

What's So Special About Passover?

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Source: Adaptation by Brandi Ullian

WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS?

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Asking questions is a core tradition in Jewish life, and the formal telling of the story of Passover is framed as a discussion with lots of questions and answers. The rabbis who created the set format for the Seder gave us these Four (or, technically, five) Questions to help break the ice:

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות

Ma Neeshtana ha-laila ha-zeh meekol ha-laylot?

Why is this night different from all other nights of the year?

Because on this night, we celebrate one of the most important times in the history of humanity, when we went forth from slavery to freedom.

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה הלילה הזה קלו מצה

Sheh-bichol ha-laylot anoo ochleem chametz oo-matzoh. Halailah hazeh chametz oomatz?

On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread. Why on this night do we eat only matzoh?

We eat the matzoh for two reasons: first, to remember the bread of affliction we had to eat when we were slaves and second, to remember how our ancestors fled from Egypt in such a hurry that they did not have time for their bread dough to rise.

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר

Sheh-bi'chol ha-laylot anoo ochleem sheh-ar yerakot. Ha-lailah hazeh maror?

On all other nights, we eat vegetables of all kinds. Why on this night must we eat bitter herbs?

We eat them to remind ourselves of how our ancestors' lives were bitter as slaves in Egypt.

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מְטַבִּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פְּעַם אַחַת הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים

Sheh-bi'chol ha-laylot ayn anoo mat-bee- leen afeeloo pa-am echad. Ha-laila hazeh sh'tay pi-ameem?

On all other nights, we do not dip vegetables even once. Why on this night do we dip greens into salt water twice, and bitter herbs into sweet charoset?

We dip karpas in salt water to remember the salty tears of the slaves, and also to remember how we crossed the salty waters of the sea. We also dip the maror in the charoset to remember how the bitterness of our slavery was made sweet by the hope for our freedom.

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין מְסַבִּין. הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה קָלְנוּ מְסַבִּין

Sheh- bi'chol ha-laylot anoo ochleem bayn yoshveen oo-bayn misoobeen. Ha-laila hazeh koolanoo misooveen?

On all other nights, everyone sits up straight at the table. Why on this night do we recline and eat at leisure?

We recline tonight as a symbol of our freedom, for when we were slaves we could never recline in comfort.