

The Four Questions

Contributed by [Laura Craig Mason](#)

Source: Freedom and Justice Seder 2012/5768

Reader: In the Seder, it is traditional that the youngest child who is able to ask recites the four questions. While we include the youngest to engage them, they also engage us. The “whys” of the innocent compel us to answer truthfully, not only about past injustices but about the inhumanity and inequity in our own world as well.

During Maggid every year, we retell and teach to our children the story of our freedom and the fulfillment of promises made to the Jewish people. In remembering our own liberation, we commit to work toward the liberation of those who remain oppressed.

Find the youngest attendee(s) to recite:

Mah nishtanah ha-lahylah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-layloht, mi-kol ha-layloht?

Why is this night different from all other nights, from all other nights?

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin chameytz u-matzah, chameytz u-matzah. Halahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, kooloh matzah.

On all other nights, we may eat chametz and matzah, chametz and matzah. On this night, on this night, only matzah.

Reader: When we were slaves in Egypt, our mothers in their flight from bondage in Egypt did not have time to let the dough rise. In memory of this, we eat only matzah, not bread, during Passover. We remember those who make our bread. This matzah represents our rush to freedom. We remember those who have been forced from their homes.

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin sh'ar y'rakot, sh'ar y'rakot. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, maror.

On all other nights, we eat many vegetables, many vegetables. On this night, on this night, maror.

Reader: We eat maror, the bitter herbs, to remind us how bitter our ancestors' lives were made by their enslavement in Egypt. We remember workers who face workplace abuses and indignities. We eat the bitter herbs to make us mindful of the bitter struggle that so many immigrants face today, and in solidarity commit to ending these injustices.

She-b'khol ha-layloht ayn anu mat'bilin afilu pa'am echat, afilu pa'am echat.

Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, sh'tay p'amim.

On all other nights, we do not dip even once. On this night, on this night, twice.

Reader: The first time, we dip our greens in salt water to taste the bitterness of enslavement. We also dip to remind ourselves of all life and growth, of earth and sea, which gives us sustenance and comes to life again in springtime. The second time, we dip the maror into the charoset. The charoset reminds us of the mortar that our ancestors mixed as slaves in Egypt, just as today, immigrants work in unsafe conditions for unjust wages. Our charoset is made from fruit and nuts, to show us that our ancestors were able to withstand the bitterness of slavery because it was sweetened by the hope of freedom. It is this shared hope that unites us here today.

She-b'khol ha-layloht anu okhlin bayn yosh'bin u'vayn m'soobin, bayn yosh'bin u'vayn m'soobin. Ha-lahylah ha-zeh, ha-lahylah ha-zeh, koolanu m'soobin.

On all other nights, we eat either sitting or reclining, either sitting or reclining. On this night, on this night, we all recline.

Reader: Avadot hayinu. We were slaves. Long ago, the wealthy Romans rested on couches during their feasts. Slaves were not allowed to rest, even while they ate. We recline today as a celebration of our freedom and to remind ourselves that we, like our ancestors, can overcome bondage in our own time. We recline to remind ourselves that rest and rejuvenation are vital to continuing our struggles for freedom in a world where many are still enslaved. But the next day we get back up and continue the struggle for justice.

From #BlackLivesMatter supplement:

We ask that this year you consider what it means to recline when so many are not yet free from oppression. This is not a simple question, and so there is no simple answer. In solidarity, you may choose not to recline. Or perhaps we can rest tonight in order to let go of the weight of our fears – our fear of others; of being visible as Jews; of committing to work outside of what is familiar and comfortable – so that we may lean into struggle tomorrow.

To Consider- An Excerpt from Rabbi Arthur Waskow's "The Freedom Seder"

"But these are not the only questions we could ask. Any question is a way in. And every question is an act of freedom. So let us ask new questions, our own questions."