

## Four Questions About Modern Slavery

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 modern-day slavery.

*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 slavery—the people who have experienced this degradation.

*Tonight, we commit to slavery 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 ha layla 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,  
Director of Programs, T’ruah

## מגיד Maggid

Fill the second cup and begin Maggid.



**“Sleepless (Via Dolorosa I),”  
by Claudia Cojocar**

Claudia writes, “During my ordeal, I was in a constant state of hyperawareness, 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.” Claudia’s reflection on her life as a trafficking survivor is on p. 42.

All faith begins with the act of questioning. From God’s first question to Adam and Even in Eden – *Ayehab*, “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, MN

## RABBIS IN ACTION

In December 2013, I visited a local Wendy's restaurant with our Middle School students. We did not do so to grab a snack, but to take a stand for human rights. We were urging Wendy's to join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program.

Our task was not to be a menace, but to have meaningful conversations to create change. The manager knew we were coming and was happy to hear my students express their concerns about the exploitation of workers in Florida tomato fields. After talking with the manager, we handed her letters to pass along to the corporate office. She assured us that she would speak to her superiors and share our concerns.

We then left and gathered our posters and signs to raise awareness outside the restaurant. This was just one afternoon and one action, but it was an afternoon that inspired me. I now believe that these students will not just learn our tradition, but also live its values, ensuring equality and human rights for all.

- Rabbi Jesse M. Olitzky,  
Congregation Beth El,  
South Orange, NJ

## Anchored in the Present, Rooted in the Past

*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.

## The Four Children

When we talk about modern-day slavery, we all start out as the child who does not know to ask, because we don't even know that the problem exists. Upon first encountering the issue, we ask simple questions. As we learn more, it is easy to slide into the frustration of the wicked child: this is such a massive uphill battle and I am so small—why should I bother caring? We seek the wisdom to overcome despair and find the ways in which we can be effective at fighting the root causes of modern slavery.

*On the path from first realizations to paralysis to activism, where do you find yourself tonight? What has your journey been to this place?*

The seder demands that we look forward, not backward. To the children's questions about why we celebrate Passover, we respond, "because God took us out of Egypt" and not "because we were slaves in Egypt." We dwell on the joy and agency of liberation, not on the pain of slavery.

"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,  
Executive Director,  
Free the Slaves