

Four Children, Four Attitudes

Contributed by [Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights](#)

Source: Rabbi Gilah Langner, T'ruah

Our tradition speaks of four children or four attitudes: the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child, and the one who does not know how to ask. Each child has a different reaction to hearing about slavery. . .

What does the wise child say? "What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws that apply to this situation? How are we to discern what God demands of us?" You are to answer this child: "God brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage that we may understand the heart of those suffering in slavery, and use all our powers to redeem them."

What does the wicked child say? "What does all this work have to do with you?" Notice: "you," not him or her. The wicked child stays far removed from suffering, and thus has lost the essence of our teachings. You might ask this child: "If you had been in Egypt, would you have been redeemed? And if you do not lift a finger now, who will redeem those who languish in slavery?"

The simple child asks: "What's this all about?" You should teach this child: God brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand, out of the affliction of slavery. So we must use our strength to abolish slavery around the world. We cannot stop our work until there are no longer any slaves, anywhere.

The child who does not know to ask, you must open his or her eyes to what is going on. For today, there are 27 million people living in slavery, and over 8 million of them are children. Surely this is one reason God took our people out of Egypt long ago – so that we might understand what slavery is like, and help free all those who remain enslaved.

And Egyptians made the Hebrews lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick... Exodus 1:14

Brick Making in Pakistan: A Vignette

Since the 1960s, an estimated 750,000 landless Muslim peasants have hand molded hundreds of millions of mud bricks each year in Pakistan. The bricks are fired in some 7,000 vast but primitive kilns spread throughout the country.

With no other hope for sustenance, desperate families drift to kilns where they borrow money to buy food and tools from the owners. On a good day, a family will mold about fourteen hundred bricks for which they are paid two dollars. But their debts keep growing because kiln owners undercount the number of bricks produced, inflate the debt, and charge exorbitant prices for food and clothing.

Impoverished families, including young children, work as a unit. Without putting their children to work, these families would sink even deeper in debt. Even so, most families incur debts they will never earn enough to repay. If kiln owners suspect that a family may be planning to run away, they take a child to another location as a hostage.

According to one former kiln owner, "to intimidate brick makers, the owner just comes along and smashes all the freshly made raw bricks, a whole day's work, for no reason. If a young worker lifts his head or causes trouble, they will put his leg in the kiln oven for a second to burn it. This is common and brick makers are forced to watch." When a parent dies, the children inherit their mother's or father's debts, assuring another generation of bonded brick makers.

David Arnow, PhD

Author of Creating Lively Passover Seders www.livelyseders.com

Co-editor My People's Passover Haggadah both published by and available from www.jewishlights.com

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