



Deep Dive: The Four Children

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THE FOUR CHILDREN IN THE HAGGADAH:

INTRO IN HAGGADAH TO THE FOUR CHILDREN

The Torah spoke corresponding to four children - one [who is] wise, one [who is] evil, one who is innocent and one who doesn't know to ask.

#1 - THE WISE CHILD

What does the wise one say? "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord our God commanded you?" (Deuteronomy 6:20)" And accordingly you will say to them, as per the laws of the Pesach sacrifice: "We may not eat an afikoman [a dessert or other foods eaten after the meal] after [we are finished eating] the Pesach sacrifice (Mishnah Pesachim 10:8)."

#2 - THE WICKED CHILD

What does the evil one say? "What is this worship to you?" (Exodus 12:26)" 'To you' and not 'to them.' And since they excluded themselves from the collective, they denied the essence [of the Jewish faith]. And accordingly, you will blunt their teeth and say to them, "For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for *me* in my going out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)." 'For me' and not 'for them.' If they had been there, they would not have been saved.

#3 - THE INNOCENT CHILD

What does the innocent one say? "What is this?" (Exodus 13:14)" And you will say to them: "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.' (Exodus 13:14)."

#4 - THE CHILD WHO DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO ASK

And [regarding] the one who doesn't know to ask, you will open [the conversation] for them. As it is stated (Exodus 13:8): "And you will speak to your child on that day saying: 'for the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt.'"

BACK TO THE SOURCE: THE FOUR “QUESTIONS” IN THE TORAH:

1) Deuteronomy 6:17-24, The Wise Child

Be sure to keep the commandments, decrees, and laws that the Lord your God has enjoined upon you. Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you and that you may be able to possess the good land that the Lord your God promised on oath to your ancestors, and that all your enemies may be driven out before you, as the Lord has spoken. When, in time to come, your child asks you, “What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord our God commanded you?” you shall say to your children: “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. The Lord wrought before our eyes marvelous and destructive signs and portents in Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household; and God freed from there, that God might take us and give us the land that God had promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these laws, to revere the Lord our God, for our lasting good and for our survival, as is now the case.

2) Exodus 12:21-27, The Wicked Child

Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them: “Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians, God will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home. You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. And when you enter the land that the Lord will give you, as God has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children ask you: ‘What is this worship to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, because God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.’”

3) Exodus 13:10-15, The Innocent Child

“And when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as God swore to you and to your ancestors, and has given it to you, you shall set apart for the Lord every first issue of the womb: every male firstling that your cattle drop shall be the Lord’s. But every firstling donkey you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born male among your children. And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What is this?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons.’”

4) Exodus 13:5-8, The Simple Child

So, when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which God swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice: “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the Lord. Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory. And you will speak to your child on that day saying: ‘for the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt.’”

FROM THE TORAH TO THE HAGGADAH:

1) Mishnah Pesachim 10:4

They mixed him a second cup, and here the son questions his father. If the son lacks the intelligence to ask, his father instructs him: "How different this night is from all other nights! On all other nights we eat hametz and matzah, tonight only matzah. On all other nights we eat other vegetables, tonight only bitter herbs. On all other nights, we eat meat roasted, boiled or cooked, tonight only roasted. On all other nights we dip once, tonight twice." And according to the intellect of the son, the father instructs him...

2) Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 115b

And one should remove the table only from before the one reciting the Haggadah... The Gemara asks: Why does one remove the table? The school of Rabbi Yannai say: So that the children will notice that something is unusual and they will ask: Why is this night different from all other nights? The Gemara relates: Abaye was sitting before Rabba when he was still a child. He saw that they were removing the table from before him, and he said to those removing it: We have not yet eaten, and you are taking the table away from us? Rabba said to him: You have exempted us from reciting the questions of: Why is this night different [ma nishtana], as you have already asked what is special about the seder night.

3) Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Leavened and Unleavened Bread 7:3

On the first night of Passover, one should introduce some change at the table, so that the children who will notice it may ask, saying: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

4) Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:14:1 (3rd Century CE)

What does the wise son say? "What mean the decrees, laws, and rules that the LORD our God has enjoined upon us?", you, likewise open to him in the Laws of Pesach, "[After eating] the Paschal lamb, one does not follow up with reveling (or 'dessert') (Mishnah Pesachim 10:8).

5) Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 70b (5th Century CE)

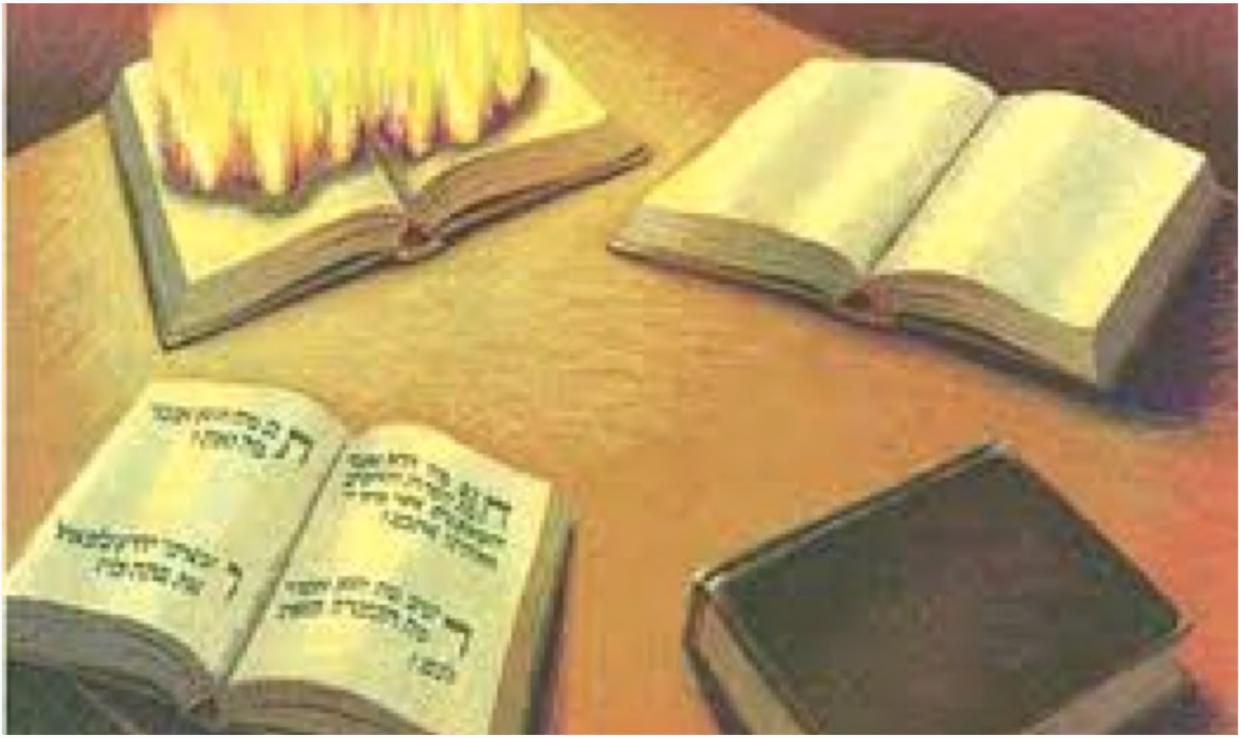
What does the wise child say? "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that the Lord our God commanded us?" (Deuteronomy 20:6)" And accordingly you will say to them: "It was with a mighty hand that the Lord brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage." (Ex. 13:14).

6) Jerusalem Talmud Pesachim 70b

What does the stupid one say? "What is this?" And accordingly you will teach him the laws of the Pesach sacrifice, that "We may not eat an afikoman [a dessert or other foods eaten after the meal] after [we are finished eating] the Pesach sacrifice (Mishnah Pesachim 10:8) so that a person should not get up from one eating group to another eating group.

VISUAL REPRESENTATIONS - TWO EXAMPLES:

1) The Four Children as Four Books: David Wander



2) Dan Reisinger: Four Aspects in Each of Us

