

Four Questions

Contributed by [Joseph Slifka Center](#)

Source: The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah

I learned the Four Questions in the kitchen. My mother handed me a towel and said: "I'll wash, you dry. I'll sing a few words, and you repeat." And so we sang, from the night after Purim, every night until I'd learned it all.

I taught the Four Questions at bath time to two little ones, lithe and slippery as seals. "I'll sing a few words, and then you sing," I said. They loved to dip and splash for "sh'tei famim." And so we sang, from Purim to Pesach. Every night, until they learned it all.

This is a rite of passage. We learn our part and take our turn.

Wine trembles in our cups. Candles flicker. Conversation stops.

First we ask the prescribed questions. Then, we add our own.

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Four Questions - מה נשתנה

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

*Mah nish-ta-na ha-lai-lah ha-zeh mikol ha-lei-lot?*

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

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה, הלילה הזה - כולו מצה.

*She-b'chol ha-lei-lot anu och'lin cha-meitz u-matzah. Ha-laylah hazeh kulo matzah.*

On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread, why on this night do we eat only matzah?

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות, - הלילה הזה מרור.

*Sheb'chol ha-lei-lot anu och'lin sh'ar y'rakot. Ha-lai-lah h-azeh maror.*

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

שבכל הלילות אין אנו מטבילין אפילו פעם אחת, - הלילה הזה שתי פעמים.

*Sheb'chol ha-lei-lot ein anu mat-beelin afee-lu pa-am echat. Ha-lai-lah hazeh sh'tei p'ameem.*

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

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בין יושבין ובין מסבין, - הלילה הזה כלנו מס.

*Sheb'chol ha-lei-lot anu och-leem bein yo-shveen u-vein m'su-been, ha-lailah hazeh kulanu m'subeen.*

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