insights can never be reduced to words.