

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

In the Pesach Haggadah we just read about the four sons (four children would be actually more appropriate): the wise child, the wicked child, the simple child and the child that doesn't know how to ask.

Somehow the wicked child is the one that gets most of the attention. Books and articles have been written about the wicked child, fluctuating all the way between damnation and compassion.

Let's review what the wicked child says: "*Why do you do all these rituals?*" He says "*you*" as though he's not a part of this. By excluding himself from the rest of us, he's washing away the whole foundation.

As Rabbi Tzvi Freeman in his brilliant article: *The Wicked Son Redeemed - Who invited him anyway?* shows, the wicked child excludes himself/ herself from the community and we still include him/her in the Haggadah. In other words, although the wicked child gives up on us, we don't give up on him/her.

The question, however, is why? Again, paraphrasing Rabbi Tzvi Freeman, we have three matzot on the Pesach Plate, we could have also three children and not four.

The main answer to the question (perhaps the only convincing one) why we don't give up on the wicked child is because he/she is our child. I don't know many parents who give up on their children, perhaps because deep inside each of us, we know our children are not wicked.

The entire journey of the Passover seder can be seen as another opportunity to bring the disengaged children back, to engage them in a meaningful conversation, to help them connect emotionally if not intellectually, and to let them know we love them, and we are never going to give up on them.

The State of Israel is celebrating its first 75 years of existence. Since the Yom Kippur War, 50 years ago, I cannot think of a more challenging time for the State of Israel. Threatened by enemies from outside and by the lack of a cohesive vision from leaders on the inside, Israel struggles to make a case both in the international arena as well as with large numbers in the Jewish world.

And yet, when the disengaged child asks: "what is this land of yours?", when he or she tells us "I want nothing to do with it!", is when we need to redouble our efforts to bring them back, not by selling them a version of Middle East politics they can't or are not willing to listen to, but by reminding them with love and tender care, that Israel belongs to them as well, to all of us, with its challenges and problems, with its injustices and defects, even with occasionally corrupt and racist leaders.

We don't need to have all the answers. As a matter of fact, the only answer we need to have is that we care for each of our children, and we are not giving up on them. Not now, not ever.

Committing ourselves to a reality in which each of our diverse children sits around the table and is part of the conversation, is the best way to celebrate the State of Israel.

L'Chaim!

Rabbi Kogan