

Why would this person not be redeemed? Could you imagine either God or Moses being so judgmental as to leave someone behind? What sin is so awful that it would cause one to deserve being left in Egypt?

No, the point is not that they would have abandoned the "wicked" child. This person who denies the community would have refused redemption! "What do you mean? Should I leave Egypt? How could they possibly mean *me* when they say 'Jew?' Or *Jude*. Or *Zhyd*." This refers to the Jews who denied their communal identity, or tried to hide themselves from reality. The World War I veteran who stayed in Germany until it was too late, sure that they would never harm a German hero. . . .

But it is not only freedom from political or religious repression that we refuse. Sometimes liberation from our own inner oppression is offered to us as a gift, and *still* we refuse to leave Egypt. *Arthur Green*

The wicked child is saying that we only have to think about Egypt; the rituals and *mitzvot* are unnecessary, since simply remembering the Exodus is enough. He does not understand that one must work for redemption and live in it afterwards, that intellectualizing is not enough.

*Michael Strassfeld*

חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֲקִים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים  
אֲשֶׁר צָנָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אוֹתָנוּ? וְאֵף אַתָּה אֹמֵר לּוֹ  
בְּהִלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח עַד: אֵין מִפְטִירִין בְּאֶכָּל אַחַר הָאֲפִיקוֹמָן.

What does the wise child ask? "What is the meaning of the decrees, laws, and rules that the Eternal One our God has commanded us?" (*Deuteronomy 6:20*). You should tell this child all the laws of Pesah down to the last detail, saying that nothing should be eaten after the *afikoman*.

**W**hat does it mean to be a wise child? It means to be fully engaged in the community, to know the limits of your understanding, to be able to search for the answers to that which you do not know. At different points in our lives, we have been this child—inquisitive, caring, eager to learn and to understand, willing to ask for information we do not have, hopeful that an answer can be found.

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֵבֶדְהָ הַזֹּאת לָכֶם? לָכֶם וְלֹא  
לוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׁהוֹצִיא אֶת־עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכָּלָל כְּפָר בְּעֶקֶר. וְאֵף  
אַתָּה הַקְּהֵה אֶת־שָׁנָיו וְאֹמֵר לּוֹ: בְּעֶבֶר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי  
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם. לִי וְלֹא לוֹ. אֵלוֹ הָיָה שָׁם, לֹא הָיָה נִגְאָל.

What does the wicked child ask? "What does this ritual mean to *you*?" (*Exodus 12:26*). To you and not to this child. Since this child withdraws from the community and denies God's role in the Exodus, challenge the child by replying, "This is done because of what the Eternal One did for me when I went out of Egypt." (*Exodus 13:8*). For me and not for you. Had you been there you would not have been redeemed.

**W**hat does it mean to be a wicked child? It means to stand apart from the community, to feel alienated and alone, depending only on yourself, to have little trust in the people around you to help you or answer your questions. At different points in our lives, we have been this child—detached, suspicious, challenging.

In order to make a clear distinction between the wise and wicked child, some rabbinic versions changed the quoted biblical text. "What is the meaning . . . that the Eternal One our God has commanded *you*?" has been changed in the Jerusalem Talmud to "commanded *us*."

*Michael Strassfeld*

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The tradition blames the wicked child because that child stands outside of the community. Do you agree? Why is it so bad to choose to stand apart? How should we respond to the "wicked" children among us? Should we give them space or shut them out? *Joy Levitt*

The wicked child might not be wicked at all; perhaps she is just expressing our doubts—what is the purpose of all this trouble you put yourself through at Pesah? Are you really working for freedom? Annoyed at someone who gives voice to our own fears, we react harshly to hide our feelings. The wicked child becomes our scapegoat. *Michael Strassfeld*