

Four Questions, and Answers

Contributed by [Ari Daigen](#)

Source:

(Adapted from Alida Liberman)

Traditionally, the youngest person present asks:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

1. On all other nights we eat either bread or matzah. Why, on this night, do we eat only matzah?
2. On all other nights we eat herbs of any kind. Why, on this night, do we eat maror, the bitter herb?
3. On all other nights, we do not dip our herbs even once. Why, on this night, do we dip them twice?
4. On all other nights, we eat sitting up. Why, on this night, do we eat while reclining?

A different guest readers each ANSWER:

1. MATZAH:

Matzah is the symbol of our affliction and our freedom. Legend has it that when Moses and his followers fled Egypt, they moved so quickly that the bread they baked did not have time to rise. *[Scholars have noted that long before the Jews celebrated Passover, farmers of the Middle East celebrated Khag Ha-matsot, the festival of unleavened bread, at this time of year.]*

2. MAROR

Tradition says that we eat the bitter herb to remind us of the bitterness of our slavery. We force ourselves to taste pain so that we may more readily value pleasure. *[Scholars inform us that bitter herbs were eaten at the Spring festival in ancient times.]*

3. DIPPING

Tonight we dip herbs twice--greens into salt water, and maror into charoset. The greens remind us that it is springtime, and new life will grow; while the salt water reminds us of the tears we cried when we were slaves in Egypt. We dip the bitter herb, maror, into the sweet charoset to show us that our ancestors withstood the bitterness of slavery because it was sweetened by the hope of freedom.

4. RECLINING

In ancient times, slaves ate hurriedly, standing or squatting on the ground. To recline at the table was the mark of a free person. As a sign of our freedom, we lean and relax as we eat and drink.

MORE QUESTIONS:

Reader: We have answered the four traditional questions, but the special foods on our Seder plate leave us with more questions: what is the meaning of the charoset, the roasted shank bone (z'ro-ah), the roasted egg (baytsa), and the orange?

A different guest reads each answer:

Charoset: As well as being sweet, the appearance of the charoset reminds us of the bricks and mortar that the Israelites are said to have made when they built the Pharaohs' palaces and cities.

Shank bone: The bone represents the lamb that was the special Paschal sacrifice on the eve of the exodus from Egypt. It is called the pesach, from the Hebrew word meaning “to pass over,” because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt when visiting plagues upon our oppressors.

Egg: The egg represents new life.

Orange: For thousands of years, an orange had no place on a seder plate, just as some people—such as gay people, and women—found at most a limited place in Jewish life. We now place an orange on the seder plate to show that Jewish life, and indeed our entire society, is more fruitful when all are welcome to fully contribute.