Subject: RECON-J digest 4100

Date: Fri, 3 Jan 2003 02:00:04 EST

From: "RECON-J: Reconstructionist Judaism" <recon-j@shamash.org>

To: "RECON-J: Reconstructionist Judaism" <recon-j@shamash.org>

RECON-J Digest 4100

Topics covered in this issue include:

1) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Aaron Goldblatt <lists-recon@goldblatt.net>

2) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Benjamin Ben-Baruch <bbenbaruch@earthlink.net>

3) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

4) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Eric Mendelsohn <mendelso@math.utoronto.ca>

5) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

6) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

7) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by "Benjamin Ben-Baruch"<bbenbaruch@earthlink.net>

8) Re: Haggadah of Passover

by "Alan G" <mr\_alan99@hotmail.com>

9) response re Fonda

by "Ilan Hartuv" <msih@mscc.huji.ac.il>

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 10:50:13 EST

From: Aaron Goldblatt <lists-recon@goldblatt.net>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

> As Passover gets closer, what do Reconstructionist members feel about

>the Haggadah? How should it (or should not?) be adapted to our age?

In my family over the past couple of years, the tradition has developed

that each person bring their own Haggadah, with variety and differences

encouraged. In the end they all seem to follow the same basic format, so

it's enlightening to see how things have changed as traditions have moved

from one place to another.

My own experience has been that, with the exception of the most recently

revised Reconstructionist Haggadah published within the last year or two,

most them tend to fall into one of two categories:

A) The overly simplistic kind. This means, all one thing or all

another. Their presentation doesn't offer a choice of services based on

the text, but instead is written with the idea that you'll do the whole thing.

A gigantic strength of the new Reconstructionist version, in my opinion, is

that it offers a choice of services depending on what you want. "Less is

more" is designed for people with a shorter service in mind, while "More is

more" is offered in the same Haggadah for people who want something longer

and slightly more traditional. I forget the name of the third, but I

believe it's very woman-centered and also looked very appealing. Another

strength is that the new Reconstructionist Haggadah includes something I've

never seen in any other compilation: An estimate of how long you'll go

before dinner. Especially for our unprepared non-Jewish friends, an hour

and a half at the table before eating anything of nutritional consequence

can be a very unwelcome surprise. I still have a friend who calls it the

"starvation holiday." (But then I've never taken her to Yom Kippur lunch.)

B) The far too complicated kind. This includes the ones with entirely too

much Hebrew for your average not-really-observant Jew.

For anyone looking to write their own (and David, as I've indicated, I want

a copy of yours when you're finished. It will make a terrific addition to

my own tradition.), I'd suggest looking at the newest Reconstuctionist book.

One thing to remember is that these books tend to be very Jewishly correct

(politically correct in a Jewish way) about telling the story of Passover,

in that only the Jewish point of view is presented. There's nothing

inherently wrong with that, but it would be nice to have some insight into

Egyptian thinking and practice during this period. Such an undertaking

would require more than a little historical research, and I'd hate to see

this sort of stuff included at the expense of the story of the Jews release

from slavery, but it would be a new and different point of view of an

ancient story.

Another thing I'd like to see is a modern discussion of the Plagues. Most

Reconstructionists I've talked to aren't big on what some call

supernaturalism. How, then, might a modern person interpret what's meant

or intended by a story of plagues of frogs, blood, boils, or first born

death. Or, even did anything even remotely close even happen. What does

the scientifically-derived historical record show?

Maybe this doesn't directly answer David's question in terms of more vs.

less Hebrew, etc., but from my point of view, these are the things I'd like

to see. After all, the whole point of the seder (at least as I was taught)

isn't to make sure we include the "right" pieces of poetry or Hebrew or

songs, or even create a tradition we redo every year, but to make sure we

retell the story. That doesn't mean, though, that we can't also include a

modern interpretation as we tell it.

ag

[As a completely unrelated aside, over the last few years, I've missed my

own most important Passover tradition. Passover to me was always two

nights, the first led by Leroy Shuster and listening to Moyshe Oysher

(spelling) do Chad Gad Yah, and Davida Shuster (I believe it was her, Gail

can correct me) singing I forget what in an awful cracking voice, and the

second night at Susie Specter's (not her current name) house. It's been a

number of years since I've done them, or since Leroy was even capable of

doing it, but it was what I got used to, and it was wonderful. Oh, and

Dana would make matzoh balls with parsley in them, green canon balls, we

called them. Fantastic.]

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 10:52:15 EST

From: Benjamin Ben-Baruch <bbenbaruch@earthlink.net>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

At 11:02 PM 2003-01-01 -0500, you wrote:

> >As Passover gets closer, what do

> >Reconstructionist members feel about the

> >Haggadah?

To my way of thinking, the Reconstructionist haggadah is by far the best

widely available haggadah.

Other haggadot worthy of consideration for 2nd and 3rd sederim and for

adding additional information (in order of my preferences):

1. The New Haggadah (the 1944? Reconstructionist haggadah, especially

noteworthy for some of its readings and for its inclusion of midrashic

material in Hebrew and English)

2. the haggadah published in Ramparts magazine ca. 1968 and later adapted

in various incarnations of liberation haggadot -- for its political

amplifications regarding the struggles for freedom and liberation

3. The New Jewish Agenda volume of 3 haggadot -- for its combination of

politics and its orientation towards alternative rituals

4. The Reform haggadah of about 10-15 years ago as a different take on a

progressive seder and for its alternative order of service (and rationale

for same) and the new CCAR haggadah (available for \*.pdf download on the

CCAR site) as a different take on a progressive seder

And, for its historical and academic excellence: E.D. Goldschmidt, The

Passover Haggadah: Its Sources and History with the complete text of the

traditional Haggadah, the most ancient Haggadah from the Cairo Geniza and

sample pages of manuscript and printed Haggadot in reproduction (Jerusalem:

The Bialik Institute, 1969). The book is in Hebrew. (The Hebrew citation

(short version): Daniel Goldschmidt, Haggadah shel Pesah: Meqoroteha

ve-toldoteha be-meshekh hadorot (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1969/5729).

Regarding the specific questions asked about principles for revising and

updating, I highly recommend the prefaces to both Reconstructionist

haggadot (i.e. the 1944 and 2000 editions). Regarding "pour out your wrath

on the nations of the earth" I recommend transvaluating this passage using

Heschel's insight about the prophetic idea "visiting the sins" of one

generation on the next. In his book The Prophets, Heschel points out that

the Hebrew term "pkod" means to hold people morally responsible for their

actions and that the prophetic idea is that not only are people resonsible

but that immoral actions lead to negative consequences that unfold in

history. This moral concept is connected to the prophetic theology of a

God that acts in history. (Trygve Tholfsen, in his book Historical

Thinking, argues convincingly that this prophetic theology discussed by

Heschel is at the core of the concept of history in contemporary western

civilization.) Thus the passage can be interpreted as "God acts in history

and our immoral actions have negative historical consequences" or more

literally "pour out thy wrath upon those nations and peoples which act

immorally by having them have to deal with the negative consequences of

their actions". But watch out when you invoke this because you will also

be invoking God's wrath upon Israel! (As did the prophets, btw.)

Benjy

Benjy

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:29:13 EST

From: Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

Richard Ulrich wrote:

.. Have you

> looked at "A Night of Questions - a Passover Haggadah" 1999, The

> Reconstructionist Press?

>

> We used it last Passover, and I must admit things were a bit of a muddle.

> There are so many choices and options, we ended up missing things, and it

> seemed vaguely unsatisfying. ..

You really have to prepare a bit before you use the new Recon Haggadah. There is TOO MUCH material to use in one sitting. And it is designed to be used in a way that required you to customize which readings and sections you will use at a particular Seder. There are a number of suggested "tracks" in the seder itself (at the back I believe) or you can create your own. But it takes the seder leader an hour or two of reading and thinking in advance to decide which selection you will read this year and which you will skip. The good news is that there are so many permutations you are unlikely to get board by repetition for many years to come.

We typically augment the seder with our own readings and musical selections, and have continued to do this with the new Recon Haggadah as well. Two musical selections that we have used for several years is a a Paul Robeson recording of "Go Down Moses", and the Klezmatics "Refugee Song" from their Possessed album.

As for "Sfoch Xamatxa Al Ha Goyim Asher Lo Yaduxa" - [ pour out they wrath on the nations who know you not ] I have mixed feelings about it's removal from the new Recon Haggaddah [ on the one hand it could be understood to be exclusionary, chauvinistic and elitist, on the other hand given the Jews extremely weak position visa vis the "Nations" for most of Jewish History, it seems like a genuine cry of pain and hope for justice, or of faith in God's ultimate victory and trustworthiness - as it is traditionally said with the door open for all the world to hear , and of course we could transvalue "the nations that know you not" to be people who are unjust.] So last year we did not say this passage when we opened the door, but had a discussion about whether it was appropriate to remove it or not.

On the general question of updated Haggadahs, it is interesting to note that one of the first in this vein (perhaps THE first) was Kaplan's 1940 "New Haggadah". It is quite dry, by my taste, but intellectually interesting for what he was trying to do; take God down a notch or two, and raise up the figure of Moses by many notches (the traditional Haggadah does not mention Moses at all), and make obvious allusions to the then current world situation. His message is clearly that Liberation is in human hands and is a human responsibility. God may help, but he helps mainly through human activity and not supernatural miracles.

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Sydney

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:31:10 EST

From: Eric Mendelsohn <mendelso@math.utoronto.ca>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

What our family and friends have done is to distribute one haggadah

(Usually Feast of Freedom) to all and one copy each of different

haggadahs to all. (Ranging from Waskow, old Recon,New Recon, San Diego,

Maxwell house, ArtScroll, Lieberman, Archeological, Facsimile of

Sarajevo, as well as readings etc--)

Each person as their turn to read comes up, can elaborate based on what

is in their particular haggadah, or their own perspective , or read

from the standard one distributed .(Christian , Sikh, Hindu guests have

much to add-- we have never had a Zoroastrian or a Muslim as a guest).

Songs are sung fershure--all else is sort of elective but we follow the

seder. We insist that Rabban Gamliel part be recited in as many

languages as the gathering knows starting with each person's mother

tongue. By replacing carpas with a mini meal (carpas , gefilte fish,

eggs in salt water, celery &olives) we can keep younger people (and

older adults) from rushing to the shuxan arux.

It is chaotic at times filled with religious, cultural, and political

debate (Hillel and Ron-- If you are in Toronto when we are you are

welcome at our seder) , as well as the overtones of a meeting of "Adult

Children of Jewish Parents" .

% Eric Mendelsohn

% eric@lilneric.ca

% http://www.lilneric.ca

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be reproduced by any means, electronic or mechanical without explicit

permission ( However, memorizing and shouting at a demonstration or

from a soapbox is encouraged). Failure to heed this warning could

invite legal action and/or one of the first nine plagues.

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:36:06 EST

From: Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

Benjamin Ben-Baruch wrote:

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>

>

> Other haggadot worthy of consideration for 2nd and 3rd sederim and for

> adding additional information (in order of my preferences):

> 1. The New Haggadah (the 1944? Reconstructionist haggadah, especially

> noteworthy for some of its readings and for its inclusion of midrashic

> material in Hebrew and English)

It was 1940. Written as the gathering storm of Nazism and anti-semitism was breaking over Europe (but before the full horrors of the "final solution").

I would also add to your list the "Liberation Haggadah" - by Aviva Cantor Zuchoff (ca 1969)

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Sydney

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:38:18 EST

From: Sydney Nestel <sydNestel@sympatico.ca>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

Aaron Goldblatt wrote:

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> .... an hour

> and a half at the table before eating anything of nutritional consequence

> can be a very unwelcome surprise. I still have a friend who calls it the

> "starvation holiday." (But then I've never taken her to Yom Kippur lunch.)

>

One way around this is to make the blessing over the Carpas (greens) into an excuse to eat more than just a sprig of parsley. We usually serve parsley, hard boiled eggs, and boiled potatoes at (all suitable for dipping in salt water) at this point in the Seder, and remind people that the main course is still an hour off and to take a second helping if they like.

Since my 17 year old son has become a vegan and an eco-terrorist (I am joking. Mostly he terrorizes his parents for wastefully destroying the planet by either using too much electricity - by leaving the computer on all night - or flushing the toilet "unnecessarily" !!!) we also use the opportunity to discuss the ecological significance of Passover and our responsibilities re global warming species extinction pollution etc. My son gladly takes the lead in preparing this section of the seder. (On the other hand preparing vegan (no meat, no honey, no eggs!!!) kosher for passover seder meal is something my wife feels she could live without.)

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Sydney

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:38:56 EST

From: "Benjamin Ben-Baruch"<bbenbaruch@earthlink.net>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

On Thu, 2 Jan 2003 10:50:13 EST Aaron Goldblatt wrote:

> . . . it would be

> nice to have some insight into

> Egyptian thinking and practice during this

> period. Such an undertaking

> would require more than a little historical

> research, . . .

An Archaelological haggadah was published in Hebrew and English about 20-30

years ago which contains some of this information.

Another excellent source regarding a different point of view on the Exodus

story is the set of educational materials and teachers guides put together in

conjunction w/ Spielberg's movie on Moses. The Islamic materials are

particularly good as educational materials and they also present the Koran

version of the Moses myths.

Benjy

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Subject: Re: Haggadah of Passover

Date: Thu, 2 Jan 2003 21:58:16 EST

From: "Alan G" <mr\_alan99@hotmail.com>

To: recon-j@shamash.org

Al Goldberg writes:

In the past couple of years I have supplemented the traditional "Goldberg

translation" Maxwell House Haggadah (which our extended family refuses to

abandon completely) with exerpts from the latest Reconstructionisat Haggadah

with the Kabbalastic Haggadah. Using all these I have been able to keep

everybody happy by mainting tradition and order by using the traditional

haggadah, adding contemporary commentary from the Recon point of view and

providing some spiritual meaning for the rituals and spiritual insights into

the story from the kabbalah point of view (which are alluded to but not

excpressed in detail by the Recon authors).

>One thing to remember is that these books tend to be very Jewishly correct

>(politically correct in a Jewish way) about telling the story of Passover,

>in that only the Jewish point of view is presented. There's nothing

>inherently wrong with that, but it would be nice to have some insight into

>Egyptian thinking and practice during this period.

The kabbalistic viewpoint is that each of is Pharaoh and we are at this

moment each in slavery to the materialistic physical world, ego, power, and

stuff. This notion replaces the fundamentalist literal reading of the text

with a meaning that provides insights as to how we can work on transforming

ourselves.

>Another thing I'd like to see is a modern discussion of the Plagues. Most

>Reconstructionists I've talked to aren't big on what some call

>supernaturalism. How, then, might a modern person interpret what's meant

>or intended by a story of plagues of frogs, blood, boils, or first born

>death. Or, even did anything even remotely close even happen. What does

>the scientifically-derived historical record show?

I don't think there is much point in trying to justify a literal reading of

Torah with science or history. The psychological/spiritual interpretations

are what provide me with meaning. The correlations between the 10 plagues

and the 10 utterances/commandments, the 10 sayings in the creation story,

the 10 sefierot of the tree of life and the process of working on ourselves

to overcome darkness in our own lives give an entirely different meaning

that tha literal readding of the story.

Al Goldberg