

## 4 questions

Contributed by [nicole](#)

**Source:** Unknown

### The Four Questions

The telling of the story of Passover is framed as a discussion with lots of questions and answers. It's tradition that the youngest person in the family asks the questions. The rabbis who created the set format for the seder gave us the Four Questions to help break the ice in case no one had their own questions. Asking questions is a core tradition in Jewish life. If everyone at yourseder is around the same age, perhaps the person with the least seder experience can ask them – or everyone can sing them all together.

מָה נִשְׁתַּנֶּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת

Mah nish-ta-nah ha-lai-lah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-lei-lot?

Why is this night different from all other nights?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֻמֵץ וּמַצָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מַצָּה:

She-b'chol ha-lei-lot a-nu och-lin cha-meitz u-ma-tzah? Ha-lai-lah ha-zeh, ku-lo ma-tzah?

Why on all other nights we eat both leavened bread and matzah, and tonight we only eat matzah?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יְרֻקוֹת הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר

She-b'chol ha-lei-lot a-nu och-lin sh'ar y'ra -kot. Ha-lai-lah ha-zeh ma-ror?

On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables, but tonight why do we only eat bitter herbs?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מְטַבְּלִין אֶפְּלוֹ פְּעַם אַחַת .  
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים:

She-b'chol ha-lei-lot ein anu mat-bi-lin a-fi-lu pa-am, e-hat. Ha-lai-lah ha-zeh, sh'tei f'a-mim?

On all other nights we aren't expected to dip our vegetables at all.

Why, tonight, do we do it twice?

שְׁבַּכֵּל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין.  
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלְנוּ מְסֻבִּין:

She-b'chol ha-lei-lot a-nu och-lin bein yosh-vin o'vein m-subin. Ha-lai-lah na-zeh ku-la-nu m-su-bin?

On all other nights we eat either sitting normally or reclining. Why do we sit reclining tonight?

Answer 1: We were slaves in Egypt. Our ancestor in flight from Egypt did not have time to let the dough rise. With not a moment to spare they snatched up the dough they had prepared and fled. But the hot sun beat as they carried the dough along with them and baked it into the flat unleavened bread we call *matzah*.

Answer 2: The first time we dip our greens to taste the brine 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 the springtime.

Answer 3: 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. But our *charoset* is made of 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.

Answer 4: Slaves were not allowed to rest, not even while they ate. Since our ancestors were freed from slavery, we recline to remind ourselves that we, like our ancestors, can overcome bondage in our own time. We also recline to remind ourselves that rest and rejuvenation are vital to continuing our struggles. We should take pleasure in reclining, even as we share our difficult history.