

A Meditation on the Four Children

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Source:

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by Rabbi Brant Rosen

As Jews, how do we respond when we hear the tragic news regularly coming out of Israel/Palestine? How do we respond to reports of checkpoints and walls, of home demolitions and evictions, of blockades and military incursions?

It might well be said that there are four very different children deep inside each of us, each reacting in his or her own characteristic way. The **Fearful Child** is marked by the trauma of the Shoah and believes that to be a Jew means to be forever vulnerable. While he may be willing to accept that we live in an age of relative Jewish privilege and power, in his heart he feels that all of these freedoms could easily be taken away in the blink of an eye. To the Fearful Child, Israel represents Jewish empowerment – the only place in the world that can ensure the collective safety of the Jewish people.

The **Bitter** Child channels her Jewish fears into demonization of the other. This child chooses to view anti-Semitism as the most eternal and pernicious of all forms of hatred and considers all those “outside the tribe” to be real or potential enemies. She believes that Palestinians fundamentally despise Jews and will never tolerate their presence in the land – and that brute force is the only language they will ever understand.

The **Silent** Child is overwhelmed with the myriad of claims, histories, narratives and analyses that emerge from Israel/Palestine. While he dreams of a day in which both peoples will live in peace, he is unable to sift through all that he hears and determine how he might help bring that day about. At his most despairing moments, he doesn't believe a just peace between these two peoples will ever be possible. And so he directs his Jewish conscience toward other causes and concerns – paralyzed by the “complexities” of this particular conflict.

The **Courageous Child** is willing to admit the painful truth that this historically persecuted people has now become a persecutor. This child understands and empathizes with the emotions of the other children all too well – in truth, she still experiences them from time to time. In the end, however, the Courageous Child refuses to live a life defined by immobilized by fear, bitterness or complacency. She understands it is her sacred duty to stand in solidarity with all who are oppressed, particularly when she herself is implicated in that oppression.

At one time or another we have heard within ourselves the voices of any or all of these children. How will we respond to them?