

My Journey Through the Haggadah- 4 Questions

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Source: My Journey Through the Haggadah, Yekutiel Atkins

The second cup has now been filled and the children come into their own. There can be very few Jews who are so estranged from things Jewish that they have never heard of the "Ma Nishtane"

the famous 'Four Questions'. "Why" we are asked by our children, is this night different from all the other nights in the year". "Why" do we eat Matzah, "Why" do we eat bitter vegetable. "Why" do we dip our food, and "Why" do we eat while leaning"?

These questions have been asked throughout the ages by generations of Jewish children. They are the very essence of the Seder and the rest of the evening is devoted to answering them. In some families, it is the custom for the youngest to do the asking, whereas in others all the children make the recitation, separately or in unison. Where there are no children present an adult will ask the questions, (Pesachim 116a) the Rabbis tell us that if a person is celebrating the Seder on his own he should ask himself (Mish. Ber. 473 .V.).

The purpose of the Seder is twofold. Firstly, to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt celebrating our freedom and the welding of the Children of Israel into one Jewish Nation. Secondly, to pass on to the next generation, our children, our Laws, traditions, customs and the fulfillment of the commandments so that they in their turn will do the same to their children and children's children thus continuing the unbroken chain reaching back to the founders of our nation Abraham and his wife Sarah (Ex. Ch. 12. V. 26).

We hope, that the whole of the preparation of the Seder together with the unusual display of items on the Seder dish, the Matzoth on the table instead of bread, the wine, the copies of the Haggadah at hand, and the general ambience and excitement will stimulate the children to ask what it all means. There is a view that says that if a child asks just a simple question "what does this all mean", the Seder can commence. However, it is traditional that the children should ask all the four questions.