



The Fifth Child at the Seder

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One of the most familiar parts of the Passover Seder is the four sons/children. These children represent the different places in which people come to the Seder: knowing and wise; selfish (or wicked); simple (or not knowing); and the fourth is silent as he or she doesn't know what to ask and is just taking everything in. However, this breakdown doesn't include a fifth child missing from the Seder, whether we give voice to him or her or not. The fifth child is the child of potential: the child that those struggling with infertility are working to create or the child that almost was, but the pregnancy ended before its completion.

The biggest difference in the Passover Seder from other Jewish observances is that it isn't expected to occur in a synagogue within a large Jewish population. It occurs in homes across the world with families and friends gathering to retell the story. People come to this holiday in all different places and spaces in life: managing their own struggles whatever they might be. As 1 in 8 couples experience infertility and 1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss, it would be foolish to assume that someone struggling with these issues isn't attending a Seder with you. These struggles tend to be silent and invisible, especially within our holiday structure.

The idea of a fifth child is not a new one. In fact, the [Lubavitcher Rebbe](#) famously spoke about the fifth son of the Pesach Seder, but in doing so, was referring to Jews who had lost their faith and strayed from being Jewish. This idea has been one that my friend [Rabbi Uri Topolosky](#) has adopted and spoken about. He includes this fifth child at his Passover Seder, but not only as the child that has lost his or her Jewish way, but also as the child that is unformed and unable to physically be at the table.

Infertility and pregnancy loss are devastating experiences that are far too common and hidden. Giving them voice can be considered to be a great act of loving-kindness since many who struggle yearn to talk about it, but are unsure how others will respond. Many people attempt to say well-intentioned refrains such as, "Just relax, and you'll get pregnant;" "G-d only gives you what you can handle;" "This is part of G-d's plan for you" or "Why not adopt?" Hearing such advice often has the opposite effect. Rather than connecting, these comments make people who are on a fertility journey or grieving pregnancy loss want to retreat and isolate. It confirms that others aren't able to put themselves in their shoes or understand their pain, and reinforces the need to stay quiet about these experiences.

Including the "fifth child" at Seder reaffirms that families experiencing infertility or pregnancy losses are seen, not only by family and friends, but also by their religion. *** Look as suggestion below***

The story of Passover leads to the Jews wandering for 40 years in the desert, searching for the Land of Israel. This parallels the journey of a couple struggling to build their family: looking forward with hope, waiting for it to happen, potentially lots of false turns, wondering if or when their family will be complete, until (we pray) they reach their "promised land" of fulfilling the dream to parent. Whatever their Promised Land turns out to be, may they have a voice at the table. Let their hopes to tell the Passover story to their children be recognized.

In honor of this fifth child or for the many other reasons people may be missing from the Passover Table, considering asking a fifth question: who is missing from our Seder?