

# The Importance of the Question



As supposed followers of Yahshua ben Yoseph HaNazaret A.K.A Yahshua HaMoshiach, I'm always astounded with the how little we still relate his teaching and conduct to the Jewish religion of his time and current orthodox Judaism today. There still exists a vast chasm of compartmentalised thinking that until bridged, is going to keep many Messianics from discovering so many more beautiful aspects of the Torah – essentially robbing people of seeing Messiah in a more exquisite depth.

It's not until I started looking into the importance of questioning in Judaism and how Yahshua responded to questions, often with counter questions or answers that invited even greater questions, that I started to see yet another facet of Judaism, which very much aligns with Messiah's teaching during his brief ministry.

You can't truly appreciate who Messiah was and is unless you learn to appreciate his religion, Israel and the Land he walked on.

Out of all the religions that existed in the second century, Judaism is the only one that has survived, and not only that, it's remained somewhat surprisingly intact given the rough terrain that it's had to traverse. Incidentally, Israel and the Land also still exist. Yet the predominant religion of the Western world that professes to follow Messiah, ignores his religion, ignores Israel and ignore the Land with almost finite precision. We must remember, that neither Yahshua or Sha'ul came to start a new religion, Israel were never forsaken and occupying the Land is a mandated aspect of Torah observance. Indeed the concept of the Promised Land is mentioned more times in Scripture than the concept of salvation. But I digress.

At the close of Last Shabbat, I decided that we'd have a Q & A session, which over the course of the week got me wondering about the nature of questions, the strict precursor to all answers. There is no such thing as an answer, unless a question precedes it.

So, a question came to me, that is, do people in our faith question things enough, do we question too much or do we question the wrong things?

Is asking a question a mitzvah?

Is there really such thing as a silly Question?

It's recorded that Messiah Yahshua answers at least 29 questions with a question. Why did he do this?

So as you can see, I had a lot of questions!

Let's start at the beginning.

## Questions from the Greats

### Moshe

**“You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won't the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”(Genesis 18:25)**

### Avraham

**“O Yahweh, why have you brought all this trouble on your own people? Why did you send me?” (Exodus 5:22)**

### YirmeYahu

**“You are always righteous, O Yahweh, when I bring a case before You, yet I would speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?’ (Jeremiah 12:1)**

### Job

**“But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with Elohim.” (Job 13:3)**

Many great men of Scripture questioned the Almighty, in fact it has been said that the greater the prophet, the harder the question. Avraham Avinu asked, **‘You could not possibly do such a thing: to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. You could not possibly do that! Won't the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’(Genesis 18:25)** Moshe asked, **“O Yahweh, why have you brought all this trouble on your own people? Why did you send me?” (Exodus 5:22)** Jeremiah said, **““You are always righteous, O Yahweh, when I bring a case before You, yet I would speak with You about Your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?’ (Jeremiah 12:1)** Job, the one who searched most thoroughly for an explanation of why humans suffer, is full of questions, to which Elohim replies with four chapters of questions of His own. Some of the earliest recorded Jewish sermons (known as the *Yelamdenu*, which means “to inquire,” began with a question asked of the rabbi by a member of the congregation. One of the classic genres of rabbinical literature is

called *She'elot uteshuvot*, which means 'questions and replies.' Pretty soon, I noticed that questioning is at the heart of all Torah learning.

There are three types of questions. There are questions about *chokhmah*, 'wisdom,' which include scientific, historical, and sociological inquiry. There are questions about justice and questions about the Torah. These include the four questions asked of children at the **Pesach Seder**, which are: 'Why is this night different? Why do we do this, not that? What is the reason for the law?'

The funny thing is, most questions get asked by small children. As a person grows into an adult, he can become somewhat complacent with his surroundings and asks fewer questions, either through an assumption that he might already know the answer or through disinterest.

Children are characterised as being inquisitive beings. They constantly ask, 'How's that work?,' 'What's that man doing?,' 'why is the sky blue?' or 'Where does rain come from?' This is an inbuilt feature in normal healthy children and it is as much about enabling the child to learn as it is about enabling the parent to teach.

The Torah emphasises the fact that children must ask questions.

**“What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Korban Pesach to Yahweh, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Mitzrayim and spared our homes when he struck down the Mitzrites.’” (Exodus 12: 26-27)**

**“In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand Yahweh brought us out of Mitzrayim, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, Yahweh killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Mitzrayim. This is why I sacrifice to Yahweh the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.’ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that Yahweh brought us out of Mitzrayim with his mighty hand.” (Exodus 13:14-16)**

**“When your son asks you in a time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that Yahweh our Elohim has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh's slaves in Mitzrayim. And Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.’” (Deuteronomy 6:20-21)**

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Parents are commanded to provoke their children to be inquisitive in regards to the Torah, in fact the Torah itself is constructed in a way that requires constant questioning. By asking questions about parts of the Torah that don't seem to make sense to a child or even an adult, depths of understanding are reached, and the temptation to just skim over the text is avoided, which causes the text to eventually be misunderstood or forgotten.

Parents who graft themselves to the Commonwealth of Israel should pass on the memories and ideals of Israel to the next generation. The story of how Israel fought for its freedom and how the nation toiled in the face of great adversity, allow upcoming generations to be anchored from one generation to the next. It's interesting how Israel is the only nation, having a faith based on constant question and answering, who have managed to maintain its heritage, while all other nations of the world have come and gone.

The true faith of the Scriptures is not a religion of blind obedience. As odd as this may sound, amid the entire 613 commandments of the Torah, there is no Hebrew word that means “to obey.” In an attempt to standardise Hebrew with other languages in the nineteenth century, the Aramaic word *le-tsayet*, which means ‘to obey,’ was added as a seemingly much needed verb. However, the pure language of Scripture uses the verb *shema*, a word that is untranslatable into English because it means to listen, to hear, to understand, to internalise, and to respond all in one word!

Another amazing thing in Scripture is how the Word spread.

Recipients of the Word of Yahweh came out to hear and they asked to join. Rarely do we have accounts of Yahshua or any of the his talmidim coaxing followers to join, rather, they made themselves as public as possible and just spoke and acted. Followers, whether they were Jews or converts, came to them and asked them if they could join. Sometimes, they were even knocked back.

So why did Yahshua answer questions with another question and why did his religion put some much emphasis on asking questions?

Ultimately, a rabbi or a teacher are not to answer questions like they're on a game show. Their job is to discern the nature of the question being asked, and invariably they have an ability to ask a return question that provokes the enquirer to examine the motive of his original question.

Now, contrary to popular belief, there is such thing as a silly question. Every question that the Pharisees asked Yahshua that was motivated to entrap him would certainly be considered silly. There are three conditions for asking questions related to Torah and Messiah. The first is that a person should be seeking to genuinely learn – not to doubt, ridicule, dismiss or reject. That is what the 'wicked son' of the Haggadah does: ask not out of a desire to understand but as a prelude to walking away. Second is that we accept limits to our understanding. Not everything is intelligible at any given moment.

The third is that when we come to receiving answers, we should be willing to do what these answers entail. For example, there is no way of understanding Shabbat without keeping Shabbat and no way of appreciating how family purity laws enhance a marriage without observing them.

*Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks* states, "...asking a question is itself a profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of human life. To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a compelling testimony to the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to go further, higher, deeper. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith – that history is not random, that the universe is not impervious to our understanding, that what happens to us is not blind chance. We ask, not because we doubt, but because we believe.

