

Whichever son you are, the Torah is out to get you

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This is the first time the Torah is mentioned in the Hagaddah. What role does the Torah play in moving us forward? The word used here, *k'neged*, really means something like 'against'. It contains echoes of Eve's relationship to Adam: *ezer k'negdo*, a helper 'against' him. The Hebrew then translates literally as 'The Torah speaks against four sons.'

Our relationship to Torah is complex, with many facets. One essential and often overlooked component is how the Torah is meant to agitate us. Wherever we are holding—wise or wicked, simple or silent—the Torah nudges us forward.

And our capacity to hear this overtone of the Torah corresponds directly to our willingness to grow. Do we wish to be confirmed in what we already are/do/think, or are we hoping to be pushed toward maximizing our experience of, and impact on, this fleeting world? **This is a good moment to notice our initial reaction to the following statement: The Torah can be a positive force in moving my life toward ultimate freedom. And it might not always feel good.**

The Hagaddah helps us figure out how our particular personalities might need to clash with Torah. So, which child are you?

Are you, perhaps, the wise child, well-versed in the intricate laws of Pesach? Perhaps you could benefit, then, from knowing that we may not eat anything after the *afikoman* so that its flavor will stay with us—that, in the end, it is the flavor of the *afikoman*, and not the laws, that stays with us. This may deepen your sense of where understanding ends and experience begins.

Are you the wicked child, insisting that this is meaningless, removing yourself from the collective 'we'? Then you are a dynamic and complex bearer of important questions coupled with a bad attitude, and you will have to see what you are missing. We will have to show—not just tell—you what it is like to be truly free, so that you can see your own accusations of hypocrisy as ill-founded. Our response to you is *not* wagging a finger. It is showing you what you are missing (with a hidden back-door invitation to rejoin us).

The simple child asks, simply, 'What is this?' She might benefit from knowing that life is complex, and that these rituals we use are bottomless in depth. 'With a strong hand Hashem took us out of Egypt'—the Chatam Sofer writes that the strong hand was needed to counteract our resistance to leaving. Why wouldn't we want to leave? Perhaps the simple child will benefit from a touch of deepening.

And the one who doesn't know how to ask—we will not leave you in silence. We will draw you into conversation, by whatever means necessary. We will entertain you, prod you, and shock you until you do ask. We want you to be a part of our special night.

We want everyone to be a part of the conversation, to contribute what they can in a constructive way. If you are wise with experience, we want to access your

knowledge, but not your arrogance. If you are skeptical, we need your questions and insights, but constructively. If you are simple, we value your simplicity, but we wish to add depth and nuance to that simplicity. And if you do not know how to ask, we want to teach you how to ask so that your particular contribution can emerge.

So, which one are you this year? Same one as last year? Are you ready to be challenged? How does the Torah challenge you most? How do you react to the challenge?