



### **Four Discussion Questions for a Perplexing Passover**

In this most unusual Passover, we have far more questions than answers. That's a scary place to be. But questions are not the enemy, even if they leave us ill at ease. If we can sit with the discomfort, questions can lead us on a meaningful journey. In the spirit of Passover, here are four questions you might discuss at your seder table.

#### **Why is this night different from all other nights?**

The opening to the four questions will likely generate chuckles, sighs, and sadness this year. What could be more different? This Passover will not feel like Passovers past. We are separated from those we love, and while Zoom provides some comfort, it is not the taste of your grandmother's chicken soup or a hug from your favorite niece. We don't have to pretend that this is easy. Where we can, we should find flickers of light in memories of Passovers past and dreams of Passovers future. And when we can't, we need to hold on to the knowledge that this is temporary, that we are stronger than we feel and that we are not alone. Passover is different this year. And yet, Passover is still the same.

#### **Does matzah really matter?**

Yes and no. The dynamic symbolism of matzah, representing both the bread of affliction (eaten by slaves) and the bread of freedom (eaten on the journey of escape) brings home for us the thin line between the two. Tradition only requires that matzah be eaten at the Passover seder. Bread and its leavened cousins, however, are anathema to the holiday. Their puffed-up nature is counter to the struggle to be free. We are bidden to sweep away the crumbs in our homes, but also in our hearts. It's a powerful reminder to shed the ways that we have become heady with the joy of being free.

#### **Why does the Haggadah (the text for the Passover seder) say "let all who are hungry come and eat"?**

Seder custom is to lean on a pillow during the ritual. The seder is modeled on a Greco-Roman banquet, for which the diner would recline on a chaise. Even as we are modeling what freedom looks like, we remember the challenges of the past and use our freedom to care for others. In a normal year, this would include having guests in our homes, but we would still be called to ensure that no one beyond our four walls goes hungry. This year, in particular, the call to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves should burn brightly within us. The capacity to prevent hunger is in our hands.

#### **What does it mean to be free?**

"When I discover who I am, I'll be free."

— **Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man**

There is freedom *from*, like the Hebrew slaves escaping Pharaoh's tyranny in Egypt, and freedom *to*, like the freedom for those same Hebrew slaves to choose to serve God. Both are essential; one alone is necessary, but insufficient. Now, when we struggle with limited freedom of movement in order to keep ourselves free from disease, freedom is no longer just a lofty ideal. We crave it on a very basic level. There is a freedom within captivity too, though, in which we dream about a better tomorrow.

*Chag sameach* (happy holiday),

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