



The Fifth Child

Passover Reflections 2019

At the center of the Pesach Hagaddah, embedded in the reply to the ‘child who does not know how to ask’ is the instruction: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (Exodus 13:8), *and you shall tell your child on this day*. This is the mitzvah of telling one’s child about the journey from slavery to the Promised Land.

But what if you feel as if you never made it to the Promised Land? What if you sit at the seder feeling enslaved, yearning to be free of your fertility struggles and family building challenges? What if you sit at the seder watching those around you tell the Exodus story to their wise, wicked, simple, and quiet children, longing so desperately for a child of your own? To whom can you tell this story of enslavement?

Perhaps this is the moment to invoke the *fifth* child. This fifth child is absent from the Hagaddah because this child is not yet wise, wicked, simple or quiet. This child has yet to be born and resides entirely in your heart and in your dreams. The fifth child reaches out to the heart’s of the seder guests, gently reminding them to be conscious of their fellow guests who can only dream of having a child to ask the Four Questions, or steal the Afikoman, or spill grape juice on the tablecloth. By including the fifth child, perhaps we can break free of some of the isolation experienced by those in the throes of fertility struggles and help them experience the seder as a night of freedom rather than another night of darkness.

Please consider including the following paragraph to seder:

The Yet to be Born Child - what does s/he say?

“Why is this journey so long? Why does the path seem so obscure and unending?”

With no real words to answer, you offer him/her understanding with a hug, a moment of quiet and the chance to express thoughts and feelings, for you both hold the truth that fertility journeys are עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה - brutal work.