

Ma Nishtanah

Contributed by [Will Deutsch](#)

Source: www.notesfromthetribe.com



I gave my tenth and last performance of the Ma Nishtanah during the second night of seder at the age of ten. Friends and family gathered around the table to witness the final impassioned rendition. You see, when you're the son of a Cantor, people expect a lot of you. And I delivered year after year. Question after question. That night was no exception. Some children need the crutch of transliteration. I didn't even need a Hagaddah. Going completely off book, I begged of the table: "Ma nishtana ha-laila ha-zeh mi-kol ha-leilot?" Without a script, I had the freedom to gesture, to look into their eyes and demand to know why we were dipping our herbs twice that evening. To my recollection there was applause. But truth be told, the glory of the four questions is short lived. There's always someone younger, cuter, just waiting to take your place. And quite literally, with a baby sister who was turning five, I was getting too old for it.

I haven't sung that song in 16 years. So this year, I created a new set of questions that have been on my

mind:

1. If the purpose of engaging the children during the seder is to fulfill the duty of passing the story down, wouldn't it make more sense just to plop them in front of a television and pop in "The Prince of Egypt?" The story itself is far less convoluted than the one in the Haggadah. Not to mention the fact that it is told through a medium targeted at children, complete with modern animation and an award winning sound track. I'm an adult and still have trouble wrapping my head around the part about the five rabbis and difference between anger, wrath, indignation, trouble and messengers of evil.

2. I know that it's not particularly Jewish, but being as it is probably the most famous seder, I can't help but wonder: who sang the Ma Nishtanah at the last supper (I would assume it was John as he was the youngest disciple)? Furthermore did they have an afikoman? And if everyone present was eating matzah why are they never depicted with crumbs all over their robes? Also, at the end did they bother saying 'Next year in Jerusalem?'

3. When do we eat?*

*In the interest of the third question, I have removed the fourth.