

The Torah speaks of four children

Contributed by [Pardes](#).

Source: Dr. David I. Bernstein in <http://elmad.pardes.org/2016/04/the-pardes-companion-to-the-haggadah/>

Perhaps no other portion of the haggadah can open up discussion like the section of the four children.

There are many learned interpretations to go to that analyze this part of the haggadah. However while the seder should include learned divrei Torah (words of Torah), it should primarily consist of questions. The Magid section models this for us, beginning with the four questions in Ma Nishtana and moving on to our section. Note that three of the four children ask a question about what we are doing at the seder, and the fourth is the one described as “unable to ask.” The haggadah is instructing us about how a seder should be run, in fine Socratic form: asking and eliciting questions. Sometimes the answers are prescribed; sometimes not.

I would like to suggest four questions (in keeping with the night’s recurring theme of four) to ask at this point in the seder. If you are leading the seder, of course you will ask questions; but if you are not, don’t be the fourth child! Feel free to ask questions, too.

Every seder is different, even in the same family, changing as our children are born and grow. Some of the questions below will be appropriate for one kind of seder, and not for another. Do not feel bound to ask all of them, and do feel free to ask your own!

1. In his haggadah, David Moss illustrates this section with four playing cards, and writes that our children are like a set of cards dealt to us. (Full disclosure: David is a friend and a former Pardes board member.) Do you think that is true? To what extent are children “dealt to us,” and to what extent do we shape/form them?
2. The haggadah divides children into these four categories: wise, wicked, simple, and one who is unable to ask. Why these categories? Can you think of others that do not appear here? If you were writing the haggadah, which four categories would you choose? Which questions might they ask?
3. Do the questions of the haggadah’s four children fit the description of the personalities? If not, how can we understand the rabbis’ decision to choose each question for each personality?
4. Who am I among these four children? Could I be in a different category? What would it be?

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