

“You shall tell your children on that day.” When we participate in the seder, we fulfill a covenant with history to celebrate freedom. But to treat this covenant only as treasured memory is to divest it of its essence. The covenant is also a promise we make to the present and the future. When we say, “What God did for me,” we recognize the illegitimacy of bondage for all people. These too need a strong hand and an outstretched arm — the Indian family in debt bondage; the Congolese man enslaved in a mine; the Nepali woman in a brothel; the Haitian girl in domestic servitude; the Ghanaian boy trapped on a fishing boat.

When we ask, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” let us answer, “We keep faith with the heritage given to us by Moses by helping to liberate those who are slaves in our time.” As Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:11, “This is not too difficult for you.” Everyone can contribute to ending bondage. Participating in the abolition of slavery in our time adds meaning and joy to the seder.

- Maurice Middleberg,  
Former Executive  
Director (Retired),  
Free the Slaves

### “*Ha Lachma Anya*” — Anchored in the past, rooted in the present

*Ha lachma anya* encapsulates the past (the bread we ate in Egypt), present (let all who are hungry come eat), and the future (as free people in the Land of Israel). The four questions then anchor us in the present — what is different this night? — before *Avadim Hayinu* sends us back in time to explore our origins.

Our understanding of human trafficking must also be rooted in history and the origins of worker exploitation.

## מגיד Maggid

Fill the second cup and begin Maggid.



### “Sleepless (Via Dolorosa I),” by Claudia Cojocaru

Ms. Cojocaru writes, “During my ordeal, I was in a constant state of hyper awareness, because I had to be ahead of the abuser. Sleeping was when I was vulnerable. This signifies that I was awake and ready to escape, to be free.” Ms. Cojocaru’s reflection on her life as a trafficking survivor is on p. 54.

All faith begins with the act of questioning. From God’s first question to Adam and Even in Eden — *Ayebab*, “Where are you?” — to Abraham’s challenge to God concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, to Sarah’s exasperating and agonizing question about whether she would ever bear children, to Moses questioning Pharaoh’s authority, the Jewish people have always been intoxicated with the art of questioning.

Perhaps we who were slaves are constantly in a state of remembering the degradation and seeking never to forget. It is the privilege of free people to ask questions; this is the birthplace of our compassion and our zeal for justice. Why else might a motley band of former slaves have taken it upon ourselves to demand that humanity live up to its sacred promise for equality and dignity for all God’s creation?

- Rabbi Michael Adam Latz,  
Shir Tikvah Congregation,  
Minneapolis, Minn.

## The Thesis Statement of the Haggadah

We might think the most basic encapsulation of the haggadah is in the simple song that children learn in Jewish preschool, which comes right after the Four Questions:

We were slaves	עֲבָדִים הָיינוּ	<i>Avadim hayinu</i>
Now we are free	עָתָה בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין.	<i>Atah b'nei chorin</i>

But as adults, we know that “now we are free” is an oversimplification. We are trapped in so many overlapping oppressive systems. Indeed, at the end of the *avadim hayinu* paragraph, the haggadah offers us an alternative thesis statement, inviting us to go beyond the basics:

וְכֵן הַמְרָבָה לְסִפּוֹר בִּיְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם הָרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח.  
**The more we expand the telling of the Exodus,  
 the more praiseworthy.**

The more we expand our perspective to include diverse liberation struggles and the action needed to bring them to fruition, the better. In the service of that expansion, this haggadah makes the following arguments:

1. The United States was founded on fundamentally racist principles and has yet to fully grapple with that legacy.
2. America's appetite for cheap goods and labor can only survive through exploitative labor practices and immigration, and our immigration policies expose people to further abuse.
3. Forced labor does not happen in a vacuum but in the context of powerful systems that treat some people as less valuable or worthy than others.
4. If we want to reconstruct our country so it fulfills its stated values, we will have to follow the solutions and leadership of thus-far marginalized communities: women, people of color, low-wage workers, and immigrants.

## Four Questions About Exploitation Today

We start the seder by noticing what is out of the ordinary and then investigating its meaning further.

*How is this night different from all other nights?*

On all other nights, we depend on the exploitation of invisible others for our food, clothing, homes, and more.

*Tonight, we listen to the stories of those who suffer to create the goods we use. We commit to working toward the human rights of all workers.*

On all other nights, we have allowed human life to become cheap in the economic quest for the cheapest goods.

*Tonight, we commit to valuing all people, regardless of their race, class, or circumstances.*

On all other nights, we have forgotten that poverty, migration, and gender-based violence leave people vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labor

*Tonight, we commit to taking concrete actions to end this exploitation and its causes.*

On all other nights, we have forgotten to seek wisdom among those who know how to end forced labor — the people who have experienced this degradation.

*Tonight, we commit to prevention that is rooted in the wisdom and experience of workers, trafficking survivors, and affected communities.*

When the seder has ended, we will not return to how it has been “on all other nights.” We commit to bringing the lessons of this seder into our actions tomorrow, the next day, and every day to come.

In March 2013, a few weeks before Passover, I participated in CIW's March for Fair Food with my older daughter, Liora. Early one morning, as dawn broke and we sat on a bus bearing a banner “No more slavery in the fields,” she asked me to practice the Four Questions, which she would recite at the seder very soon. In that moment, past and present came together. Listening to her chant in Hebrew *mah nishtanah balailah hazeh* (“why is this night different from all other nights”) I understood the power of the commitment we make as Jews each year. We cannot tell the story of slavery without committing to action in the present day. And we are blessed to know that today real solutions are possible.

— Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster,  
Deputy Director, T'ruah