



THE FOUR CHILDREN

Thus the story of the Exodus was told and retold, from generation to generation; parents would tell the story to their children, so that they, in turn, might tell it to their children. But, as the ancient rabbis knew, children are different from one another. And so, they spoke of four kinds of children and how to respond most effectively to each one.

The rabbis found in the Torah four versions of the command to tell the story of the Exodus to our children. From this, they inferred that there were four kinds of children, four different ways of responding to our Jewish heritage.

THE FIRST KIND OF CHILD IS THE WISE CHILD.

The wise child loves Passover and is eager to celebrate the holiday. This child asks, “What are the decrees, the statutes, and the laws that the Eternal One our God has commanded concerning Passover?” (Deuteronomy 6:20) Teach this child the customs and rituals of the festival. Reveal their beauty, not only as beloved traditions but also as the symbols of a noble ideal—the ideal of freedom for all people.

חֲכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר: מָה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים
וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶתְכֶם:
(דברים ו ב) וְאִם אַתָּה אֹמֵר לּוֹ כְּהִלְכוֹת
הַפֶּסַח: אֵין מִפְטִירִין אַחַר הַפֶּסַח אֶפִיקוּמָן:

ANOTHER KIND OF CHILD IS THE IRREVERENT CHILD.

The irreverent child is scornful, detached from the celebration and the community. This child asks, "What does this service mean to *you*?" speaking as an outsider. (Exodus 12:26) Scold this child saying, "It is because of what God did for me when I went out of Egypt." (Exodus 15:8) For me; not for you; for a commitment to the community must be made before enjoying the blessings bestowed upon the community. Because you set yourself apart from the Jewish people, you would not have made the journey from slavery to freedom."

רָשַׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר: מָה הָעֶבֶדָה הַזֹּאת
לָכֶם: (שְׁמוֹת י"ב כ"ו) לָכֶם וְלֹא לּוֹ. וּלְפִי
שֶׁהוֹצִיא אֶת-עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכֶּלֶל כְּפָר בְּעֵקֶר.
וְאִם אַתָּה הִקְהֵה אֶת-שָׁנָיו וְאָמַר-לוֹ: בְּעִבּוֹר
זֶה עָשָׂה יי לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם: (שְׁמוֹת י"ג ח)
לִי וְלֹא לּוֹ. אֱלוֹ הָיָה שָׁם, לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל:

THE THIRD KIND OF CHILD IS THE SIMPLE CHILD.

The simple child is naïve and innocent, and very shy. This child would like to know what Passover means but cannot formulate sophisticated questions. The simple child asks, "What is this all about?" (Exodus 13:14) Reassure this youngster, "With a strong hand, God brought us forth from Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

תָּם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר: מַה-זֹּאת, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו,
בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יי מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית
עֲבָדִים: (שְׁמוֹת י"ג י"ד)

AND THE FOURTH KIND OF CHILD IS THE ONE WHO DOES NOT REALIZE THAT SOMETHING UNUSUAL IS GOING ON.

Awaken this child saying, "This is because of what God did for me when I went forth from Egypt."

(Exodus 13:8)

וְשֵׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשֹׂאֵל אֶת פֶּתַח לוֹ. שְׂנֵאֵמֶר,
וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה
עָשָׂה יי לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם: (שמות י"ג ח)

The four children can be understood as four traits within each of us. If your portrait were drawn tonight, which child might it reflect? If a fifth child were added to the Haggadah, what trait might that child represent? What question might the fifth child ask?

