

Four Children by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

The Torah speaks of Four Children:

One a lamden / Sharp Student, one a chossid / high Emotional Quotient, one a tamim / Good One and one she-ayn lo shum s'fekut u'b'eyot / One Who Does Not Doubt or Question.

The Sharp Student, [what do they say?]: (Deut 6:20) “[What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws] which YHVH our God has commanded you” and so you shall answer them according to the capacity of their sharpness of wit.

The High EQ one, [what do they say?]: (Exodus 12: 26) “[What is] this service to you?” So you will make an effort to reign in their longings, for they also want to be a part of the integrity and perfection that comes with meaningful rituals. If you are loving, then they will understand devekut / cleaving, and will get a taste of what it means to feel close to God.

The Good one, [what do they say?]: (Exodus 13:14) “What is this?” and so you shall bear witness to them from your own experience, that the Holy One is assisting you with ‘a strong hand’, to take you out and to take them out of Mitzrayim.

The One who does not question, you will feed them some maror / horseradish, so they will feel their friends’ troubles and so that compassion will be instilled in their heart.

The Four Daughters

The daughter in search of a usable past. Ma hi omeret? What does she say?

"Why didn't the Torah count women among the '600,000 men on foot, aside from children,' who came out of Egypt? And why did Moses say at Sinai, 'Go not near a woman,' addressing only men, as if preparation for Revelation was not meant for us, as well?"

Because she already understands that Jewish memory is essential to our identity, teach her that history is made by those who tell the tale. If Torah did not name and number women, it is up to her to fill the empty spaces of our holy texts.

And the daughter who wants to erase her difference. Ma hi omeret? What does she say?

"Why must you keep pushing your women's questions into every text? And why are these women's issues so important to you?"

"To you," and "not to me." Since she so easily forgets the struggles of her mothers and sisters, you must tell her the story of your own journey to the seder table and invite her to join you in thanking God for the blessing of being a Jewish woman.

And the daughter who does not know that she has a place at the table. Ma hi omeret? What does she say?

"What is this?"

Because she doesn't realize that her question is, in itself, a part of the seder tradition, teach her that the Haggadah is an extended conversation about liberation, and tell her that her insights and questions are also text.

And the daughter who asks no questions?

You must say to her, "Your question, when they come, will liberate you from Egypt. This is how it is and has always been with your mothers and grandmothers. From the moment Yocheved, Miriam and the midwives questioned Pharaoh's edict until today, every question we ask helps us leave Egypt farther behind."

(Tamara Cohen, Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, and Ronnie Horn)