

# My Journey Through the Haggadah- The Answers

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Source: My Journey Through the Haggadah, Yekutiel Atkins

So, why do we eat Matzah instead of bread? Why do we eat a bitter vegetable? Why do we dip our food (we have already done it once, the second time will be later on in the Seder)? Why do we eat and drink leaning?

1) The first question is the obvious one. There are two reasons. Firstly we eat Matzah because we are commanded to do so in the Torah (Ex. Ch. 12. V. 15-21), In addition it commemorates that first Pesach when on leaving Egypt in a hurry we baked the dough before it had time to rise. (Ex. Ch. 12 V. 34).

2) We eat bitter vegetables as a symbol of and a commemoration of our lives having been made bitter by the forced labour of the Egyptians when we were slaves in Egypt.

3) Dipping the food does not appear to have anything to do with the Seder night why therefore of all the seemingly strange things we do on the Seder night is this one singled out. The usual reason given is that it should prompt the children to ask about the Seder night and Pesach generally, however, there is another much more profound explanation.

The exile to Egypt while foretold to Abraham in the "covenant between the pieces" (Gen. Ch.15..V 7-14), really started when Joseph was put into the pit by his brothers as told in Gen. Ch. 37, and then spirited away to Egypt by a band of Midianite caravan traders. The brothers taking the striped coat of many colours given to Joseph by his father Jacob, slaughtered a male goat, dipped the coat into its blood and gave it to Jacob as 'proof' that Joseph had been devoured by wild beasts.

Over 200 years later in Egypt, the Jewish people are commanded by God to take a male lamb or goat, slaughter it and dip a bundle of hyssop branches in its blood and smear the blood on the door- post and lintel of their houses (Ex. Ch. 12. V. 22). This was the first act of rebellion against the Egyptians and marked the end of their long servitude, the beginning of their freedom and the first declaration that they, as a people had put their trust in the Almighty

Perhaps the two dippings at the Seder night are an oblique reminder of these two events that mark the two most important milestones on the long road of the history of the Jewish people, the beginning and the end of slavery in Egypt.

(4) The last question is why on this night we eat leaning. It was the practice at the time the Haggadah was compiled for free people who ate their meal in a leisurely manner, not to sit at a table as we do nowadays, but at couches with each person eating from his own small table and being served by a servant. Although nowadays we do not eat in that manner, we still commemorate this practice.

These are all the simple answers but because we are Jews, we do not rely on simple answers to these questions. The whole Haggadah is devoted to answering them in its own way so that the events they commemorate are fixed in our minds and repeated every year throughout our lifetimes. Later on in the Haggadah it says, 'even if we are all clever or knowledgeable or learned we still have the duty of relating the story of the Exodus, and its meaning for the Jewish people. The Haggadah then begins to give the answer to the children's questions.