

The Four Children

Contributed by [Religious Action Center](#)

Source: Earth Justice Seder

We often talk at the seder about the Four Children: the Wise, Wicked, Simple, and the One Who Does Not Know How to Ask. We see a little of ourselves in each child as we discuss their place in the seder and how we explain to them the story of Passover. Do we tell them that we were there together at Sinai, including them in our legacy, or do we exclude them and criticize their apathy?

This year, as we consider Passover's Four Children around the seder table, let us discover and discuss the tension between our Jewish community's obligation to "till and tend" the earth as God told humankind in the Garden of Eden, and the spectrum of beliefs that many may hold about climate change.

The Wise Child:

This child knows that climate change is real and that they must act to combat its effects. The Wise Child has read that global temperatures and sea levels are rising every year, that more species are becoming endangered, and that more communities are experiencing extreme weather events and decreased crop viability. The Wise Child sees all this and is motivated to combat climate change in any way they can.

The Wicked Child:

The Wicked Child has read about climate change and is aware that scientists predict a whole range of negative effects if we don't reduce global carbon emissions. But the Wicked Child doesn't think the issues caused by climate change apply to them. They believe climate change will only affect the poor and the vulnerable in places they will never visit. They remain unconcerned.

The Simple Child:

The Simple Child is overwhelmed by the idea that humankind could be radically altering the entire face of the earth. They don't believe it's possible that scientific predictions are accurate. This child simply ignores the evidence that the problem is real at all.

The One Who Does Not Know How to Ask:

This child is much more like The Wise Child than we may typically imagine. The One Who Does Not Know How to Ask has also read about climate change and knows that environmental degradation and the effects on the global population are a real and present threat. Unlike The Wise Child and much more like the Simple Child, this child is overwhelmed. How is this possible? This child might ask, How can I, alone, prevent this global catastrophe?

Just as we are like and unlike each of the Four Children of the Passover seder that we discuss every year, we each have in us elements of the Four Children of climate change. We all have some awareness that climate change is an issue, but may be able to face its gravity differently, and may or may not acknowledge to ourselves the relationship between our action and carbon emissions.

There is an answer for each of these children. We can look to The Wise Child and ask them to be a leader in their community and congregation, spearheading environmental initiatives like recycling, composting, and energy efficiency. We can tell the The One Who Does Not Know How to Ask to follow the Wise Child and learn about work they can do in their synagogue or even their home and the small changes they can make in their life like changing their light bulbs to LEDs or CFLs or cooking at home to reduce their personal

emissions. To the Wicked Child and to the Simple Child, we have to show the growing body of evidence that climate change is real and is affecting not just the poorest and vulnerable among us, but will reverberate through all communities as its impacts grow.

Perhaps, over the course of this Passover, as we move past this seder table, we can consider these Four Children as we encounter them in our lives and work together, both to acknowledge that climate change is real and learn how to prevent the worst predicted effects.

{ GREENING TIP }

Switch your light bulbs to LEDs and CFLs to reduce your energy consumption.

For more information on the environmental justice, please visit rac.org/enviro.

For all Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism resources, please visit rac.org/Passover.