
The Four Generations

Sybil Wolin

In four different passages, the Torah commands parents to tell the story of Passover to their children. The traditional Haggadah talks about four types of children, each with different questions and attitudes toward the seder. Tonight, as we share our table and our traditions with generations of family and friends, we have adapted the four types of children to four generations.

The voices of future generations whisper in our dreams. “What will I inherit? What will be my birthright?” Say to them, “For you, we will preserve the seder, the story of our people, and the wisdom of our fathers and our mothers.”

The children’s generation asks, “What is all of this worth? Why should I do it?” Say to the children, “We have taught you to question, and we are glad that you ask. If you are fully here—if you sing, and read, and drink, and eat with us tonight—the seder will be yours, and you will continue the process of re-creating us and our traditions in every generation.”

The parents’ generation says, “What is this worth? What has it done for us?” Tell this generation, “We remember a distant time when our people were slaves in Egypt. Tonight, we are celebrating because we have been freed. If we cherish our freedom, if we celebrate it and use it well, the seder will be a lasting gift to our children and our children’s children for all time.

And what about the grandparents who want to know, “What will remain?” To the grandparents’ question, you shall say, “All of this and more.”

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