



# SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE

## PESACH GUIDE

### Part Two

**The Four Children:  
Reaching them, engaging them,  
including them, teaching them**

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## **The Four Children: Reaching them, engaging them, including them**

Adapted from "[A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah](#)," by [Noam Zion](#) and [David Dishon](#) (Reprinted by permission)

If ever there were an event that appeals to a parent's desire to bring their youth-culture-centered children to appreciate the old values of cultural and ethnic pride and identification, the Pesach Seder is it. Here lies a dangerous pitfall for the parent-educator. The leader of the seder is likely to concentrate on the text of the Haggadah without sufficiently taking into consideration the audience - the younger generation - and its level of interest. Absorbed with the sales pitch, the salesperson often forgets the customer.

## **The Four Parents: Children Label Their Parents**

In the days of the patriarchal regime, we allowed ourselves to categorize our children harshly – accepting only one as positive – the wise one. The simple, the wicked and the one who knows not how to ask questions had to swallow hard and hide their sense of being insulted...

Now in our days no child is identified as “the offspring of the parent” and often the parent is identified as “the parent of that child.” We have arrived at an era not of patriarchy or matriarchy but the rule of children. In our age it is then miraculous that our dear, delightful children don't divide us up and categorize us. At the best, we would be rated “naive or simple minded parents” or “parents who don't know how to respond to a question.” (Israel Eldad, “The Victory of the Wise Son”)

## **The Pitfalls of Labeling**

I instinctively recoil from static stereotypes that label persons simplistically. Therefore, I choose to interpret the midrash of the four children as a diverse set of strategies for addressing four different facets of each and every child. Each personality combines these facets in different ways. For example, the wise and the rebellious facets can be combined for evil. Then the cunning mind is used to inflict pain on one's parents. Alternatively, the combination can produce a revolutionary *halutz* (pioneer) seeking not just to undermine the traditional order but to create new frameworks of meaning. This requires an intelligence which is not conservative like the traditional “wise child” but which looks beyond the horizon, beyond the existing laws and their pat rationale. (Yaariv Ben Aharon, kibbutz author)

## **The Four Children as a Screenplay**

A simple reading of the Haggadah's midrash of the four children can obscure the fact that it provides the script for a dialogue. Let each character in the dialogue be played by a different seder participant.

The cast is as follows:

- Narrator
- Each of the four children
- Four parents who answer.

The reading goes as follows:

Narrator: The Torah alludes in various places to four types of children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask. What does the wise child say?

Wise Child: “What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which the Lord your God has commanded you?” (Deut. 6:20).

Narrator: You must tell him some of the laws of Pesach (from the Mishna):

1st Parent: “We do not proceed to any afikoman (dessert or after dinner celebrations) after eating the Pesach lamb” (Pesachim X).

Narrator: What does the wicked child say?

Wicked Child: “Whatever does this service mean to you?” (Exodus 12:26).

Narrator: This child emphasizes “you” and not himself! Since the child excludes himself from the community and rejects a major principle of faith, you should “set his teeth on edge” and say to him:

2nd Parent: “It is because of this, that the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt” (Exodus 13:8). “Me” and not him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

Narrator: What does the simple child ask?

Simple Child: “What is this?” (Exodus 13:14).

Narrator: And you shall say to that child:

3rd Parent: “By a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Narrator: As for the child who does not know how to ask, you should prompt him, as it is said: “You shall tell your child on that day, saying:”

4th Parent: “It is because of this, that the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt” (Ex 13:8).

## Beating The Bounds: Producing Wicked Children

The Passover celebration is aimed at the child in all of us, allowing us to open our imaginations, to rediscover the lost elements of wonder, pleasure, and hilarity that are captured in this event. Having children at the seder can help make this happen. If we make our children unhappy, they will remember Passover, but not fondly. In the British Isles, there is a custom of taking sons out every year to “beat the bounds.” Today they use the stick as the boundary markers, but they used to beat the boys at the site of those markers to ensure that they would remember the limits of ancestral property. Beating our ancient heritage into our children’s psyches may make them remember, but it is probably the reason so many people remember ritual and ceremony as intrinsically unpleasant. (Ira Steingroot, Keeping Passover)

## Who Is Truly Wise?

The wise child of the Haggadah is portrayed as a knowledgeable, believing and obedient child. This child formulates long complex questions, distinguishes multiple categories of laws, and accepts the God who commanded “us.” But let’s beware of this stereotyped, academic brainchild. Is this child truly wise?

- Don Isaac Abrabanel, “The Smart Alec”: “This ‘wise-guy’ child is arrogant in his ‘wisdom.’ He shows off the distinctions he can make between types of mitzvot. ‘But you teach him the subtleties down to the last detail in the Mishna.’ Let the ‘smart-alec’ who appears wise in his own eyes see that there is still much for him to learn. There is twice as much wisdom in these laws as in the question. Let the wise grow in wisdom and in humility.”
- Israel Eldad, “To Know When to Ask”: “No! The wise child does not derive his title from the pretense to know-it-all. One who thinks he possesses wisdom already, does not ask at all. ‘One who does not even know how to ask’ has a negative trait, typical of the know-it-all. The truly wise child asks genuine questions, not cynically and mockingly like the rebellious child and not superficially like the simple child. He seeks the essence of things, ‘What is the true nature of the laws, testimonies and statutes that God has commanded us?’”
- The Chassidic Seer of Lublin: “In my judgment, it is better to be a wicked person who knows he is wicked, than a righteous one who knows that he is righteous. Worst of all is to be a wicked person who thinks he is righteous.” (Menachem HaCohen, Haggadah of HaAm)

“You shall tell your child” (Exodus 13:8)

The Rabbis wondered about: “You shall tell your child on that day: ‘It is because of this, that the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.’” Could this verse mean that you should begin to tell the story at the beginning of the month (in which the Exodus occurred)? No, for the verse explicitly states “on that day” (of the Exodus). Could that mean that we start when it is still daytime? No, for the verse explicitly states: “because of

this”. “This” refers to matza and marror laid before you (only on seder night) (Mekhilta). “This” implies that the parents must point at the matza and marror, using them as visual aids to tell the story (Rabbi Simcha of Vitri).

### **The Contemporary “Four Children”**

Which famous person today would be the best representative of the “wise child,” of the “wicked child,” and so on? Suggest candidates and discuss their suitability.

### **A Child’s Perspective**

Ask the younger children to describe the behavior of “a bad child” at the seder.

- What might be causing such behavior?
- Do they approve of the parent’s response in the Haggadah?
- How would they handle the situation?
- Why do they think the “silent child” asks no questions?

How might that child be coaxed into greater involvement?

### **Beyond Labels**

I do not view labels as static pigeonholes. I believe in the power of the educational act to release locked up potentials. For example, one who does not know how to ask may be silenced by the rules of society. The silence may hide an exceptional, sensitive child whose questions are choked. A parent can “open the child up,” remove the obstructions, enable personal growth and break stereotypes. (Yaariv Ben Aharon, Kibbutz author)

### **Bridging the Generation Gap**

The intergenerational 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 totally foreign to the reality of the younger generation. The gap in experience causes difficulties in the intergenerational dialogue.

Invite the seder participants to discuss the following:

What are the generational gaps among us, the participants of tonight’s seder? Go around the table and have people relate a particular experience connected with their generation which might be difficult for a person of a different generation to comprehend.

## **LEADER'S GUIDE**

### **The Four Children**

The Haggadah offers us educational advice about intergenerational storytelling. The midrash of the Four Children invites us to distinguish different character types and to suggest different approaches to our offspring. Consider the artistic interpretations of the Four Children, comparing and contrasting them.

The Rabbis turn the commandment of “ve-heegadta” (you shall tell) into a mitzvah of dialogue – with give and take on both sides. Successful dialogue means that each side, and especially the side anxious to “pass on the message,” be keenly attentive to what the other is saying and feeling – to the particular personality and his or her needs.

### **Examining a Midrash: The Biblical and the Rabbinic Four Children**

Midrash is a classical Rabbinic method of exploring a Biblical text both to explain internal difficulties in the text and to “search out” (midrash) meaning relevant to their own religious and cultural life. It combines careful study of the text along with creative explanations which go well beyond what the historic text says so that the text is made to confront the contemporary situation. The midrash of the Four Children provides an excellent example of such creativity.

We begin with a careful look at the Biblical text itself as if approaching it for the first time in our lives. Then we will compare the Haggadah’s Four Children both to the biblical Four Children and to an alternative midrash on the Four Children created by Rabbi Chiya from the same historical period as the one in the Haggadah.

“The Four Children” in the Torah

The “four” children of the Midrash derive from four places in the Torah that record some sort of verbatim conversation between parent and child in which the Exodus is mentioned. Interestingly, in only one of these four places does the child ask a question directly pertaining to the Pesach ritual. As one examines these texts the following questions arise:

- What seems to be the event which prompts the child’s question?
- What does the child really want to know? (Information? Something else?)
- How would you characterize the educational approach of the parent in answering the question?
- Assuming for a moment the Rabbinic categorization into “four children:” To which child does each passage seem appropriate? Is the identification straightforward, ambiguous, or forced?

## **“The Four Children” in the Haggadah**

The Rabbinic midrash rearranges and recontextualizes the original Biblical texts. After realizing what is new in the Midrash, we can then try to determine what was the textual or ideological basis for the innovative interpretation.

We may take the dialogue of the “wise child” in the Haggadah as an example. Amazingly we note that the Rabbis here deleted the Torah’s answer to the question (Deuteronomy 6:20) and substituted their own: “Tell him about the laws of Pesach - right up to ‘we don’t proceed to the Afikoman after the Pesach.’” The different answer reveals a different understanding of the question. From the Torah it is clear that the child is asking about the general basis of all the commandments - Why do we perform them? What are they for? The Rabbis, however, understand it as a request for information about the detailed laws of Pesach. Whose answer seems more appropriate to the wise child of today?

### **Rabbi Chiya’s Four Children**

The version of the “Four Children” found in the Haggadah dates from the second century C.E. But the Jerusalem Talmud records a version given by Rabbi Chiya. Let’s compare them. The answers given to the wise and the simple child have been switched! To the simple child, called here “the stupid one,” - we explain the laws of Pesach; to the wise one, the story of the Exodus. Which is the subject matter appropriate for the wise elite - law or history?

The “wicked” child is described more vividly. What bugs him is “all the trouble and bother you put us through every year” in preparing for Pesach and enacting the Seder. It’s all a burden to him - “who needs it?” The expression of the parent in addressing the child as “that person” is also interesting. It reflects the distant tone and attitude taken towards the wicked child.

### **The Torah**

When your child asks you tomorrow: “What is our obligation to these testimonies, laws and regulations that the Lord our God has commanded you?”

Then you are to say to your child: We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD took us out of Egypt with a strong hand;

The LORD placed signs and wonders, great and evil ones, on Egypt, on Pharaoh and all his house, before our eyes.

And God took us out of there in order to bring us, to give us the land that God swore to our ancestors;

So the LORD has commanded us to observe all these laws, to hold the LORD our God in awe, for our own good all the days to come, to keep us alive as we are this day.

(Deuteronomy 6:20-24)

Take a hyssop, dip it in the blood (of the Pesach lamb) in the basin and touch the lintel cord and the two door posts . . .

When God sees the blood, the LORD will pass over the entrance . . . You are to keep this commandment as a law for you and your children forever.

Now it will be, when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, as promised, you are to keep this rite.

And when your children say to you: “What does this ritual mean to you?”

Then say: It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Children of Israel in Egypt, when God struck Egypt and our houses were rescued. (Exodus 12:22-27)

It shall be when the Lord brings you to the land of the Canaanites, as God promised to you and your ancestors and gave it to you.

Then you are to transfer every first born of the womb to the LORD . . . and every first born of men, among your sons, you are to redeem.

It shall be when your child asks you tomorrow: “What does this mean?”

You are to say: By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of a house of bondage. (Exodus 13: 11-14)

Matzot are to be eaten for seven days . . .

And you are to tell your child that day, saying:

“It is because of what the LORD did for me, when I went out of Egypt.”

It shall be for the sign on your hand and for a reminder between your eyes, in order that the Lord's law may be in your mouth, that by a strong hand did the Lord, bring you out of Egypt. (Exodus 13: 7-9)

### **The Haggadah's Four Children**

The Torah alludes in various places to four types of children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

What does the wise child say?

“What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which the Lord your God has

commanded you.” (Deuteronomy 6:20)

“You too must tell him some of the laws of Pesach, up to (the Mishna):

“We do not proceed to any ‘afikoman’ (dessert or after dinner celebrations) after eating the Paschal lamb.” (Tractate Pesachim X)

What does the wicked child say?

“Whatever does this service mean to you?” (Exodus 12:26)

Emphasizing “you” and not himself! And since he excludes himself from the community and rejects a major principle of faith, you should also “set his teeth on edge” and say to him: “It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8)

“Me” and not him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

What does the simple child ask?

“What is this?” (Exodus 13:14)

And you shall say to him: “By a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (Exodus 13:14)

As for the child who does not know how to ask, you should prompt him, as it is said: And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: “It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8)

**Rabbi Chiya’s Other Four Children** (Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 10:4)

The Torah alludes (in various places) to four types of children: the wise child, the wicked child, the stupid child, the child who does not know how to ask.

What does the wise child say?

“What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which the Lord your God has commanded us?” (Deuteronomy 6:20)

And you shall say to him: “By a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (Exodus 13:14)

What does the wicked child say?

“Whatever does this service (or work) mean to you?” (Exodus 12:26) What is this drudgery that you bother us with year in and year out? Since he excludes himself from

the community, similarly you should say to him (or regarding him), “It is because of what the Lord did for me.” (Exodus 13:8) For “me” He did it, for “that person” (pointing to the wicked child) He did not do it. If “that person” had been in Egypt, he would never have been worthy of being redeemed, not ever.

What does the stupid child ask?

“What is this?” (Exodus 13:14) You must teach him the laws of Pesach, that “We do not proceed to afikoman (dessert or after dinner celebrations) after eating the Paschal lamb.” (Tractate Pesachim X) That means he should not leave one group of Pesach celebrants and join another. In other words, in the Temple era the Paschal lamb was to be eaten only in prearranged groups, and the child must not run from one group to another.

As for the child who does not know how to ask, you should prompt him, first.

### **A Multi-Generational Symposium on the Rabbis’ Four Types of Children**

The Rabbis’ famous midrash on the four children serves as a kind of diagnostic chart for parents and educators. The rabbinic “gang of four” (the wise, the wicked, the simple and the one who does not know how to ask) can offer helpful distinctions among the personalities and learning styles of our children. But it may also lead us to counterproductive stereotyping of our potential students (good/evil; brilliant/stupid).

Below we have followed the discussion of types of children and attempts at communicating with them from the Torah through the Rabbis of the Talmud to contemporary thinkers and finally to artists who have “commented” on the four children visually. By reading one or two of these at the seder you may inspire a thorough educational debate among parents and children.

“Who is Truly Wise?” (Pirkei Avot 4:1): Competing Commentaries on the Rabbis’ Wise Child

What does the wise child say?

“What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which the Lord your God has commanded you?” (Deuteronomy 6:20).

You too must tell him some of the laws of Pesach, up to (the end of the Mishna):

“We do not proceed to any afikoman (dessert or after dinner celebrations) after eating the Paschal lamb.” (Tractate Pesachim X)

Clearly the wise child of the Haggadah is portrayed as a knowledgeable, believing and obedient child who formulates long complex questions, distinguishes multiple categories of laws, and accepts the authority of the God who commanded “us.” But let’s beware of this stereotyped academic brain child.

Is this child truly wise?

This “wise-ass” child is arrogant in his “wisdom.” He shows off the distinctions he can make between types of mitzvot. “But you teach him the subtleties of the laws of Pesach down to the last detail in the Mishna.” Let the smart alec who appears wise in his own eyes see that there is still much for him to learn. There is double as much wisdom in these laws as in his question. Let the wise grow in wisdom and in humility. (Don Isaac Abrabanel, “The Smart Alec”)

No! The wise child does not derive his title from his pretense to know-it-all. One who thinks he possesses wisdom already, does not ask at all. “One who does not even know how to ask” has a negative trait typical of the know-it-all. The truly wise child asks, not cynically and mockingly like the rebellious son and not superficially like the simple son. He seeks the essence of things, “What is the true nature of the laws, testimonies and statutes that God has commanded us?” (Israel Eldad, “To Know When to Ask”)

The Rashi

The very term “rasha” is difficult to translate: “wicked” and “evil” are harsh, uncompromising terms for a child. “Rebellious,” “mischievous,” “recalcitrant,” “chutzpadik,” “impolite,” “wilde chaya,” “naughty,” “troublesome,” “difficult,” “problematic” are also possible.

What leads the rabbi who composed this midrash to interpret the question: “What is this service to you?” as a touchstone for a rebellious child? Why did he think excluding the child from the family and setting his teeth on edge were the most appropriate educational response? What alternative interpretations or responses could be proposed? Here is a sampling of commentaries.

This child is determined to embarrass us, the parents (in the midst of the seder before all the guests). He implies that the wine and lamb chops are only for our culinary pleasure when he says pointedly, “This service is for you” (not a religious act of worship of God). (Don Isaac Abrabanel from Spain)

This child is not asking a question like the others but making a statement as it says in the Torah: “When your children come to tell you: What is this service to you?” (Exodus 12:26) The tone is arrogant and the intent is to ridicule the ceremony. Instead of asking “why,” the child asks sarcastically: What is all this service for, this tiresome bothersome Haggadah that ruins the festive atmosphere and postpones the meal? (R. Shimon ben R. Yehuda Chavillo from Mantova)

The Torah recommends that the parent ignore this (chutzpadik) child and exclude him from the discussion. The answer is directed to the rest of the children. “This service is a response to what God did for me when I went out of Egypt. Not for him (pointing at the child)! Had he been there, he would not have been

redeemed!” (Rabbi Elijah the Gaon of Vilna)

### Rebellious Daughter of the Talmud

What alienates a child from Judaism? Sometimes it is an edifice complex - the concern for big expensive buildings and high dues as the entry card to organized worship of God. Consider this ancient rebellious daughter.

“Miriam daughter of Bilga the Cohen abandoned Judaism and then married an officer of the Hellenistic government. [The story goes that] when the Gentiles entered the Temple, she came and knocked on the top of the altar [the way one disciplines a child] and said: ‘Wolf, wolf! You destroyed the property of the Jews [eating up their livestock in unnecessary sacrifices] and You did not help them in the time of their need.’” (T.B. Sukkah 56b; Tosefta IV 28)

Her critique of the expense of Jewish observance and of God’s lack of concern for Jewish poverty may be behind the wicked or alienated child’s question - “What is this sacrifice all about? Why must we go to such trouble [and expense] to make Pesach every year?” (Scholar’s Haggadah, p. 274)

In my judgment it is better to be a bad person who knows he is bad than a righteous one who knows that he is righteous. Worst of all is to be a wicked person who thinks he is righteous. (Menachem HaCohen, Hassidic Seer of Lublin (Haggadah of Ha-Am, 19th century, Poland)

### **What Lies Behind the Fourth Child’s Silence: ‘The Child Who Does Not Know How To Ask’**

The Midrash recommends: Create an opening for the child. Just as it says in the Torah: “Tell your child on that very day - ‘For this, God did for me - when I left Egypt.’” (Exodus 13:8)

### **Exploring the Eloquent Silence**

Nu! This is quite strange. Jewish children who can’t even express wonder? How young are these children? Could there be something obstructing their conversation with their parents? With their tradition? (Marc Angel, The Parent of the Silent Child)

Rabbi Shelomo Halevy Alkabets explains that the child does not ask because he is afraid of making a mistake. He does not know how to phrase his question and lacks confidence. Therefore, the parent should try to lead him into a conversation, to encourage him, to strengthen him, to strengthen his confidence. Through the conversation, the child will have the opportunity of expressing himself. This child has understanding and knowledge, and it is the parent’s responsibility to help the child express himself. (Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, Geulat Olam)

The child who does not even know how to ask lacks imagination and curiosity. The parent has an obligation to tell the story of the miraculous exodus, thereby stimulating the child's imagination. Even such a child can advance intellectually if he is encouraged to ask questions, to find out the meaning of things. (Rabbi Yaacov Houli, Me'am Lo'ez)

The four children are paralleled by four kinds of parents. The wise parent encourages the child to learn and to ask. The wicked parent treats religious symbolism with scorn, separating himself from the community. The naive parent does not trouble to study and learn, and has no deep knowledge of Torah and Jewish tradition. In each of these three cases, the children follow the models set by their parents.

The child who does not know how to ask is a most unfortunate child. Children are naturally curious and are always asking questions. To find a child who is unable to ask is shocking, even frightening. Such a child may exist because of the domineering nature of the parent. A parent who is constantly criticizing the child, always silencing him, and frequently showing him disrespect - such a parent deprives the child of self-esteem. The child suppresses questions because he is afraid.

The Haggadah teaches parents to reevaluate their own roles in relationship to their children, to open channels of communication. If parents and children can sit around the same table, can celebrate the festival, and can discuss words of Torah - then there is hope. (Rabbi Marc Angel, The Sephardic Haggadah)

No! I don't agree with the advice of the Haggadah here. The Haggadah says open him up to critical thinking. In my judgment the parent should be silent. Just kiss this child on the forehead for faithfully maintaining his loyalty to those sanctified traditions. The love of knowledge, the philosophical quest is important but the supreme wisdom is to accept the treasures of the past without second guessing, without evaluating their historical origins and their pragmatic utility. It is essential to cherish and preserve that kind of respectful wisdom and not to tarnish it with unnecessary talk. (Zeev Jabotinsky, "In Praise of the Unquestioning Personality")

Open up the child who has not learned to ask. Lead him on the path to becoming a questioning personality, one who inquires about the way of the world. Open him up to formulate his own queries. For without questions your ready-made answers remain inert and there is no common ground between you. The silence of the child can be thunderous. The silence of the one who does not know how to ask may be the result of not having found an appropriate address to express queries. Deeply meaningful silences can issue forth secrets that resound throughout the whole world . . . Model for the child the adults who know how to ask of themselves questions. As the rabbis said: "If the child and the spouse are unable to ask, let the parent ask himself." (T.B. Pesachim 115a) Then there is a good chance that the child will learn to ask as well. (Yariv Ben Aharon, "A Thunderous Silence")

## **Silent Children and their Mothers**

The Midrash of the Four Children recommends that “you” - should open up the child who does not know how to ask. You be the first teacher who helps the child to wonder and to inquire. In Mishnaic Hebrew that simply means “you” without any gender identification, but the new kibbutz Haggadah understands the word as in Biblical Hebrew as “you feminine:” You, the mother, are the child’s first teacher. Perhaps an alternative reading is possible: “you” as a collective form; the organized Jewish community, have a collective responsibility to teach all the alienated, silent Jews. (The Scholar’s Haggadah, p. 278)

Whenever Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev came to that passage in the Haggadah which deals with the Four Sons and read in it about the fourth son, he who does not know how to ask, he said:

“The one who knows not how to ask, that is myself, Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. I do not know how to ask you, Lord of the world, and even if I did know, I could not bear to do it. How could I venture to ask you: Why . . . we are driven from one exile into another, why our foes are allowed to torment us so much?

“But in the Haggadah the parent of the one who does not know how to ask is told: ‘It is for you to disclose the answer to the child.’

“And the Haggadah refers to the Torah in which it is written, ‘And you shall tell your son.’ (Exodus 13)

“Lord of the world, am I not your child?” (Even if I cannot formulate the questions, you can begin to answer them for me.) (“Job and the Silent One,” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, Poland, 19th century)

## **Four Children, Four Generations and “The Orphan in History”**

One might identify four generations - since the great emigration of Eastern European Jews to the New World began in the 1880’s. The first generation of the 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 SIMPLE curiosity about the customs of their grandparents.

Finally, a fourth generation is without knowledge or even mild acquaintance is born. These 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.

As a child, growing up on Manhattan's East Side, I lived among Jewish WASP's. My father had changed his name from "Cohen" to "Cowan" when he was 21. So I was brought up to think of myself as a "Cowan" - the Welsh word for stonecutter, not a "Cohen" - a member of the Jewish priesthood.

My family celebrated Christmas and always gathered for Easter dinner of ham and sweet potatoes. Though they never converted to Christianity my parents sent me to an Episcopalian prep school with a mandatory chapel service. In those years, I barely knew what a Passover seder was. I didn't know anyone who practiced "archaic" customs such as keeping kosher or lighting candles Friday night. When I fell in love and married Rachel, a New England Protestant whose ancestors came here in the 17th century, it didn't matter in the least that we were formally an interfaith marriage. I had become an orphan without a history. – "An Orphan in History," Paul Cowan (Saul Cohen)

Listen to Paul Cowan: a "fourth generation" Jew who later discovered how to ask and became Jewishly involved. Does his story speak to any of you? Why did the rift develop within the chain of tradition? Can you offer any ports of reentry into Jewish life in which a dialogue between the individual and the resources of the past can begin? Can you imagine what the fifth generation will be like?

## The Four Children

We are always proud, forever  
speaking of the wise one, the wise child.  
What about the bad one (recalling, of course,  
Father Flanagan's "There's no such thing as a bad kid")?

If we have none of those, why are so many rabbis  
making rounds in the Big Houses across our fair land?

Who are these ghosts in the minimum,  
medium, and maximum prisons? Figments?  
(We had our Uncle Simcha who hid out  
with Grandpa for a few weeks. I think it was  
Prohibition and he was mixed up with some,  
shall we say, undesirable fellows.)

Now comes the hard part, the special two -  
"simple" and "unable-to-ask."  
You may say "simple" means nice or "easygoing,"  
the kid who likes everything, is happy, and  
makes no demands. It's the one you refer to  
now that he or she is grown up when you say,  
"Joe (or Nancy) was an easy child." All right, then -  
that's three out of four. But that still leaves  
"the one who doesn't know how to ask."

I think the pictures in the Haggadah are wrong,  
painting children so small.

They shift; they mislead. It doesn't mean:  
"so young they can't formulate the words."  
It means . . . We know what it means.  
And if we just say it, with the pride of the first,  
maybe this year more can come out of their hiding places.

- Danny Siegel

Rabbi Israel Salanter (19th C., founder of the Musar Movement, Poland): “We have all the four children in each of us”

Activity: Identifying with all 4 children in us.

In the course of our lives or even in one day we often take on all 4 roles: wise (inquisitive, smart, etc.), wicked (rebellious, contemptuous, mischievous, cynical, etc.), simple (naive, bewildered, straightforward, etc.), not knowing how to ask (“clueless,” silent, introverted, bewildered, “spaced-out,” etc.).

Try to talk about a situation in which: “I feel like the (wise, wicked, simple, or silent) child, when I \_\_\_\_\_.”

### **P’tach (Parents for Teaching Torah to All Children)**

A new Jewish parents organization for learning disabled children calls itself “P’TACH” = Parents for Teaching Torah to All Children. The Hebrew word P’tach” = “open” is borrowed from the Haggadah’s recommendation that parents try to “open up” the silent fourth child, to elicit questions and communication. Consider their advertisement which redefines the usual characterization of the fourth child. Perhaps participants at the seder can contribute to the discussion about ways to teach this child.

Experts Say:

- Dyslexic
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Hyperactive

P’tach Says:

We can help you!

Teachers Say:

- Unmotivated
- Uncooperative
- A Behavior Problem

P’tach Says:

We believe in you!

Parents Say:

- Difficult
- Frustrating
- Disobedient

P’tach Says:

Don’t give up!

The Kids Say:

- What a dummy!

P’tach Says:

You can do it!

The Child Says:

- I’m just plain stoopid!

P’tach Says:

We will help you open up to learning!