

*"My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn asked her child what they learned that day. But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'Did you ask a good question today?' That difference -- asking good questions -- made me become a scientist."*

-- Isidore I. Rabi, Nobel Laureate

Dear University of San Francisco community,

At a time when nobody seems to have the answers to the many communal, political and spiritual questions that confront us, and when the answers provided seem to create more confusion and polarization than before, perhaps the wisest move is to ask smarter questions. Critical thinking and question-asking is in line with Jewish tradition and the Passover holiday.

Questioning lies at the heart of our spiritual journey and flows from the deepest parts of Jewish tradition. Asking questions is so fundamental to the experience of freedom that according to the Rabbis (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 116a) even if one finds oneself alone on Passover Eve, one should still recite "The Four Questions." Of course, the Four Questions of the Haggadah are just the beginning.

From Abraham and Moses, to Ruth Bader Ginsburg and other contemporary moral messengers, we are called to challenge the status quo with a healthy and robust curiosity. Questioning and clarifying can help us prioritize our social justice obligations. During this holy season for Jews, Christians and Muslims let us commit to asking good questions and working together to respond meaningfully.

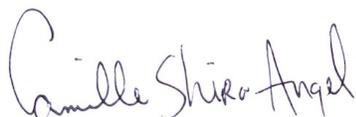
This year we urge you to continue that tradition at your Passover Seder table. Give everyone a chance to do what we have always done so well: ask vital questions about the most important things in our lives.

The first two questions of the Haggadah's Four Questions, also known as the *Ma Nishtana*, focus our attention on symbols of oppression and tragedy, more specifically on the Bread of Affliction and the Bitter Herbs. What two new questions, questions that actually allow us to see those things in fresh ways, do we want to ask about the many painful events that confront us today?

The second two questions of *Ma Nishtana* mention the customs of dipping twice and reclining at the table, focusing our attention on the good things that we have in our lives, including our ability to enjoy them. What two new questions do we need to ask that would heighten our understanding and appreciation of those things with which we are already blessed?

This year at our seders, even if alone, let us commit to asking good questions and using our freedoms and privileges to raise our questions up, out loud and in solidarity with those underserved and still oppressed by racism, prejudice, xenophobia, and utter apathy. We can and we must seek out justice for the oppressed if Passover, Holy Week, and Ramadan are to mean anything in these trying and uncertain times.

Next year, may we celebrate in person, together and in good health.



Camille Shira Angel, Rabbi-in-Residence