

# מה נשתנה: Old and New Questions

## How is This Year Different?

Noam Zion

When extended families and distant friends gather for the annual seder, it is usual to catch up and ask what is new. To deepen this exchange, some families ask each one at the table to share the most important ways in which they or their world has changed since last year's seder. Some share personal milestones or losses, while others note the ways they have grown and what they have learned, or describe experiences that have impacted them and their communities.

## Questions for Conversation

- What are the new or newly acute questions you are asking yourselves this year about Jewish identity and Jewish peoplehood?
- Since last Passover, what has changed for you individually, in your community, for the Jewish people, for the world?



Illustration by Michel Kichka from *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices* (2007).

# Contemporary Versions of *Ma Nishtana* from Early Kibbutz *Haggadot*

Mishael Zion

Asking questions at the seder was initially intended to be spontaneous and genuine, but the rabbis composed the four questions we now recite each year. Even with these in place, the seder still invites new questions, asking why the world is the way it is and pointing towards what it could be.

Before and after the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, secular *kibbutzim* issued new *haggadot* reflecting the Holocaust and the return to Jewish sovereignty for the first time in two thousand years. In recalling the killing of Israelite babies in Egypt and the struggle for freedom from persecution and slavery, these kibbutz members felt the acute relevance of Passover's story.

One of these *haggadot's* most original contributions was introducing a custom of composing contemporary questions for the young to ask the founders of the kibbutz. For example, in the 1930s and early 1940s, kibbutz *haggadot* include the following questions:

- Why do people hate Jews throughout the entire world?
- Why is there so much bloodshed in the world? How bizarre is this world, in this year, in this generation?
- What happens to people whose consciences are silenced?
- When will peace reign in our land and in the entire world?
- On Passover, every Jew is obligated to ask him or herself: When was I born? Where was I born? What historical memories do I carry with me?

## Questions for Conversation

- What are your questions about what makes this night or this year different from all others?
- The young kibbutz question writers turned to the elders of their *kibbutzim*. What resources are available to answer your questions this year?
- Choose one of the questions from the early kibbutz *haggadot* to discuss at your seder.



Illustration by Maryam Bartuv from *Kibbutz Gvar'am Haggadah*, 1943. Kibbutz Gvar'am is in the Gaza Envelope and its members were evacuated after October 7. They were cleared to return home in January 2024.