



WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT?



Passover & The Freedom to **QUESTION**



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PASSOVER & THE FREEDOM TO QUESTION

SHEMOS CHAPTER 12

And it shall be when your children say to you, "What is this service to you?"	(כו) והיה כי יאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבדה הזאת לכם:
You shall say to them, "It is a pesach offering to Hashem, Who passed over the houses of the Children in Israel in Egypt."	(כו) ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא ליקוק אשר פסח על בתי בני ישראל



The holiday of Passover is the only holiday that is introduced in the Torah with people asking questions. There are many holidays in the Torah, but only one is described with the anticipated question of children, "What is the significance of this day?"

- What is questioning such a central part of the Passover experience?

**THIS QUESTION IS ONLY REINFORCED BY THE WAY WE CHOOSE TO BEGIN THE
PASSOVER HAGGADAH: WITH A QUESTION**

מה גשתגה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות
-*"How is this night different
from all other nights"*

THE QUEST FOR QUESTIONS

TALMUD SANHEDRIN 93B

THE TALMUD RECOUNTS THE SPECIAL BLESSINGS GIVEN TO KING DAVID. THE TALMUD INTERPRETS THE VERSE DESCRIBING DAVID'S ATTRIBUTES ON A DEEPER LEVEL:

The blessings of King David are indicated in the verse describing him as, "one who knows how to play musical instruments, and one mighty in courage, and a warrior, and understanding in all matters, and a man of appealing looks; and Hashem is with him.	דוד - דכתיב (שמואל א' ט"ז) ויען אחד מהנערים ויאמר הנה ראיתי בן לישי בית הלחמי ידע נגן וגבור חיל ואיש מלחמה ונבון דבר ואיש תאר וה' עמו וגו'.
What does it mean that David knows how to play musical instruments? This alludes to his ability to ask incisive questions	... : ידע נגן - שיודע לישאל
What does it mean that David was courageous? This alludes to his ability to answer difficult questions.	... גבור - שיודע להשיב



What is the connection between music and questioning?

MAHARAL, BER HAGOLAH, 2:9
WITH COMMENTARY BY RABBI YEHOSHUA HARTMAN

ומה שאמר "יודע נגן" - 'יודע לשואל', פירושו, מי ש'יודע נגן' והשואל מדה אחת להם. לפי שהתורה משמח לב האדם, וכאשר ישאל אדם הוא משמח לב השומע, ופותח את לבו עד ששמח, כמו שעושה מי שיודע נגן. והתשובה שמושיב לו דומה ל"גבור חיל", מנצח את השואל, וזה "גבור חיל". הרי ראינו שעיקר שמחת התורה שייך יותר לשאלה מאשר לתשובה.

That which the Talmud says that knowledge of questioning is equivalent to knowledge of music can be explained as follows. That music and questioning really have the same characteristics. The Torah is meant to awaken one's soul with happiness and emotion in the same way music resonates within a person. A question opens up a world of possibilities and opportunities like hearing an amazing song for the first time. On the other hand the answering a question, the Talmud compares to a courageous warrior, for the person providing the answer to the question, in a sense, must "conquer" the mind of the questioner. But the primary way in which one is able to experience the joy of Torah is more from the questions than the answers.

WHY DOES A GREAT QUESTION BRING MORE JOY THAN AN ANSWER?

QUESTIONING AS AN EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM



“The slave lives in silence, if such a meaningless existence may be called like. He has no message to deliver. In contrast with the slave, the free man bears a message, has a good deal to tell, and is eager to convey his life story to anyone who cares to listen. No wonder the Toirah has, four times, emphasized the duty of the father- a liberated slave - to tell his children, born in freedom, the story of liberation. Free man who is eager to tell his story, is always surrounded by an audience willing to listen to his story. The slave has neither a story nor a curious audience. Moreover, he is not merely a speechless being, but a mute being, devoid not only of the word, but of the meaningful sound as well. “

-Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l (1903-1993)

HOW IS QUESTIONING A UNIQUE EXPRESSION OF FREEDOM?

QUESTIONS AS A CENTRAL ASPECT OF JUDAISM CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Isidore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize for physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied: "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to say, 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me into a scientist."



Judaism is a religion of questions. The greatest prophets asked questions of G-d. The Book of Job, the most searching of all explorations of human suffering, is a book of questions asked by man, to which G-d replies with a string of questions of His own. The earliest sermons usually began with a question asked of the rabbi by a member of the congregation. Most famously, the seder service on Passover begins with four questions asked by the youngest child. So I can identify with Rabi's childhood memories.

When I left university and went to Israel to study in a rabbinical seminary, I was stunned by the sheer intensity with which the students grappled with texts. Once in a while the teacher's face would light up at a comment from the class. "Du fregst a gutte kashe," he would say (you raise a good objection). This was his highest form of praise. Abraham Twerski, an American psychiatrist, tells of how, when he was young, his instructor would relish challenges to his arguments. In his broken English he would say: "You right! You a hundred prozent right! Now I show you where you wrong." Religious faith has suffered hugely in the modern world by being cast as naive, blind, unquestioning.

The scientist asks, the believer just believes. Critical inquiry, so the stereotype runs, is what makes the difference between the pursuit of knowledge and the certainties of faith. One who believes in the fundamentals of a creed is derided as a fundamentalist. The word fundamentalist itself comes to mean a simplistic approach to complex issues. Religious belief is often seen as the suspension of critical intelligence.

As Wilson Mizner once put it: "I respect faith. But doubt is what gets you an education." To me, this is a caricature of faith, not faith itself. What is the asking of a question if not itself a profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of human life? To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a moving demonstration of the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to transcend, to climb. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith - that the world is not random, the universe is not impervious to our understanding, life is not chance. That, I suspect, is why Judaism encourages questions. On the phrase: "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness", Rashi, the 11th-century biblical commentator, says: "This means, with the power to understand and to discern." Critical intelligence is the gift G-d gave humanity. To use it in the cause of human dignity and insight is one of the great ways of serving G-d. When faith suppresses questions, it dies.

When it accepts superficial answers, it withers. Faith is not opposed to doubt. What it is opposed to is the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

