

The Reform Advocate

Volume IX, Number II: Spring 2017

THE SOCIETY FOR
CLASSICAL
REFORM
JUDAISM

Reclaiming & Renewing
Our Heritage for the 21st Century



“Let All Who Are Hungry Come...” Passover: A Classical Reform Perspective

by Rabbi Howard A. Berman

Reform Judaism’s deep commitment to outreach and inclusion are core values rooted in the historic development of our Movement. The early pioneers of liberal Judaism were broad thinkers who sought to reclaim the universal message of our Biblical Prophets, teaching that the Torah’s ethical ideals were meant to embrace all people. In today’s pluralistic Movement, the Classical Reform voice continues to uphold the historic spiritual principles and distinctive worship traditions of our heritage, and seeks to express this focus in its thought and practice. In no context is this perspective more clearly reflected than in the new ways that our Movement came to understand the meaning and observance of Passover, early in its history in the 19th century.

While the interpretations of the Exodus in the traditional Haggadah tended to emphasize the particular meaning of the story for Jews themselves, the early Reformers expanded its timeless messages and themes, to proclaim a universal ideal for all humanity. In the various edi-

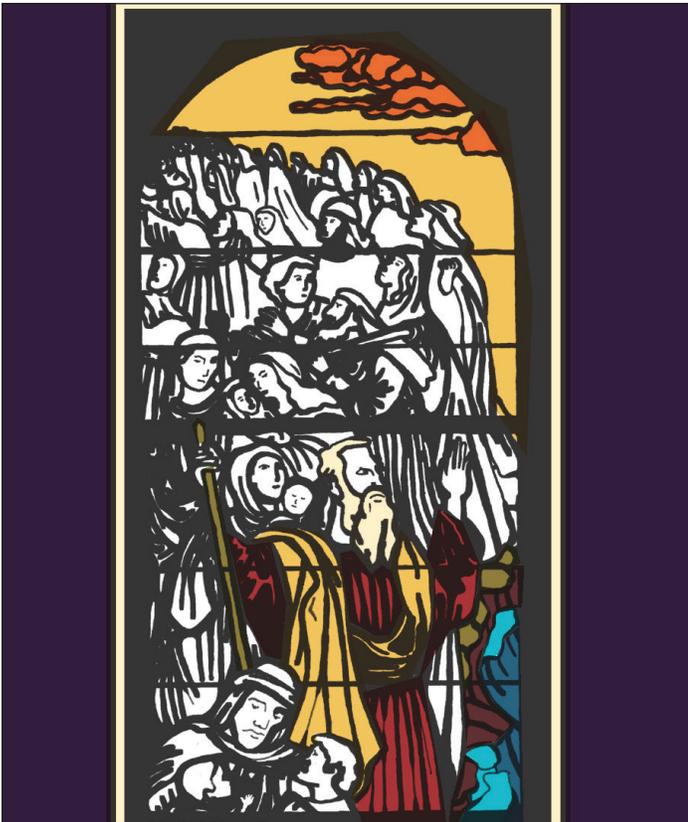
tions of the historic Union Haggadah, they gave new significance to the ancient invitation “let all who are hungry, come and eat!” The memory of slavery and the promise of liberation became a paradigm for human history in general, with the Jewish experience broadened to serve as a symbolic hope for oppressed people everywhere. The link of ancient memory and future redemption was fundamental to the historic Haggadah text, but had previously focused on the coming arrival of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

“The Reform Haggadah radically expanded this concept to envision the time when all men and women would be freed from every form of tyranny and suffering. The great Classical Reform hymn, “God of Might” reframed the literalist aspirations of the “Adir Hu” text that concludes the Seder, replacing the previous emphasis on the rebuilding of the ancient Temple with the broader, universal hope that one day, the “chains of all who labored in thrall would be riven.”



*INSIDE: Jewish Response to the Immigration & Refugee Crisis,
plus - Important Interfaith Family and Jewish Life Survey Results*

This inclusive, accessible understanding of Passover's meaning has special significance for those who choose to join themselves to the faith and community, history and destiny of the Jewish People ...or who share that history and destiny with their loved ones. Because its story is a universal one, the Haggadah's challenge that we should remember the Exodus as if each of us personally were redeemed from slavery in Egypt, becomes a powerful way to claim this historic legacy for oneself. The liberation from previous spiritual struggle, the journey through the wilderness, and the revelatory encounter at Sinai, all become a symbolic model for the individual experience of anyone whose own personal wanderings have led them to choose Judaism. The Seder itself, originally conceived as a "crash course" in basic Judaism, can become an intensive review of our entire history, for either a new participant or a diverse gathering of family and friends of different faiths and backgrounds... to say nothing of those countless life-long Jews who could use a refresher course!

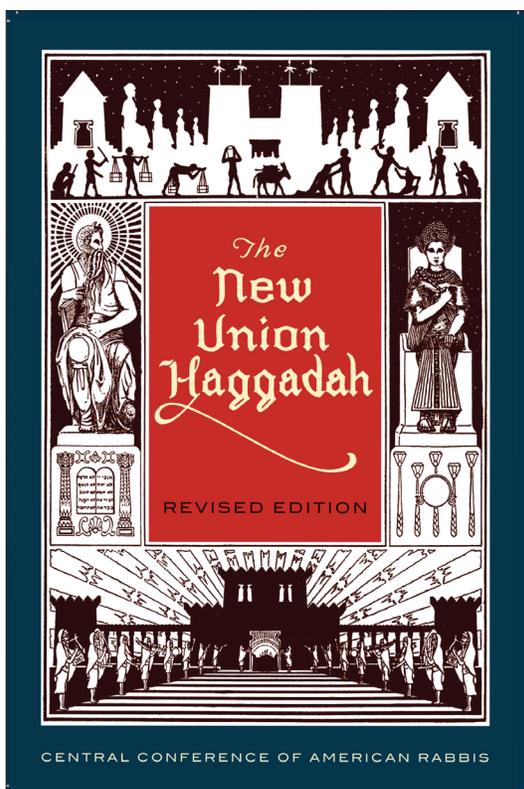


An historic Reform perspective would hold that while our liberal religious emphasis should be on the broad ethical values of Passover, rather than on its rituals, nevertheless, the rich symbolism of the Festival's various observances can also be profoundly meaningful ways to connect and affirm these ideals. A conscious, mindful decision to avoid eating bread during Passover week offers the opportunity to constantly reflect on the contemporary implications of freedom and liberation in our daily lives. This practice also reminds of the reality that many in our world must abstain from eating bread every day...not out of religious choice, but through the enslavement of poverty and hunger.

All of us...those born into the Jewish community, those whose own spiritual journeys have led them to our faith, and those who share their love and lives with Jews, can all accept Passover's broad, inclusive invitation to come and eat at the table of freedom. We can all embrace the memory of oppression and liberation as our own. This great challenge is proclaimed in the opening words of the Seder:

“Now in the presence of loved ones and friends, before us the emblems of festive rejoicing, we gather for our sacred celebration. With the household of Israel, our elders and young ones, linking and bonding the past with the future, we heed once again the Divine call to service... living our story that is told for all people... whose shining conclusion is yet to unfold!”

Illustrations taken from The New Union Haggadah



This beautiful volume, edited by Rabbi Howard Berman and published by our national Reform Movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis, is a fresh, new interpretation of the Seder that was first published in 1923. This is a faithful revision of "the little grey book" that has been beloved by generations of American Reform Jews. Now, families who have cherished this holiday tradition, can finally replace their tattered, wine-stained copies with a beautiful new edition that seeks to preserve the elegance and beauty of the original version, while making it fresh and relevant to our time. It has been acclaimed for the magnificent blending of the traditional prayers, readings and songs - all updated - with the distinctive original Art Deco design and new, contemporary artwork created specially for this edition.

Planning for your Passover Seder

The Beautiful and Moving

NEW UNION HAGGADAH

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"This Haggadah is beautiful in every way. Its message is the hope of peace FOR ALL PEOPLE. A compact hardcover volume (easy for cleanup and durability), its colorful images uplift and inspire. The language is new, but the meaning is timeless..."

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Frederick Roden, PhD

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NEW ELEMENTS in *THE NEW UNION HAGGADAH*

Leader:

In addition to the three traditional symbols already explained, there are new elements we have added to the seder, which broaden our reflections of the meaning of Passover for our own time.

THE ROASTED EGG

The leader lifts up the roasted egg.

Leader:

The egg has long been on the seder plate, but was never formally explained, as were the other ritual foods. As another universal symbol of the renewal of springtime and of women as a source of the cycle of birth and life, we lift it up and honor its meaning now.

THE CUP OF MIRIAM AND THE ORANGE

Leader:

Our tradition teaches that a miraculous well of water accompanied the Israelites on their journey from slavery to freedom, giving them water and sustaining them throughout the deserts. It is said that this well existed because of Miriam, Moses' sister, whose spiritual values nourished the community of Israel, and that when she died, the waters of the well went dry. In honor of Miriam and all of the Jewish women - mothers, daughters, and sisters - whose roles in the Passover story and its celebration through the ages have not been fully shared and honored, we place a cup of water, Miriam's cup, on our table.

The leader raised the cup of water:

Leader:

This is Miriam's cup, the cup of living and miraculous water. We pause now to give thanks to her strength and courage, her gifts of prophecy, and the wise ways in which she sustained the Children of Israel in the desert. We think of the countless strong, wise, courageous women in our tradition, in our world, and in our lives who have nourished us, taught us, blessed us, and supported us in our own journeys and search for liberation.

Pass Miriam's cup, filled with water, to all present. Each person fills their water glass with some of the water from Miriam's cup and then, in so doing, silently reflects a lesson learned or a blessing gleaned through a relationship with a woman in our life.

THE ORANGE

The leader lifts up the orange.

Leader:

The orange that we have added to the traditional symbolic foods on the seder plate is yet another new dimension of the traditions of Passover. Its unlikely presence in the midst of the other seder symbols has come to represent other voices not previously recognized in the life of our communities or family life, from women in roles of spiritual leadership, to the full diversity of those who gather around our seder tables.

Together:

Let us give thanks for the blessing of everyone among us, for their love and guidance, and for their unique places in our lives - as we recommit ourselves to continuing the Exodus struggle for the freedom and liberation of all people everywhere!



WELCOMING THE STRANGER IN OUR MIDST A TIMELY PASSOVER MESSAGE

Working for a just and compassionate society is a core Jewish value. Not surprisingly, thousands of rabbis and countless Jewish organizations, individuals and families, are stepping up to fight discrimination against immigrants and refugees based on race, faith or nationality. The national institutions of Reform Judaism have been in the forefront of this effort, reaffirming the Prophetic vision that has always been at the heart of our liberal Jewish faith.

One of the great pioneer Founders of our Movement, Rabbi David Einhorn (1809-1879), became one of the earliest Jewish voices against racism and xenophobia in the United States. In his Inaugural Sermon at Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore in 1855, this newly arrived immigrant from Germany denounced the “Know Nothing” Party - the nativist, anti- Catholic political movement that was the forerunner of the Ku Klux Klan- courageously affirming that such bigotry undermined all of America’s foundational values. Rabbi Einhorn is regarded as the “Father” of Classical Reform Judaism and the Union Prayer Book, which continues to proclaim that we do God’s will most clearly “when justice burns like a flaming fire within us, and love evokes willing sacrifice from us...”

Here are some of the faces of today’s immigrants and refugees, quotes from Jewish leaders, and excerpts from the New Union Haggadah. Faith in action.

“The Jewish community – like all Americans whose ancestors arrived as refugees and immigrants – was given opportunities to access education, join the workforce, and contribute to their communities and their country. Let us not now allow fear to overwhelm our nation’s capacity for compassion,”

Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Director of the Religion Action Center



Nuccio DiNuzzo/Chicago Tribune/TNS via Getty Images

While blessed with the liberty of this land, let us also strive to make secure our spiritual freedom. As the delivered, we may become the deliverer...our people’s historic task of working for the liberation of all humanity from every form of tyranny and oppression. (*New Union Haggadah*, pg. 43.)

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus (November 2, 1883)



By NH Labor New, Published December 20, 2013

“We will resist all attempts to vilify refugees... “The U.S. Jewish community owes its very existence to a tradition of welcoming refugees.”

From HIAS, a refugee resettlement agency formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

We break the middle matzah, setting aside one half as the *afikomen*. We will share this bread of our affliction after the meal, even as our story has seen us from slavery into freedom. May it be a reminder to us of the importance of liberty, a signpost of our dedication to the end of bondage for all people. (*The New Union Haggadah*, pgs. 25-26.)

L'CHAYIM . . . TO LIFE!

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם!

LASHANAH HABAAH
BIRUSHALAYIM!

NEXT YEAR . . .
IN A WORLD AT PEACE . . .
FOR JERUSALEM
AND FOR ALL PEOPLE!

“INTERFAITH FAMILY AND JEWISH LIFE SURVEY”

PREDICTS WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO JOIN A CONGREGATION

by Cynthia L. Conley, Ph.D., MSW; Rabbi Dr. Nadia Siritsky, MSSW, BCC; Rabbi Devon A. Lerner, DD, MSW

“In the Historic spirit of Reform Judaism, we are committed to a meaningful, participatory liturgy that appeals to both mind and heart — a primarily English language Service (or in the vernacular of the community) — enriched by the timeless elements of Hebrew texts...”

(Excerpt from “The Principles of the Society for Classical Reform Judaism,” on our website at <http://renewreform.org/about/our-principles>)

The value of conducting services primarily in English is debated within the American Reform Movement, without much objective data to inform the conversation. In 2015, Dr. Cynthia Conley, Assistant Professor, Spalding University, School of Social Work, approached the Society, offering to conduct a survey to study the impact of the amount of Hebrew in Reform Jewish worship services on attendance and spiritual satisfaction. The Society gladly gave its verbal support for this study that could inform our advocacy efforts. Dr. Conley designed the *Interfaith Family and Jewish Life Survey* and analyzed the results. The Society helped promote participation in the survey.

The results of the Interfaith Family and Jewish Life Survey have provided us with important data about who is likely to join a congregation and find meaning and purpose in worship experiences. The findings are particularly timely as many congregations are struggling to attract new members.

Over 230 individuals responded to the survey with approximately 80% indicating that they were members of Reform congregations in the United States; 37% identified as a member of an interfaith couple. Seventy-one percent of congregants reported that they have a poor reading knowledge of Hebrew and 89% reported a poor understanding of Hebrew. In sum, only 11% can read and understand Hebrew.

A 2013 Pew Research study, *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, concluded that: “Only 13% of Jews in America understand Hebrew, so the majority of them may be unintentionally excluded during worship services. Non-Jewish significant others who attend worship services are also unintentionally excluded from worship.”

Both members and prospective members are more likely to attend worship services and become engaged in the congregation, when the services are language accessible .

Non-members who do not understand Hebrew reported that their minds stray when Hebrew is read. They also indicated that they would attend services more frequently if additional English was included in the service.

Since a large majority of Jews cannot read or understand Hebrew, the amount of Hebrew in a worship service will have a significant impact on those who attend. This is a true for Jews and for interfaith families and individuals from different faith backgrounds who are spiritually drawn to Reform Judaism. Those with little or no Hebrew language skills will find it more difficult to experience the beauty and power of the prayers and worship experience.

This is not, however, a reason to exclude Hebrew from services. Hebrew is our sacred language. Our key Hebrew prayers, recited and beloved by Jews around the world for centuries, are important parts of Jewish life and worship. The sound of Hebrew spiritually connects us to our ancestors and heritage. Yet, the meaning of the words spoken in the vernacular and addressing matters of mind and heart, are essential for a spiritually meaningful experience. How much Hebrew we include can significantly impact who attends services and who joins a Reform congregation. Here are two key findings of the Interfaith Family and Jewish Life survey.

Two Key Findings

1) Both members of congregations and prospective members said they are more likely to attend services and become engaged in the congregation when the worship services are language accessible. Non-

members who do not understand Hebrew reported that their minds strayed when Hebrew was read. They also indicated that they would attend services more frequently if additional English was included in the service.

2) Interfaith families also indicated they are more likely to join a congregation when they feel unconditionally welcomed, when worship services are language accessible, and when the congregation's policies support the full participation of interfaith families in the life of the congregation. This includes reading from the bimah during their child's baby naming and Bar or Bat Mitzvah service.

Many interfaith families belong to or are considering joining a Reform congregation. Addressing language accessibility in Reform worship services is important as the number of interfaith families in America continues to grow. The initial findings of the Interfaith Family and Jewish Life Survey are encouraging and we look forward to conducting an expanded study to gain additional data that will allow Reform congregations to more effectively respond to the needs of all those who seek Jewish expressions of their spiritual quests. We anticipate that our initial survey and the data from an expanded survey will help us develop resources that can support congregations in meeting these needs. We look forward to sharing our findings with the broader Reform Jewish community.

***INTERFAITH FAMILIES
ARE MORE LIKELY TO JOIN
A REFORM JEWISH
CONGREGATION WHEN ...***

- *They feel unconditionally welcomed as an interfaith family*
- *Worship services are language accessible*
- *Congregation policies support full participation of interfaith families in congregational life, including reading from the bimah during their child's baby naming and Bar or Bat Mitzvah service*

**STUDIES CITED IN THE
INTERFAITH FAMILY & JEWISH
LIFE**

**Studies on the Impact of Hebrew
on the Worship Service Experience**

1. A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013 Pew Research Center
 - a. Only 13% of Jews in America understand Hebrew, so "the majority of them may be unintentionally excluded during worship services."
 - b. Non-Jewish significant others who attend worship services are also unintentionally excluded from worship.

<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey>

**Recent Studies on the Growing Number
on Interfaith Family in the U.S.**

1. One in Five Americans Were Raised in Interfaith Homes: 2016 Pew Research Center

<http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2016/10/26083429/Mixed-Religions-full-report.pdf>
2. Religious Landscape Study: 2014 Pew Research Center
 - a. One in six Jews in the United States are Jews by Choice, who converted to Judaism from another religion.
3. A Portrait of Jewish Americans, 2013 Pew Research Center
 - a. Thirty-five percent of Jews are married or partnered to someone of a different faith or of no religious orientation.
 - b. Fifty-eight percent of Jew who have married since 2000 are in interfaith marriages.

<http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey>

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The Society for Classical Reform Judaism advocates for the progressive spiritual values and worship traditions of our Reform heritage as creative resources for contemporary Jewish life.

We understand Judaism to be foremost a religious commitment rather than an ethnic identity.

We promote opportunities for meaningful and accessible worship, primarily in the language of our own time and place.

We demonstrate our religious commitment in ethical action inspired by the Biblical Prophets.

We affirm the American experience and its ideals as central to our Jewish identity.

We extend a warm welcome and unconditional support for interfaith families and all spiritual seekers.

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