

When the Four Children Aren't There to Ask Questions

Facilitator Guide

Based on the traditional “Four Children” of the Haggadah, and the ritual of the “Four Questions”, this unit provides suggestions for ways we might adopt the question-asking element of the Seder to provoke timely, thoughtful questions and discussion at our Seder this year.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

“The Four Children” section of the haggadah depicts a series of individuals who are trying to understand the Passover experience through the prism of their own perspectives. They each ask a question (except for the one who does not know how to ask), and we are told by the haggadah’s rabbinic narrator what to answer them. Of course, the Four Children’s questions (“What are the laws and statutes that God our Lord commanded you?” “What is this whole ritual to you anyway?” “What’s that?”) preceded the Four Children schema, as the questions all originate in the Torah itself, independent of their askers. But questions are the order of the seder night, and it is the children present who are envisioned asking them.

This year, many families will be missing their children, or their parents, or their siblings, or their cousins. Some of those individuals were murdered, some fell in battle, and some are still being held hostage in Gaza, for over 500 days.

So this year, at your seder, consider asking questions on their behalf, since they can’t do it themselves.

For deeper insights and further reading on “Why Is This Year Different From All Other Years?”, please see the Pardes Passover Guide on celebrating Passover post October 7th, [here](#).

Info For Facilitator



Info for the Facilitator:

The activities in this resource can be used either by an educator in preparation for Pesach (with students in a classroom or experiential educational setting) or by a Seder leader at the Seder itself.



Target Audience:

All ages, multi generational



Length Of Program:

Depends on the educational or Seder setting: Choose any or all of the activities and spend as long or as short as you see fit based on your participants and their needs and attention span.

LET'S EXPLORE

Below are a few suggestions for possible question-related activities that you could consider including in your Seder. These could also be adapted as a Pre-Pesach unit in a classroom setting which students could engage with in preparation for Pesach and bring home to their family Seders.

Activity 1:

- What sorts of questions do you think that the *Chacham* (the wise child), the *Rasha* (the wicked child), the *Tam* (the innocent child), and the *SheAino Yode'a Lish'ol* (the child who doesn't know how to ask) would each ask about the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza?

Put yourselves in the shoes of the specific children that the Haggadah depicts, and come up with questions you think are appropriate to their respective perspectives.

For example: The *Tam* (innocent child) might ask, "Why aren't the Red Cross going in to see the Israeli hostages? Why aren't the hostages getting the medicines their families sent them?"

Activity 2:

There are many different types of reactions that Jews are having to the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza.

- Give titles to four (or more) sorts of people, and name some questions they are asking about the war and the hostages.

For example: The Angry One might ask, "Why are we bowing to international pressure? Why do we care about what anyone else says? Why do we think the world will help us now? Nobody ever helped us before."

Activity 3:

Each hostage, each soldier, each of those murdered is or was an individual with his/her own specific lived experience and personal perspective. Use the [Everyone Counts website](#) as well as the personal [stories here](#) to learn about the backgrounds of four individuals, and in this case, ask a question or raise a discussion point about the Passover story on their behalf.*

* For "extra credit," you could learn about some of the individuals being memorialized by the Ot Hayim project (ot-hayim.co.il) with new Hebrew fonts created based on their handwriting, and type out questions or discussion points you are raising on their behalf in their specialized fonts.



Illustration: Sophia Vincent Guy.
[From the PJ Library Haggadah.](#)

TAKE ACTION!

Save a Seat at the Seder Table

Finally - just as many households are holding a spot for a hostage at their Shabbat table each week, many will be saving a seat at the table for a hostage who isn't free to celebrate Passover with their family this year. When we think about Elijah the Prophet joining each seder, with a cup of wine left aside for him, we see even more that setting a place for a specific hostage is appropriate to our tradition.

CLOSING INTENTION

When you sing "*Ha Lachma Anya*" (This Is the Bread of Affliction) at the beginning of your seder, and invite in all those who are hungry or in need, make sure to focus your most heartfelt invitation on the hostages still waiting to come home. Still awaited at home.



Written by Aviva Lauer, Chief Education and Educational Training Officer, Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, and Gottesman Family Director of the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators