

TRADITIONAL

The Four Children

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Source: Telling the Story: A Passover Haggadah Explained

Four times the Torah commands us to tell our children about the Exodus from Egypt and because of this, traditional Haggadot speak of four kinds of sons. The Hebrew word for “children” is the same word as “sons” and either can be used. Our sages teach that perhaps there is really a part of each of the four children in us all.

The wise child questions, “What is the meaning of the laws and observances which the Lord, our God, has commanded you?” In response to this child we explain the observances of the Passover in-depth.

The scornful child questions, “What does this service mean to you?” This child says “to you” and does not feel a part of our observances. By excluding God — and himself, this child would not have been redeemed had he or she been in Egypt. We ask this child to listen closely and become part of our traditions and learn what the Seder means.

The simple child questions, “What is this ceremony about?” We say, “We are remembering a time long ago when we were forced to work as slaves. God made us a free people and we are celebrating our freedom.” We hope by observing the Seder year after year, this child will come to appreciate the message of the Passover holiday.

The innocent child doesn’t think to question. To this child we say, “In the spring of every year we remember how we were brought out of slavery to freedom.”

Some rabbis remind us that there is also a fifth child... the one who is not at this table. This is the person who should be with us, but is not... and we mark his absence.