

The Four Adults

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Source: Love and Justice Haggadah, compiled and created by Dara Silverman and Micah Bazant

It is a tradition at the Seder to include a section entitled "the Four Children." We have turned it upside down, to remind us that as adults we have a lot to learn from youth. From the U.S. to South Africa to Palestine, young people have been, and are, at the forefront of most of the social justice movements on this planet. If there is a mix of ages of people at your seder, perhaps some of the older people would like to practice asking questions, and the younger folks would like to respond:

The Angry Adult – Violent and oppressive things are happening to me, the people I love and people I don't even know. Why can't we make the people in power hurt the way we are all hurting? Hatred and violence can never overcome hatred and violence. Only love and compassion can transform our world.

Cambodian Buddhist monk Maha Ghosananda, whose family was killed by the Khmer Rouge, has written it is a law of the universe that retaliation, hatred, and revenge only continue the cycle and never stop it. Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but means rather that we use love in all our negotiations. It means that we see ourselves in the opponent – for what is the opponent but a being in ignorance, and we ourselves are also ignorant of many things. Therefore, only loving kindness and right-mindedness can free us.

The Ashamed Adult – I'm so ashamed of what my people are doing that I have no way of dealing with it?!? We must acknowledge our feelings of guilt, shame and disappointment, while ultimately using the fire of injustice to fuel us in working for change. We must also remember the amazing people in all cultures, who are working to dismantle oppression together everyday.

Marianne Williamson said: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually who are you not to be? You are a child of G-d. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of G-d that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

The Fearful Adult – Why should I care about 'those people' when they don't care about me? If I share what I have, there won't be enough and I will end up suffering. We must challenge the sense of scarcity that we have learned from capitalism and our histories of oppression. If we change the way food, housing, education, and resources are distributed, we could all have enough.

Martin Luther King said: It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.

The Compassionate Adult – How can I struggle for justice with an open heart? How can we live in a way that builds the world we want to live in, without losing hope? This is the question that we answer with our lives.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy. And yet being alive is no answer to the problems of living. To be or not to be is not the question. The vital question is: how to be and how not to be...to pray is to recollect passionately the perpetual urgency of this vital question.

Anne Frank wrote: It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all of my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too; I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out."

Each of us bears in our own belly the angry one, the ashamed one, the frightened one, the compassionate one. Which of these children shall we bring to birth? Only if we can deeply hear all four of them can we truthfully answer the fourth question. Only if we can deeply hear all four of them can we bring to birth a child, a people that is truly wise.

Love and Justice in Times of War Haggadah.

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