

The Passover Seder's Four Children and LGBTQ+ Inclusion: Moving Toward Full Hospitality

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by Rabbi Dara Lithwick

Every year in the [Passover](#) Haggadah, we read, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” These words have taken on deep meaning for me as I came out of the closet, got married, and had kids of my own: Our freedom and redemption are founded on being inclusive and welcoming.

[The story of the Exodus from Egypt](#) is so axiomatic in the Jewish tradition that the [Torah](#) commands us to tell it to our children *four* times (Exodus 12:26, 13:8, 13:14, and Deuteronomy 6:20). According to the rabbinic tradition, we must tell it in ways that can be understood by those asking the questions.

The rabbis explained that the four Biblical passages referred to four kinds of children (or four qualities that we all possess): one wise, one contrary, one simple, and one who does not know what to ask. This way, the Torah encourages us to find out how to connect and engage with each other and recognize the holiness in all of us.

This Passover, I offer the model of the [Four Children](#) to teach about LGBTQ inclusion. By sharing these perspectives, I hope we can make our seder tables – and our communities – ever more welcoming and free.

THE WISE CHILD

The wise child is thirsty for guidance. They might ask: “What has God commanded of us?” “How can I be a better ally and friend?” “How can I celebrate you and help ensure that our laws and policies and spaces are LGBTQ inclusive?”

We can teach this child a [summary of Canadian pride milestones](#) throughout the past 50 years and tell them about [LGBT milestones in the United States](#) dating back to 1924. We can encourage them to lead in synagogues and communities to ensure that forms, policies, language, and ritual are inclusive of sexuality and gender diversity.

THE CONTRARY CHILD

The contrary child does not see any need to ensure that LGBTQ people belong in our communities. They might ask: “Why should I do this for you?”

Those of us who value inclusion may initially feel inclined to exclude the contrary child. Including them as one of the Four Children, though, suggests that they are not fundamentally bad – simply ignorant.

We can remind them of a fundamental teaching in Torah:

“You shall not wrong nor oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:20).”

The Torah emphasizes the import of protecting the stranger at least 36 times, as well as to love them:

“The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers

in the land of Egypt: I am the Eternal your God.” (Leviticus 19:34).

When I first came out, my parents did not understand what they called my “lifestyle,” nor did they accept it. They wondered whether I would be able to build a family and have children, and they worried that I would face discrimination. It took them time (and some anguish) to appreciate and understand why being true to myself was so fundamental. Thankfully, in time – with open hearts and our rabbi’s help – they came around and transitioned from “contrary” to “wise” and, ultimately, supportive.

THE SIMPLE CHILD

The simple child wants to know where to begin. This individual might ask: “What is this about?” To them, we can quote the following:

“V’ahavta l’rei-acha kamocho.”

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18)

These words of Torah are a reminder that all of us deserve to be loved – after all, there is no caveat in this law that says your neighbor is deserving of love only if they are a certain type of person.

Another great starting point is to teach basic terms and concepts. To quote the [Union for Reform Judaism’s LGBTQ Educational Resource Module](#):

“Knowing LGBTQ terms and vocabulary can help you and your community understand the landscape of gender, biological sex, and sexual orientation, which can assist you in being inclusive of all people...It is always best to ask someone how they identify and to ask them to clarify what that identity means to them.”

THE CHILD WHO DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK

There are those who don’t even know how to ask.

We can tell them that we are all created *b’tzelem Elohim* (in God’s image), that we are all deserving of respect and kindness and this diversity is part of God’s gift to us as humans.

THE FIFTH CHILD

Finally, we can imagine a fifth child – one who isn’t even at the seder table because they don’t think that they belong.

This fifth child may feel lost; they may not be able to see how to reconcile their LGBTQ identity with their Jewish upbringing. We must make every effort to reach the fifth child, to live the words in the Haggadah, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” We must keep our hearts and our homes open so they can feel welcome and included at our Seder tables.

In the words of Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism:

“Audacious hospitality isn’t just a temporary act of kindness so people don’t feel excluded. It’s an ongoing invitation to be part of community – and a way to transform ourselves spiritually in the process.”

And let us say: Amen.

Here’s wishing meaningful, hospitable, and inclusive Passover seders to you and yours. *Chag sameach!*

Visit the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism’s [LGBTQ+ equality page](#) for more resources and action items.