

The Liberated Haggadah
A Passover Celebration for Cultural, Secular and Humanistic Jews
by Rabbi Peter H. Schweitzer

Selections

“Contemporary Challenge”

In the modern era, however, our contemporary sages – biblical scholars, archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians – have called into question practically all aspects of the legend we have so loyally commemorated each year. These scholars have identified inconsistencies in the story, chronological lapses, and the mythological aspects of the account, not to mention a total lack of corroborating evidence.

At most, perhaps a small band of our ancestors – the Levite tribe – experienced and escaped Egyptian slavery – but nearly all of the early Hebrews never stepped foot in Egypt and had no memory of this event.

And yet, this story has enthralled the Jewish people for centuries and been embraced by Jewish culture collectively as our foundational event.

Why has it been so compelling? And why do we continue to cling to it even in the face of evidence to the contrary?

We tell the story because it is the first ever in recorded history to celebrate the idea that slaves could become free people.

We tell the story because it has inspired us – in our darkest moments – to hope for freedom renewed.

We tell the story because it teaches us to have compassion for all those who are still not free – because “we, too, once were slaves in Egypt.”

“Four Types of Children”

There are four types of children. We will answer each according to his or her ability to listen and comprehend...

...Some say there is also a fifth child who no longer sits at the table.

This child has fallen away by attrition and disaffection.
This child has been turned away by rejection and disapproval.
She is feeling sad and lonely. He is feeling angry and bitter.

*Say to this child:
There is always a seat at this table.
Please come back to us, we cherish you forever.*

“One World - One People” (Introduction to a list of Contemporary Plagues)

The fate of every Jew is bound up with the fate of the Jewish people. And the destiny of the Jewish people cannot be separated from the destiny of all humanity. We cannot be fully Jewish unless we recognize that we are also fully human...

...Modernity has brought enormous comfort, convenience, and wealth – for many. But millions more live in poverty. They are afflicted with disease and malnutrition. They are victims of oppressive regimes and uncertain futures.

A multitude of social problems continues to plague the world. Whether close at home or in far-off lands, we all share in their effects and in the responsibility to overcome them.

We spill wine from our cups at the mention of each of these Contemporary Afflictions. We cannot allow ourselves to drink a full measure since our own lives are sobered by these ills, which darken our lives and diminish our joy.