

The Four Children

The Four Children's original role in the Haggadah was to offer different perspectives on telling the story, but they also speak in any given year to the issues of the day. This year, they offer us multiple entry points into telling the story of the war in Israel and Gaza. The story is shaped by who is telling it: who are the heroes and the villains, where does it begin and end, and much more. The four children are distinct, individual people, and they are also aspects inside each of us. Let's pause to invite them in fully, as they are all integral members of the Jewish community and all important parts of our own psyches.



1. Wise Child

The traditional answer to the wise child includes every last detail of the laws of Passover.

- What does that tell you about how they understand “wisdom”? How might that apply to the current war?
- Do you have a different idea of what constitutes wisdom? What would you like to hear from the wise child about the war?

2. Wicked Child

The traditional explanation of what makes this child so “wicked” is that they are stuck in their own head and can't see others' perspectives; they ask derisively, “What does all this mean to you?” indicating it means nothing to them.

- What might that teach us this year about the challenges, and the value, of taking other people's perspectives seriously?
- What is the “wicked” child saying about this war? What values do you think motivate them?

3. Simple Child

The simple (or pure) child's question is, “What is this?”, which can be both very basic and deeply profound.

- What simple questions do you find yourself asking about this war? What profound questions do they lead you to?

4. Child who does not know how to ask

Who might be the child who does not know (how) to ask? How would you begin a conversation with them? What does their silence say?

Are there one or two of these children whom you feel the most affinity for, in this moment?

V'hi she'amda: In Every Generation

The short paragraph beginning “v'hi she'amda” in the middle of Magid, sometimes sung without much thought, covers generations of Jewish trauma, suffering, and fear in a few brief lines:

[God] has stood for our ancestors and for us; not [only] one [person or nation] has stood [against] us to destroy us, but rather in each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us, but the Holy Blessed One rescues us from their hand.

- How does reading these lines make you feel this year, in the wake of the war in Israel and Gaza? Is that different from how you might have felt in past years?

We want to build a Jewish community and identity that is not naive or willfully ignorant of real threats, but is also not primarily focused on a narrative of survival against a sea of enemies; there is so much more to being Jewish.

The end of Magid offers us a two-part suggestion:

1. Contrast “v'hi she'amda” to the more famous “b'chol dor vador” (“in every generation”):

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as if they left Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 13:8); “And you shall explain to your son on that day: For the sake of this, did the ETERNAL do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt.”

The distinction is subtle but powerful. *V'hi she'amda* emphasizes the threat and isolation faced by each generation; what it describes as “*b'chol dor vador*, in every generation” is the danger that leaves us powerless and reliant on God to save us.

This second paragraph similarly has us suffering (in Egypt), but what it describes as “*b'chol dor vador*, in every generation” is an obligation on us for how we see ourselves. It transforms us from an object into a subject with agency — and from that place of power, hopefully, we can have empathy and solidarity for other groups who experience oppression.

- How does this distinction feel for you?
- How would it change your perspective if you shifted from a mindset of *V'hi she'amda* to one of *b'chol dor vador*?

2. Look to the immediate next paragraph for spiritual guidance:

Therefore we are obligated to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, lavish, bless, raise high, and acclaim The ONE who made all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: bringing us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to [celebration of] a festival, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. And let us say a new song before [God], Halleluyah!

There are two emotional signposts here. In the first sentence, we are guided toward gratitude. In the second, gratitude builds into joyful singing (traditionally of the first two psalms of the Hallel service).

- How does this emotional guidance answer our (very real) fear?
- One could argue that *v'hi she'amda* is also about gratitude, but it lacks the second step of song. How or why is that step significant for you? step significant for you?

Next Year In Jerusalem:

Additional texts and visions for the end of your seder

- Let all who find the city holy, live in peace and freedom.
- Let all captives be free—crowned with joy everlasting. Let them attain joy and gladness (Isaiah 51:11).
- Let all who fight for justice, have the persistence of Moses, the voice of Aaron, and the initiative of Miriam.
- Let those envisioning a Jerusalem of peace, feel empowered to see their vision to fruition.
- Let Jerusalem live up to the vision of the prophets that nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they know war anymore (Isaiah 2:4).
- Let this holy place embody *tzelem elohim* (dignity of every human being).
- Let our souls not be shrouded in the plague of darkness.
- Let the stone the builders rejected become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22).
- Let the gates of justice open for all Israelis and Palestinians to experience collective freedom.
- Let those who spread evil be silenced (weekday *Amidah* prayer).
- Let all those in a place of narrowness, move to a place of expansiveness, from darkness to light, and from oppression to redemption (*Acheinu* prayer).
- Let us follow the lead of Standing Together, an Israeli organization mobilizing Jewish and Palestinian citizens to work together for a shared future. In their words, “while the minority who benefit from the status quo of occupation and economic inequality seek to keep us divided, we know that we — the majority — have far more in common than that which sets us apart.”
- Add your own

