



FIGHT GENOCIDE
DO NOT STAND IDLY BY



The Four Children Adult Resources

In true Melton style, let's turn to the original sources, the texts, to understand the Four Sons or the Four Children in our Passover Haggadah. We will then reference modern sources to shed additional light.

Drawing from and building on this discussion of the original source, we will consider the four children in the context of social action and the work of Jewish World Watch. Jewish World Watch (JWW), a leader in the fight against genocide and mass human atrocities, engages individuals and communities to take local action and bears witness to first-hand accounts in conflict regions such as the Sudan and Congo. JWW partners with on-the-ground organizations to improve the lives of survivors of this violence, to help build the foundation for a safer world, and inspire our communities to support tangible projects and advocate for political change (www.jewishworldwatch.org).

TEXT 1: Tanach a) Exodus 12:26-27

And when your children say to you, "What does this service [the seder] mean to you?" Then you shall say, "This is the Passover sacrifice to Adonai, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt..."

b) Exodus 13:8

And you shall tell your child on that day, "because of what Adonai did for me when I went out of Egypt."

c) Exodus 13:14

And when your child asks you one day, "What is this?" You shall say, "With a mighty hand Adonai brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of slaves."

d) Deuteronomy 6:20-21

When your child asks you one day, "What are the testimonies, the statues and the judgments which Adonai our God commanded you?" Then you shall say to your child, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Adonai brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand."

ANALYSIS

From these four sets of verses, each commanding us to teach the next generation about our exodus from Egypt, we have to question why this had to be repeated. It is commonly understood in the study of Torah that nothing is repetitive, but instead anything repeated is done so for a reason. One way to understand these four different questions/repetitions has become the metaphor of the Four Children: that each child asks the question in a different way and must, therefore, be answered in a different way. Educators understand that, according to Proverbs 22:6 "Teach a child according to his way [his strengths, his abilities, his appropriate level] and he will never depart from it [the content of the lesson]."

Text a above is thought to be the basis of the Wicked Son. By wording the question "what is this to YOU" this child separates himself from the community and from the exodus experience. It is because of this that he is thought to be "wicked."

Text b above is understood to be the basis of the Child Who Does Not Know Enough to Ask because in this instance, there was no question posed, but that does not relieve us of our obligation to teach that child.

Text c could be the source of the Simple Son and the answer suggested for this son is equally as simple and straight forward.

That leaves Text d from which we understand the Wise Child because this question probes at all of the details. This child must already have a good foundation of knowledge and has the curiosity to go even further.

TEXT 2: Nachama Leibowitz

(1905-1997) Recognized as one of the leading teachers of the Torah of the twentieth century, as well as a role model for Orthodox women. Born in Germany, made aliyah to Israel in 1930 and appointed Professor at Tel Aviv University.

In three cases, the child approaches the parent, but in Exodus 13:8, the child does not initiate the conversation. The midrash, therefore, deduces that this is a child that does not know how to ask the question. In the three remaining verses, where the child initiates the conversation, two ask a question, but one (in Exodus 12: 26) makes a statement. This son, the midrash concludes, is the wicked son who is not questioning, but challenging.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. How can you discern between someone who simply isn't interested and someone who just doesn't know how to formulate a question?
2. If a person is simply not interested in Judaism, should this person be "answered" anyway?
3. Have you encountered a person in your life who has challenged you the way the Wicked Son challenges his parents? How might you turn that person from a "challenger" into a "questioner?" Should you even try?

TEXT 3: Noam Zion

Author of [A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah](#) as well as other books on modern home observance. Zion is currently a fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.

"The Wicked Child" – An Unfair Description

The "wicked" child expresses a sense of alienation from our Jewish heritage. In this age of liberalism and democracy, of pluralistic tolerance for many cultural expressions, should a person who expresses such a feeling be condemned as "wicked" or "evil?"

Bridging the Generation Gap

The inter-generational dialogues in the Torah explicitly refer to parents who participated in the Exodus addressing their children who have grown up in freedom in the Land of Israel. The parents have undergone an experience of slavery and redemption which is totally foreign to the reality of the younger generation. The gap in the experience causes difficulties in the inter-generational dialogue.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Does a similar generational gap exist in your family? Is there something that one generation experienced that another simply cannot fully understand?
2. Is one generation of your family experiencing Judaism in a way that the others cannot understand? How does this change their approach to Judaism in general or Passover more specifically?

TEXT 4: Rabbi Deborah Silver

Currently the Associate Rabbi of Adat Ari El in Los Angeles and Florence Melton Faculty. Formerly practiced law and taught at BPP Law School in England. The following is excerpted from an article entitled “Who Knows Four? The Deeper Meaning of Pesach” which appeared in Walking with the Jewish Calendar, a publication of The Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies.

In an article entitled *The Four-fold Structure of the Passover Haggadah*¹ Dr. Jeremy Schonfield explores the thread of ‘four’ as it runs through the first half of the Pesah Seder. What looks on the surface like a somewhat incoherent, repetitive text is actually, he argues, a series of four different Haggadot which we read in sequence. The Pesah story is told four times, each from a different aspect and each aimed at a different audiences. He identifies the audiences, moreover - each version is aimed at one of the four children whose story precedes them.

The Haggadah of the ‘wise child,’ he argues, is the one attributed to the teacher Shmuel. It begins, *Avadim hayyinu le’faroh bemitzrayim* [We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt], which is the answer given in the Tanakh to the wise son’s question there. The Haggadah of the ‘wicked child’ is the one attributed to the teacher Rav, beginning, *Mithila ovdei avodah zarah hayu avoteinu*, [From the beginning, our fathers were slaves] picking up the child’s own language in her/his question, *ma ha’avodah hazot lakhem?* [what is this service to you?] The Haggadah of the ‘simple child’ is the one which follows, beginning *Tzei u’lemad* - ‘go out and learn’. And the final Haggadah, appropriately enough for a child who does not know how to question, is that of Rabban Gamliel - a ‘show and tell’ of the shankbone, the matzah and the bitter herbs. Thus, before the meal reaches the table, four types of children have had the story told in the way they personally need to hear it.

¹ Dr Jeremy Schonfield, *The Four-fold Structure of the Passover Haggadah*, published under the title, *One Haggadah, or Four?* in Robert Hayward and Brad Embry (eds) *Studies in Jewish Prayer*. Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 17 (2005) 185-205.

TEXT 5: Rabbi Richard N. Levy

Reform Rabbi living in Los Angeles. Former Director of UCLA Hillel and former Dean of HUC’s Rabbinic School in Los Angeles. The following is excerpted from the haggadah he edited and translated entitled On the Wings of Freedom: The Hillel Haggadah for the Nights of Passover.

Perhaps (some Chasidic rabbis suggest) we should turn the order of the Four Children upside down and see the silence of the One Who Does Not Know How to Ask as the most profound response, emerging out of the awesomeness of the Exodus and even of life itself.

If this is so, then (perhaps) the knowledge of the Wise One represents the lowest step on the ladder of learning, which moves from the mastery of facts (Wise One) to the higher rung of the Wicked One to the still higher rung of the Simple One to the “One Whose Understanding Transcends Speech.” The haggadah tells us that this is the One to whom we must open up; it is through the Silent One, the one who has moved beyond the questions, through whom we may understand what Adonai really did for each of us when we went out of Egypt.

Final Food for Thought:

Why do the Wise Child and the Simple Child receive the same answer to their very different questions?

¹ Dr Jeremy Schonfield, *The Four-fold Structure of the Passover Haggadah*, published under the title, *One Haggadah, or Four?* in Robert Hayward and Brad Embry (eds) *Studies in Jewish Prayer*. Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 17 (2005) 185-205.

If you enjoyed this learning, please visit the Conejo/West Valley Melton School at www.meltonwestvalley.org

The Four Children: Social Justice and the Mission of Jewish World Watch

JWW believes that the story of Passover provides teachable moments that powerfully weave the portrait of the four children with its social justice mission. Consider that each of the children is actually just one of the many facets that make up our individual souls and demonstrate the various ways we might behave:

The Wise Child: **Upstander**

The Wicked/Contrary: **Bystander**

The Simple Child: **Unaware**

The child who doesn't know how to ask: **Insulated**

JWW works to educate the unaware, inspire the insulated and provide opportunities for all of us to make a difference in the lives of survivors of genocide.

Further descriptions of these four “inner children” and questions to consider:

The Upstander/ *Ha'Chacham*/Wise

The Upstander in us asks: What is the Jewish response to genocide and mass atrocities in the world? What does God expect of us?

The Upstander understands that we are all created *b'tzelem Elohim* – in the image of G-d. Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara defied orders and saved thousands of Jews by issuing transit visas during the Holocaust. American Jews rallied to stop the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims. Today, thousands of JWW activists join JWW to fight against genocide in Sudan and Congo. We see the face of G-d in every person, no matter her race, creed or color – and respond when suffering and brutality occur. The Upstander knows this responsibility, and acts.
Question: How are you an Upstander – for your family, your community and the world?

The Bystander/ *Ha'Rasha*/wicked

The Bystander in us asks: Why should I care?

The Bystander in us knows that there is suffering in the world, but consciously chooses to turn away from it. Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate, says, “the opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference.” We may think that the needs of our own families and communities preclude us from caring for others who are unknown and far away. But at base our question is wrong. The moral choice is not “either/or.” The Jewish response is “both/and.”

Question: What factors go into your decisions to be an Upstander or a Bystander?

The Unaware/ *Ha'Tam*/Simple

The Unaware child in us asks: Really, genocide? Now, in the 21st century? Where?

The genocide in Darfur, Sudan is in its 9th year. 400,000 civilians have been slaughtered and more than 3 million displaced. In Congo, over a decade of war has claimed 5.4 million lives. A

brutal campaign of mass rape has destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of women. These conflicts echo the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, when the world abdicated its responsibility to protect innocent lives. Once the eyes of the Unaware child in us are opened, we are awakened to our responsibility to stay informed.

Question: Now that you know, what will you do?

The Insulated/She'aino Yodea Lishol/Doesn't know enough to ask

Sometimes we don't even know to ask.

We move through our days focused on our needs and those of our family. When we look around, however, we see the joy and sadness that exists in communities around the world. We may insulate ourselves because we feel we are too small to make an impact. Rabbi Tarfon said, "You are not obligated to finish the work; neither are you free to desist from it" (Pirkei Avot). You cannot end genocide alone, but working together as a movement, we can move the world closer to that goal.

Question: Together, we can make a difference. Will you join us?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. When are you moved to be the "Upstander" or choose to be on the sidelines?"
2. Can you identify moments when you are each of the 4 facets JWW uses to describe the children?
3. How do these 'children,' present in all of us, motivate your actions?
4. The children are currently matched as follows: the Wise child is the Upstander, the Contrary Child is the Bystander, the Simple Child is the Unaware, and the Child Who Does Not Know How to Ask is the Insulated. After the discussion of the original texts, do you feel these could be matched differently? How do the social justice children complement each other or blend?