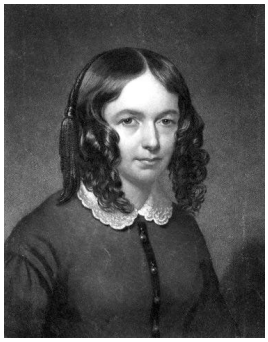
A Multilingual Passover to Remember

By Murray Spiegel and Rickey Stein

This Passover, why not invite all the tribes and peoples of the world—including *Am Yisrael*—to your seder table? Friends and family will delight in reciting or hearing the *Ma Nishtana* (Four Questions) in your choice of living, ancient, and comical languages.

Here are 20 versions of the first question: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" excerpted from our new book, that are sure to bring a new dimension of linguistic levity to your Passover celebration.



LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOENICIAN COIN; ANCIENT TEMPLE NEAR BANGALORE, INDIA; POET ELIZABETH B. BROWNING.

Ancient Languages

Phoenician/Canaanite:

?ha-lêlōt 'aḥaray ba-kōl ze ha-lêl šōniy ma

Latin:

CUR HÆC NOX ÆB OMNIBUS ÆLIIS NOCTIBUS DIFFERT

Old English:

Fop hpi ıſ þeoſ nihc unzelic eallum oðꝼum nihcum?

For hwi is theos niḥt ungelic eallum othrum niḥtum?

Living Languages

Yiddish:

פאַרוואָס איז די נאַכט פון פסח אַנדערש פון אַלע אַנדערע נעכט?

Farvos iz dee nakht fun Peysakh andersh fun aleh andereh nekht?

Vietnamese:

Sao đêm nay lại khác mọi đêm qua?

Tibetan:

ཆི་ཁྱེ་ཕྱིར་མཚན་མོ་འདི་ནི་མཚན་མོ་གཞན་པ་ཀུན་དང་མཚུངས་མ་

Chee-chir tshan-mo dee-ni tshan-mo shan-pa kun-dang tshung ma-yin?

Thai:

ทำไมคืนนี้ไม่เหมือนคืนอื่นๆ

Tammai kuen nee mai muan kuen eun eun?

Spanish:

¿Por qué es diferente esta noche de todas las otras noches?

Pipil/El Salvador:

Taika te kenha ini tayua ken muchi ne tajtayua?

Panjabi/India:

ਇਹ ਰਾਤ ਦੂਜੀ ਰਾਤਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਅਲਗ ਕਿਉਂ ਹੈ?

Eh raat dooji raatan ton alag kyoun hai?

Navajo:

Haash yit'éego díí tł'éé' ígíí t'éiyá łahgo áhóhoot'eego bee nihoot'ą́?

Hopi:

Sen pu' mihiqw apiy soosok mimhiqat amuupe hinta?

Ewe/Ghana:

Nukatae egbea fe zã to vovo tso bubuwo katã gbɔ?

Comical Languages

Gilbert and Sullivan Operettas:

The "Why" Question
("If You Give Me Your Attention"—Princess Ida)

They will give me their attention they will turn to me and gape.
They'll put down their Manishevitz, I'll put down my
Welch's grape.
Because I am the youngest thus to me it must befall
The Ma Nishtana to read aloud tonight before them all.
I'm not too good at Hebrew yet somehow I must begin
On this night to differentiate a Gimmel from a Shin.
There's no doubt tonight is different from all other nights
I've known;
On all other nights a kid can hope that he be left alone.
But I must ask "Why!"
[Chorus: He must ask "why"! He must ask "why"!]

Murray Spiegel and Rickey Stein are coauthors of 300 Ways to Ask the Four Questions *(**WhyIsThisNight.com**), a book, CD, and DVD package containing 374 ways to ask the* Ma Nishtana, *and more.*

Photograph of Ancient Temple: Tony DeJoie

Curiosity's a virtue; everybody tells me that,
Yet tonight I rather fear that I will end up like the cat.
I'm hoping just as I begin to ask my questions four
That the absentee Elijah will come knocking at the door!
Oh I know there is no prophet in my hopes, but God forbid
My nogoodnik Uncle Mordechai should only have a kid!
Then that kid would be the youngest and at long last I would get
To watch someone else have tsouris while I eat my charoset!
But I must ask "Why!"
[Chorus: He must ask "why"! He must ask "why"!]

Twitter:

YYYY THS NITE DIFRNT FRM AL OTHR NITES ?

Shakespearean:

We look from friend to friend and aſk of them
Why dark of night is different to vs
On this occaſion, ſvch that brings vs here.

Poetry:

Why — Do I ask thee? Let me count the queries.
I ask thee of the length and width and height
Of a crumbly, flakey matzo slice;

Lawyerese:

1.0 Why is this night, defined as that period of time commencing at sundown according to readily established almanac norms for sunrise and sundown and continuing until sunrise according to said established norms, different or unlike in substantive and material ways from all other nights, as defined hereinabove?

Klingon:

qatlh pimlaw' ramvam rammey latlh je?

Binary:

01010111011010000111100 1 0110100101110011 011
10100011010000110100101110011 01101110011010
01011001110110100001110100 01100100011010010
11001100110011001100101011100100110010101101
11001110100 01100110011100100110111101101101
01100001011011000110110 0 01101111011101000110
10000110010101110010 01101110011010010110011 1
01101000011101000111001100111111

This year, make your *Ma Nishtana* different from all other seder nights! □

What's your favorite language for reciting the first question? Share your Passover experience at the "Multilingual Passover to Remember" page: **reformjudaismmag.org**.