

Questions for This Seder

We posed four questions to students this year and are thrilled to share some of their responses. They are offered not as conclusions, but as invitations. Consider using these questions at your seder table.

Tze ulemad (Go out and learn) is not confined to the beit midrash. It unfolds wherever honest reflection meets shared conversation. May these questions help spark your own.

The Question You're Sitting with This Year:

What question are you carrying into this Passover? It might be textual, theological, personal, or unresolved. Why does this question feel alive for you right now?

Elyse Wolman, JTS Rabbinical Student

Every year, I think about the **עשן** (wicked child). In the Haggadah, the **עשן** asks: "What is this service to you?" By saying "you," he excludes himself. Therefore, we reply: "Because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt." For me and not for him. It concludes saying that the **עשן** wouldn't have been redeemed. Why does the **עשן**'s question imply



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exclusion? And why must we respond so harshly to this question? This interpretation of the **עשן** reflects the rabbis' worries about students challenging authority in a way that would challenge the foundation of Jewish tradition. However, these worries and this interpretation reflect a changing religious landscape in which it was necessary to have a firm foundation to ensure survival.

Our society today is not like that. Today we live in a relatively stable religious landscape. I believe we should shift the focus away from ensuring survival to ensuring accessibility. While the ancient rabbis were aiming to promote a specific paradigm for learning, Jewish educators today recognize that each child learns differently. And, more importantly, these differences aren't a reason to dismiss a child's curiosity. I view the **עשן**'s question as one many Jews today are asking: Why does Jewish practice matter to us? Why should this matter to us? These questions are valid. I believe we need to ask ourselves: Does there need to be a villainous figure in our Haggadah's metaphor for the next generation of Jewish children? Does the **עשן** need to exist at all?