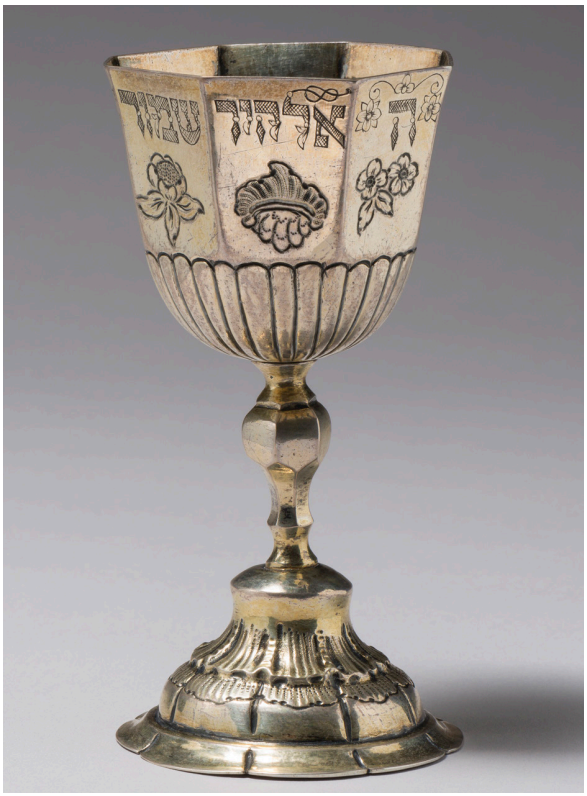
FIVE FAITHS PROJECT



Judaism

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Introduction to Judaism

The story of Abraham and Sarah

> *How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands! The heavens declare your glory, the arch of sky displays your handiwork. The heavens declare the glory of God.*
>
> Psalm 8

In order to begin to build a basic understanding of Judaism, it is essential to turn to its stories. The early history of the Jewish faith is recorded in the books of the Torah, Judaism's sacred text. According to these stories and members of the living Jewish tradition, the history of the Jewish people, their faith and their practices may be said to begin with one man and his wife. This story tells of the time when God, Creator of the universe, spoke to Abraham and said he must take his wife and leave their homeland to travel to a distant and unknown land. Abraham was living in a remote region of what is now called the Middle East and traveled toward the land identified today as Israel. While he was on this journey, Abraham looked up at the night sky. The story explains that he heard God speak to him again. In the sacred text, the words of God are recorded:

> *I will make of you a great nation,*
> *And I will bless you;*
> *I will make your name great*
> *And you shall be a blessing…*

The story explains that Abraham was 75 years old at the time, married, and without children. Nevertheless, the text informs the reader that Abraham believed God would fulfill his promise to him. This promise made between God and Abraham is called a covenant in the Jewish tradition. A covenant is an agreement between two parties in which both have a responsibility. God's responsibility was to act in order to fulfill his word and Abraham's responsibility was to believe God and live accordingly. Because of Abraham's obedience, Jews believe God's love for Abraham and all of his descendants deepened. And because God fulfilled his word, Abraham and his descendants' love for God deepened as well.

But the story of Abraham must also include Sarah, his wife. She, too, believed God, and her wisdom and faithfulness is seen throughout the story. Women play many important roles in the foundational stories of Judaism. In this story, God told Abraham to listen to his wife, to be accountable to her. Abraham and Sarah gave birth to a son. They called him Isaac. Isaac married Rebecca. They in turn had children and little by little the lineage grew. As the story progresses through a series of adventures and challenges, the descendants of Abraham and Sarah were taken into slavery in Egypt. However, throughout these events, time and again, Jews find examples which

strengthen their belief in God's steadfastness. These examples support the Jewish belief in a true love between God and God's people.

The stories of the Jewish heritage are not without sorrow and difficulty. In these stories, recorded in the book of Exodus, one of the books in the Torah, God ultimately frees the descendants of Abraham, through the obedient leadership of Moses and his brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam.

God revealed to Moses the Ten Commandments and the Law

For forty years, Moses and the Hebrew people wandered through the wilderness. At a place called Mt. Sinai, God revealed to Moses the Ten Commandments and the Law. These commandments and law were instrumental in the formation of a new identity for the descendants of Abraham, often called the Hebrew People. According to the texts, the Exodus out of Egypt to the land God promised to Abraham would not be the last exile. Jewish history is often understood as exilic, as a series of exiles in which Jews have been faced with leaving one land for another, journeying and returning to the land promised so long ago. It is this history of motion, of travel and return, of faith expressed in the lives of ordinary men and women, mothers and daughters, sons and brothers that constitutes the Jewish heritage into which God is seen to have moved.

In giving the Ten Commandments and the Law to Moses, many Jews believe God reaffirmed the promise made to Abraham and consolidated a uniquely Jewish way of life. The Law of Moses, as it is sometimes called, covers every aspect of life. But the modern word "law" is lacking, for the Jewish law is often called Halakhah, a Hebrew word which means "the way, the path." In some sense then, the Law is active and expansive, rather than restrictive. It implies motion and progression. It implies life. Halakhah creates for the Jewish people a way of life in full response to the love of God.

The Shabbat: a Jewish response to the love of God

One way in which Jewish people may respond to God's love is through the weekly celebration of the Shabbat. Shabbat begins on Friday evening with a festive meal and continues through a day of rest on Saturday, during which many Jews refrain from all workaday activities. During the Shabbat, many Jews attend synagogue, the gathering place of worship and education in the Jewish tradition. At synagogue, a portion of the sacred texts is read and prayers are spoken. At every gathering in the synagogue, the essence of the faith is proclaimed: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord alone." These words once again introduce the presence of God, reaffirm the authority of God and God's call to faithful men and women throughout history.

The sacred texts of Judaism: the Torah, the Writings and the Talmud

While all religious traditions hold their stories as an important component for faith building, Judaism places a special reliance on the call and actions of God in the recorded history of a particular lineage. By carefully listening to the stories, time and time again, year after year, Jewish people may see and come to know tshe loving hand of God. In these stories, Jews see the action, intervention, creation and sustenance of God. The preservation of this sacred history takes on profound significance because within it Jewish people are given glimpses of their own human nature and the nature of God. These stories are recorded in the Hebrew Bible. It consists of three parts: The Torah, which includes the story of the Exodus and the Law, the Prophets, (Joshua, Judges, Jeremiah, et al.) and the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, the Book of Job). In addition to the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, a vast and rich literary resource, offers interpretations, commentary, explanations of the commandments of God, stories of famous rabbis and other Jewish lore. The sacred texts are recorded in Hebrew and preserved by rabbis. The rabbi is a teacher and a scholar, qualified to offer explanations of the sacred Torah.

The cycles of remembrance: Shabbat and the High Holidays

At the synagogue, the Jewish center of life and worship, over the course of a year, the Torah is read in its entirety. Jewish services create a cycle of remembrance. Weekly, Shabbat commemorates God's creation of the world. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the annual Day of Atonement, mark the Jewish New Year with a time of introspection and moral resolve. The Seder celebration relives in story and song the Exodus from Egypt and rekindles Jewish hope and future vision. Hanukkah is the annual, eight-day celebration commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 165 BCE after years of severe religious persecution. These holidays, along with many others, reinforce three critical truths in the Jewish world view. First, Jewish heritage and tradition affirm that God is the maker and human beings are the made. Second, this religious heritage asserts that God can be known through hearing his word. And finally, the Jewish faith tradition maintains that God offered, through his word, a way of life which is both meaningful and purposeful.

With God there is always a mystery

> *Take care, then, not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God concluded with you, and not to make for yourselves any sculptured image in any likeness, against which the Lord your God has enjoined you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God.*
>
> Deuteronomy 4.23-24

While many Jewish stories speak of God and God's action in sacred history, it is important to stress that many Jews believe that with God there is always mystery, a

certain unknowable aspect. The Jewish way of life invites followers to remember and imagine how God has acted in history, but also to keep that image from ever becoming more important than God's true self. God is not contained within creation or history any more than the pot holds the potter. Many Jews believe that this mystery is born out of the tension that lives between God as transcendent and God as thoroughly imminent. Transcendence refers to the other-ness of God, different from humans, separate in existence from all that appears to exist. But in this tradition, reverence for God also includes an awareness of God as close at hand, nearby, involved in human history in an abiding way. In the fleeting moments of life when human beings actually experience the presence of God, they experience kedushah or holiness. As David Ariel explains in What Do Jews Believe?, kedushah is ""the experience of becoming momentarily aware of the impact of divine transcendence in the world.""

Thus, the whole of human experience, and particularly Jewish history, is the direct outgrowth of what might be described as God-experience. Judith Plaskow writes:

> *Again and again in the course of its existence, the Jewish people has felt itself called by and accountable to a power not of its own making, a power that seemed to direct its destiny and give meaning to its life. In both ordinary and extraordinary moments, it has found itself guided by a reality that both propelled and sustained it and to which gratitude and obedience seemed the only fitting response.*

Judaism as culture and way of life

But to think of Judaism as solely a religion is to overlook its complexity. It is a culture, a way of life. It is a people. Imagine a mighty tree. Judaism can be likened to the tree and its complex root system and its many branches. There are four main roots in Jewish life and history: Faith, Observance, Culture and Nation. Each of these roots is expressed in the many branches of the Jewish heritage.

Faith

Faith, the first root, reaches back through history to the story of Abraham. Today, the faithful response is expressed in as many different ways as there are Jews. Remembering the analogy of the tree, each Jew may be said to be linked to the tap root of faith in one way or another, and each manifests that relationship according to upbringing, conscience and individual integrity. The diversity within Judaism is noteworthy, but its diversity grows from these common roots. There are many branches of the Jewish faith community, spreading from fundamentalism to ultra liberalism, with varying understandings and practices, but each member of each branch looks with faith to the God of history. Each branch also acknowledges that there is more to Jewish life and identity than faith alone.

Observance

Judaism also has a deep root of observance. Again, the ways and the means by which this observance is expressed may vary greatly from individual to individual, from household to household, but to be Jewish is to observe. This word, observance, has two important meanings. First, to observe means to attentively watch. To be Jewish means to be one who watches in order to see glimpses of God. To be Jewish is to possess a keen sense of "taking note" of what has occurred and what is now occurring in order to better understand and more fully participate in the significant moments of life. But to observe also has the meaning of adherence to or compliance with a certain set of agreements, rules and celebrations. Many Jews observe the holy days, holidays and festivals. Jews observe, to one degree or another, the laws that God gave to Moses. This notion of observance is central to Judaism because Jewish people find their lives to be so rich in ritual, so imbued with symbolism, so striking in complexity and in generosity, that they require observance in order to fully appreciate its magnitude. To be Jewish is to observe in both its meanings: to see and to adhere to the way things really are, to stand in the reality of the world as God made it in the Torah. This root gives to Jews a particular vantage point on all that has been, is and will be. Observance becomes both the present experience of Jewish people, and the historical and future imperative.

Culture

The third root of Judaism is its culture. Defining beauty as that which has unity, balance and a sense of integrity or completeness, to be Jewish is to have and maintain a truly beautiful culture. Stories, language and a connection to a particular land are central to this Jewish culture. The stories of Judaism live in the Torah and Talmud, but also in grandparents, mothers and fathers, uncles and cousins. Jews also search for and find the Midrash, a living tradition of stories, explanations and reflections on Jewish texts and traditions. Whether told formally in Jewish rituals and texts, or informally across a kitchen table, Jewish culture is supported and maintained through its stories. Hebrew is the language of the sacred texts and is still used in many Jewish ceremonies and celebrations, but Judaism is expressed in many languages, including Arabic and Yiddish.

Similarly, Israel plays an important role in Jewish culture. In much the same way that Hebrew is the language of the sacred texts, so Israel is the historical homeland of a sacred history. This attachment to the land now known as Israel is so important to the Jewish identity that it cannot be ignored. Modern Israel, given to a new Jewish nation in 1948, just after World War II, is an important indicator of the passionate love many Jews feel for that region of the world wherein God acted on their behalf. But lines on a map, while important, cannot define what is at stake for Jewish people. Honoring the sacred history of God is what matters. As Huston Smith describes Israel in The World's Religions, ""History cries out from every city and hillside, storied in the past."" It is this

history that is lived in, held in and remembered through the land that makes the territorial boundaries of such great importance to so many Jews.

Nation

But there is at least one more root, and that is the root of Nation. The Jewish identity draws strength from more than its faith, its observances and its culture. Judaism draws identity from its understanding of nationality. To be Jewish, wherever one lives, however one practices faith, is to see oneself as part of a people, all descended from Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob, all part of the nation which God promised would come from them. This sense of national identity is an ancestral kinship and affiliation which unites all Jews regardless of their individual and often differing expressions of faith, culture and observance.

The richness of the Jewish tradition

But to end here would be to miss something of the richness of this tradition. Judaism is a faith which incorporates story, song and prayer into the daily lives of millions of individuals and families. It is a tradition that has produced highly intricate and ornate objects made of rare and fine materials for use in its religious celebrations. While not all Jews would describe themselves as religious, there are almost 13 million people who identify themselves as Jewish in the world toady. To sit at the Shabbat table, light the candles at the appointed times, drink from the Kiddush cup, regard the Law of Moses and the story of the unleavened bread, to identify oneself as Jewish is to be reminded of the many aspects of Jewish life. The feasting and fasting, the laughter and tears, the chanting voices of believers as they retell and reenact the sacred history of God, who made all the creation out of his words spoken into the void, all of these things and more, create only an image of the richness of the Jewish heritage, in much that one can only see expressions of God's nature, and never the face of God himself. To be Jewish is to live in that rich wonder and profound faithfulness of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Moses and Miriam, all the prophets and faith-filled men and women who have gone before. To be Jewish is stand in a particular stream of human history which holds a living memory of the times in which God spoke, the ways in which God acted, and how a nation was born, grew, survived and continues even to this day.

Further Research & Points for Discussion

- The stories of Abraham and Sarah can be found in the book of Genesis, beginning in chapter 12. Jews, Muslims, and Christians all include a version of this story within their sacred texts. In the Torah, after God promised that Abraham would be the father of a great nation, but before he and Sarah have their son Isaac, Abraham has another son by a woman named Hagar. This son is named Ishmael. Although Ishmael and Hagar are forced to leave the company of Abraham, God meets them in their travels and makes promises to Hagar and Ishmael. From this set of promises, as well as the original promise to Abraham, Muslims draw their heritage. Both Jews and Muslims regard Abraham as the patriarch, and Jews regard Sarah as the matriarch of the faith, while Muslims regard Hagar as the matriarch of Islam. Many Christians regard Abraham and Sarah as their patriarch and matriarch as well.

- The story of the Exodus can be found in the Torah in the book of Exodus, chapters 1 – 20. Chapter one explains how the people came to be in bondage and the subsequent chapters describe the process by which Moses led the people out of slavery. In Chapter 20, Moses receives the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments can also be found in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6. The Law of Moses is found in the remaining chapters of Exodus and within the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

- Assign to students the task of finding a copy of the Ten Commandments. These may be found in the Torah, but also in the Christian Bible as well as in other sources. Some students may feel confident that they already know the Ten Commandments, even these students should be encouraged to find the commandments within a reliable source. How have the commandments influenced our modern laws? Can students identify counterparts for some of the commandments within our contemporary laws?

- Using an atlas, find modern Israel. With a little more research, find maps of the world made before the 1948 establishment of this new nation. Students may also be able to find maps of Biblical times, in which Haran will be identified. Comparing older, more recent and contemporary maps, encourage students to find other examples of changing boundaries, countries and regions. Have any boundaries changed within their lifetime? Were any of these changes based on religious ideals? What events might cause the changing boundaries and the establishment of new nations? What events led to the establishment of Modern Israel?

- If study of WWII and the Holocaust is within the teacher's expected course of study, ask students to consider how the history of the Hebrew people in the stories of Moses and the Exodus might affect Jewish understanding of the historical events of the Holocaust? What does it mean to be a people in exile?

Contemporary Research Questions

- Search for news stories pertaining to a movement in America to post the Ten Commandments in public schools. Students may research this question and present to the class the pros and cons. Ask students to consider the possible outcomes, motivations, and objections. Encourage students to support these considerations with source materials.

- The nation of Israel continues to have on-going conflict, and peace talks continue as well. Using newspapers, television, periodicals, and the Internet, ask students to research the conflicts and the role America has played in negotiating for peace. How does sharing a common heritage in the story of Abraham affect the struggles in the Middle East?

- Using the internet and a local newspaper, ask students to find the nearest synagogue. Imagine you are a practicing Jew, keeping the Shabbat. In some Orthodox Jewish households, driving a car is considered to be "work" and should be avoided on Shabbat. Is the synagogue close enough to your home or school that you would be able to walk there on Shabbat?

Yom Kippur, East River, New York, no. 16 from *The Americans*,1954
Robert Frank, American, born in Zurich (1924 – 2019)
gelatin silver print
12 3/8 x 18 6/8 in.

In 1955, Swedish born photographer, Robert Frank received a Guggenheim award. He spent the next two years traveling throughout the United States capturing images of American life. These images were then published in a book called *The Americans* (1959). This book may be available in the public library.

Frank's photographs were taken with a 35mm camera. Many consider that he broke the mold of contemporary photography by creating images which appear to have been taken on the run, or at the spur of the moment. Sometimes, his images are a little out of focus, or the horizon line may be off kilter. In this way, he was able to capture an immediacy in his work. Many of the images in *The Americans* include immigrant families.

In this image, Frank shows the viewer Jewish men and a boy aboard a boat in the East River. The men have their backs to the camera and the young boy looks off to the distance. The result is a certain sense of mystery, perhaps suggesting that it is not easy to see directly into the lives of Jewish immigrants.

How does the viewer identify the individuals as Jewish? One clue is the head covering on the boy in the foreground. Are there other clues? Consider the title of the piece as one clue the artist provides the viewer.

Yorn Kippur ("yohm kee-POOR") is the last of the Ten Days of Repentance, the Day of Atonement that begins the Jewish Calendar Year. It is a solemn day of prayer and fasting, with services held at the synagogue. Prayers are made to void all promises and vows made in haste or thoughtlessness. Commemorations for the death of loved ones, and poetry focusing on forgiveness are included in the services of the day.

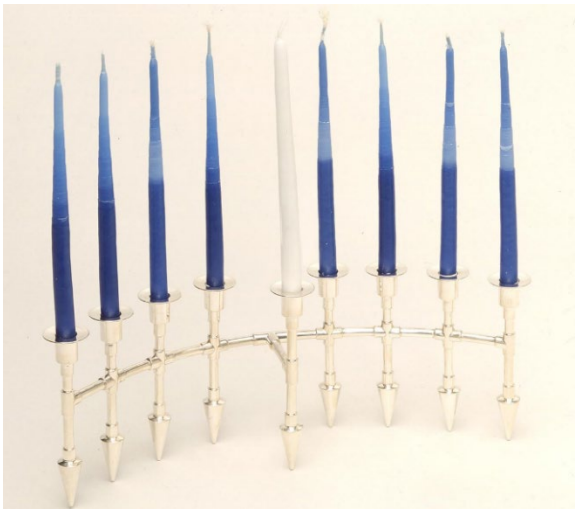
Robert Frank (American, born in Switzerland, 1924- 2019); *Yom Kippur - East River, New York City, no. 16 from The Americans,* 1954; Gelatin Silver Print; 12 3/8 x 18 13/16 in.; Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Anonymous Gift, 79.70.18

Hanukkiah, 1999
John Cogwell, American born, 1948
Silver, 3 7/8 x 10 x 2 in.

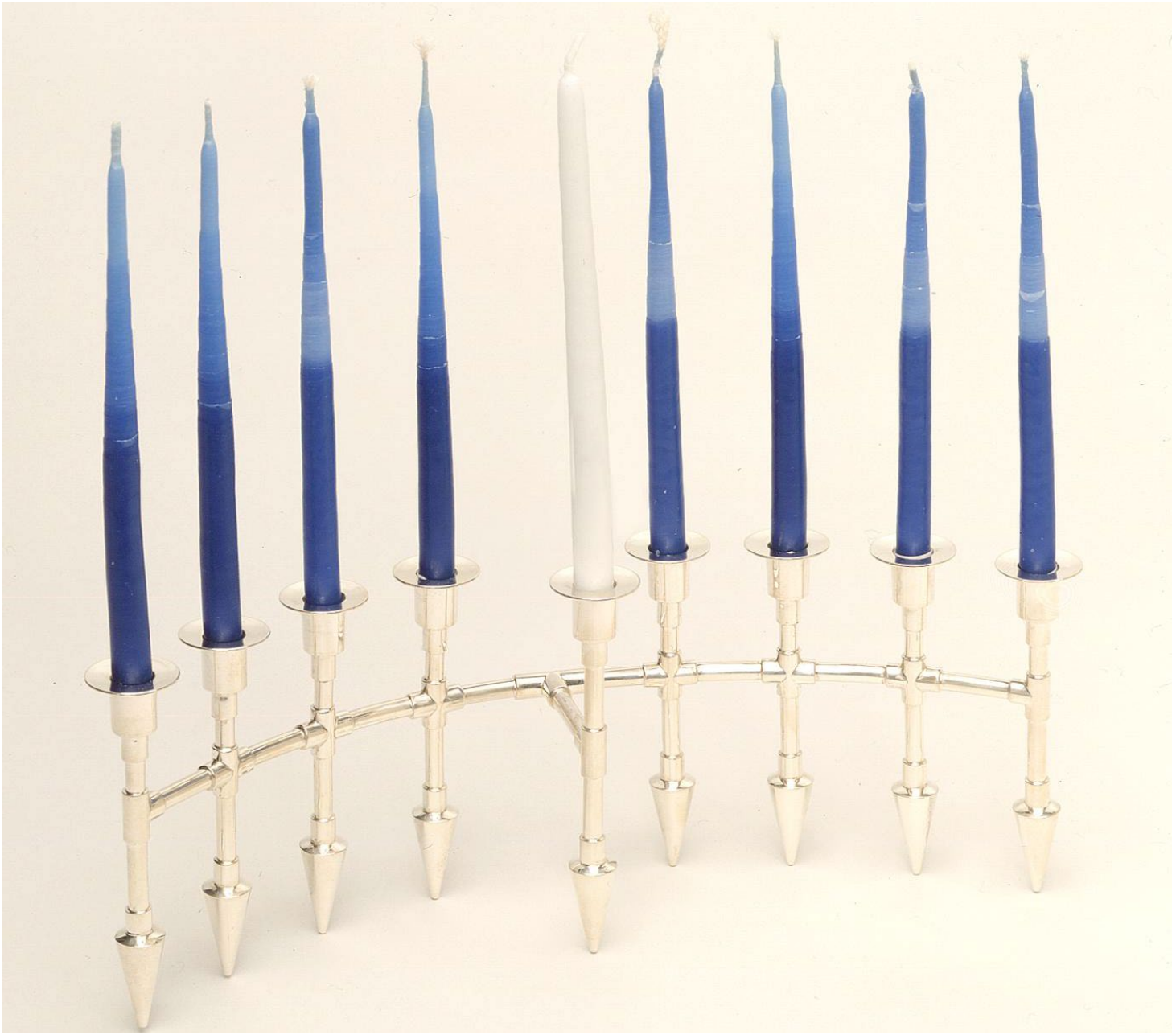
The annual celebration of Hanukah commemorates the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165 BCE. At the time of rededication, only one container of oil, sufficient for one day, was available to light the temple. Nevertheless, the oil lasted for eight days. Each year, Jewish families remember the miracle of the oil by lighting nine candles over eight consecutive days. The central candle is lit first, and all the other candles are lit from it. During this celebration, not only do Jews remember what has happened in the history of their faith, but they also reflect on the significance of these events in the present experience. Hanukah is a time of remembering and celebrating freedom and the power of the Jewish spirit.

Throughout history and in contemporary times, artists have interpreted the basic design - a candlestick with nine branches with the central candle given a position of special significance - in many ways. Some hanukkiahs are elaborately decorated. In this case, the design is simple, with carefully executed changes in shape adding to its beauty. Students should note the delicacy of the design, as well as the balance and curve of the hanukkiah. As in so much of Jewish ritual art, the construction of the object reflects Jewish understanding of the beauty and symmetry found in the natural world. Jewish families may purchase or construct their own hanukkiahs out of readily available materials.

The celebration of Hanukah occurs in mid-December. Families exchange small gifts on each day of the celebration and reflect on their heritage.



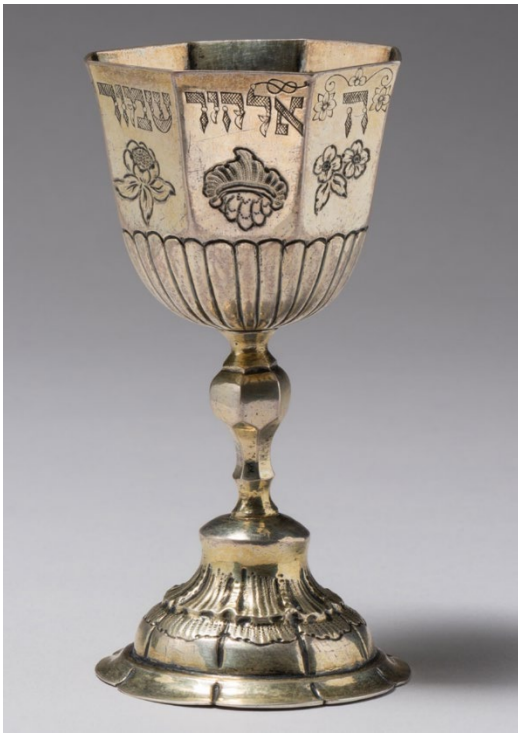
- The Hanukkiah is a candlestick with nine branches. The central candle, called the shamash, or Guardian Light, is always given a special place of prominence in the center of the candlestick.
- How does this artist give the central candle a place of prominence? What other options might the artist have considered?
- Traditionally, candles used in a Hanukkiah are made of beeswax. In some instances, the candlestick may have small glass cups which hold lamp oil.
- The Hanukkiah is used in home celebrations of Hanukah and is often placed where it can be seen by passers-by.
- Students may ask, "What is the difference between a hanukkiah and a menorah?" Traditionally, the menorah is a candlestick in Jewish temples and is lit every day. The Hanukkiah is used in the homes of Jewish families and reserved for the season of Hanukah. However, the terms are commonly interchanged.



John E. Cogswell (American, born 1948); *Hanukkiah*, 1999; Silver; 3 7/8 x 10 x 2 in. Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund, 2000.2

Kiddush Cup, c. 1759 / 61
Hieronymus Mittnacht, German, died 1769
Silver-gilt, engraved and chased
2 11/16 in.

The Kiddush Cup is used in the family ritual of the Shabbat (or Sabbath) meal. Kiddush literally means "blessing." Wine is poured into the cup and a prayer of blessing is spoken. The Shabbat meal is the central ritual within Jewish life. The meal is shared in the home on Friday evening and is considered to be as holy a ritual as those celebrated in the temple or synagogue. During the meal, many prayers are spoken and stories told which recount aspects of Jewish history in order to remind practicing Jews of the interventions of God in their common history. It is also considered to be a time of instruction, when children may learn about their faith and heritage. By refraining from activities which can be defined as "work" from sundown on Friday to sunset on Saturday, many Jews use the time to be with their families, to read the Torah or other Jewish texts and to celebrate Jewish life. Shabbat is considered a joyous time in the life of a Jewish family.



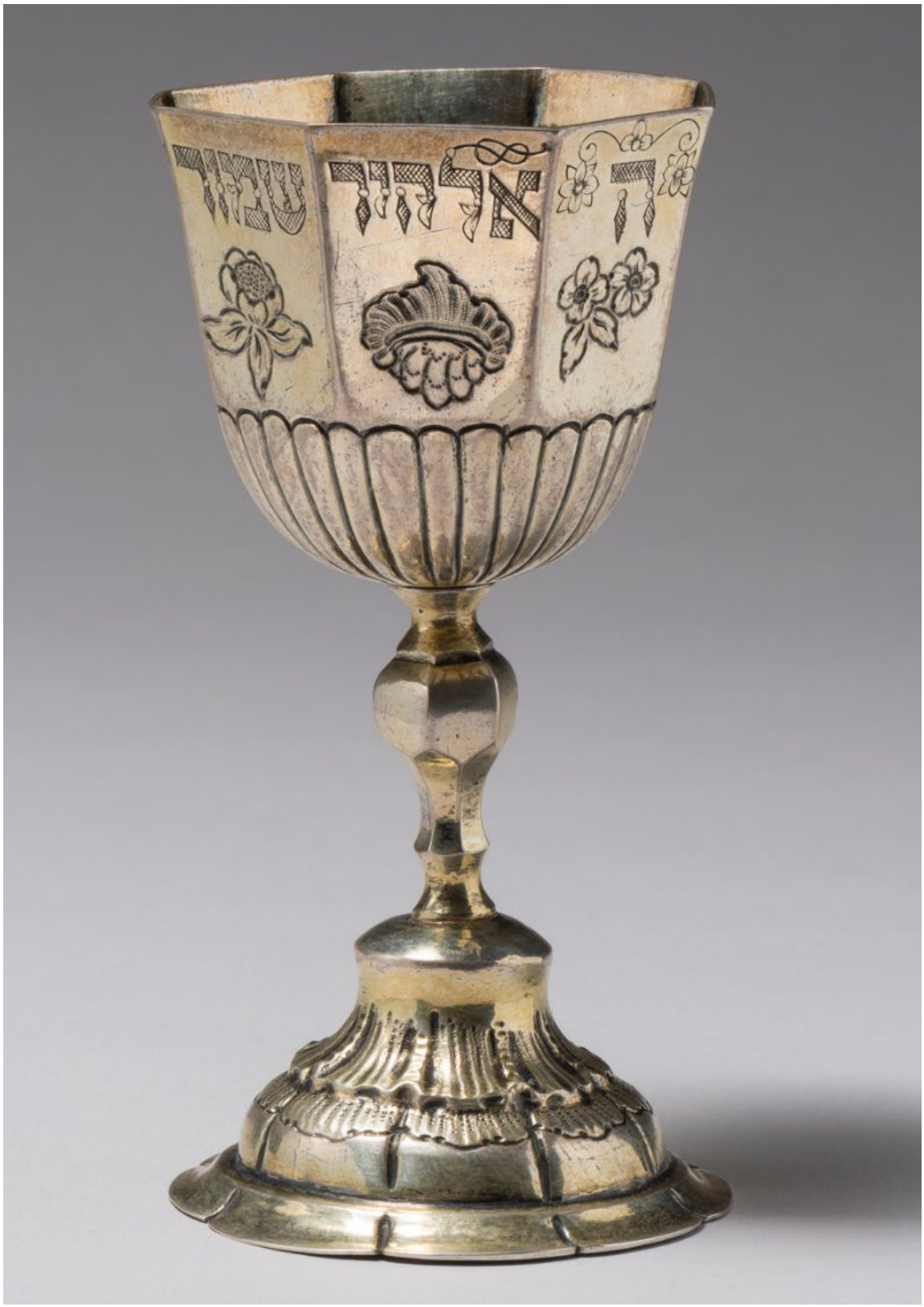
- On each side of the cup the artist engraved words in Hebrew. The text reads from right to left and says:

  "Guard the Sabbath day and keep it holy as the Lord your God has commanded you."
  Exodus 20:8

  This text comes from the Torah.

- As part of their religious training, many Jewish young people learn to read, write and speak Hebrew.

- The cup is decorated with a floral motif with symmetrical lines in the cup and base.



Hieronymus Mittnacht (German, active in Augsburg, died 1769); *Kiddush Cup*, 1759-1761; Silver-gilt, engraved and chased; 2 11/16 in.; Ackland Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The William A. Whitaker Foundation Art Fund, 99.21

Voices of Faith

The Story of Passover

Summary
This story provides background information and recounts the narrative of Moses and the exodus from Egypt as recorded in the Torah. The story tells of the birth of Moses, the important roles of his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron and the captivity and release of the Hebrew people.

Research Option
Find the sections of Exodus in the Torah from which this storyteller drew information for this story. What, if anything, did the storyteller leave out? How did the storyteller make this story interesting and engaging?

Where is Egypt? The Nile River? The wilderness? Where is the Promised Land the storyteller describes? The final story on this recording offers insights into the annual celebration of the Jewish Passover.

Discussion Questions

- This story is central to the Jewish faith tradition. What qualities does Moses possess in this story?
- How does he demonstrate his commitment to God and to the Hebrews?
- Remind students that the Pharaoh was often considered to be a kind of god among the Egyptians. How does God establish himself as the one true God in this story?
- Jewish people remember the Passover in an annual celebration. What happens in this story that can be described as a Passover? When do Jews celebrate Passover? Why might it be important to remember this time?

Transcript of recorded story: The Story of Passover

My name is Deborah Goldstein. I teach in the Jewish Community School of Wake County in Raleigh, N.C., and I also teach at the Beth Meyer Synagogue. I teach in the religious school in the fifth grade.

This is the story of the Passover, of how Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and into freedom. Like most stories it really starts before the Exodus, before Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and before even Moses was born. It really begins over 400 years before Moses was born, when a man named Joseph decided to bring his family, his father Jacob, also known as Israel, and his brothers into Egypt to live. For over 400 years the family of Jacob and Joseph were advisors to the kings of Egypt, the Pharaohs, and they had an honored place in Egyptian society.

But after 400 or so years, a new Pharaoh rose up in Egypt, and he didn't like the Jews, and he didn't like the people of Jacob and Joseph. He looked around, and he found that there were too many of them, and that frightened him. And so he took away their wealth, and he took away their position, and he made them slaves to work for him in the fields, to help build his storehouses and to serve him in his palaces. But he was still afraid. He saw that there were still too many Hebrews, and he was afraid that they would rise up against him. There was something about them that made him uncomfortable - something that was different, something about the way they lived and spoke and something about their god. And so he decided that he would get rid of the Hebrews altogether and that the way he would do that is to have his soldiers come and take all the boys that were born and kill them. And so his soldiers went from house to house, and they broke in, and they took the babies, and they took them to the river, and they threw them into the Nile.

Now, there was one family where a baby had just been born, the family of Amram and Yokheved. Now, they had two children already, Aaron their son and Miriam their daughter. But they had a new baby, and they were afraid that their baby also would be killed. So they hid him. Now, you can hide a small baby because it doesn't take much space, it doesn't make much noise, and it's pretty easy to keep quiet. And so Yokheved hid the new baby in the house. But after about three months the baby was too big to hide in the house anymore, and she had to take him out of the house and find someplace else for him to hide. And so she made a basket of reeds, and she put the baby in the basket; she put him in the river, and she prayed to her god to watch after him and protect him. She gave the basket a push, and it started down the Nile.

Her daughter Miriam followed on the bank of the river to watch the basket and see what happened to her brother so that she could come back and tell her parents. She watched as the basket floated down the Nile and floated into the princess, the daughter of the Pharaoh, who was bathing in the river with her ladies. The princess felt something touch her leg, and she looked and there was the basket, and in it there was a baby. She could see from the way the baby was clothed, the kind of fabric that he was wrapped in, that he must be a Hebrew baby. But he was a beautiful baby. She decided that she would keep him and take him into the palace and raise him as her own son. She named him Moses because it means to be drawn out of the reeds and that is what she had done - she had drawn him out of the water. Miriam ran home, and she told her mother that in fact her brother was safe, and he was living as the son of the Pharaoh in the palace.

Many years went by, and the princess raised Moses as her son, and he grew to be a teenager and then a man. He always thought of himself as being Egyptian, he took for granted the privileges they had in the palace, that Hebrew slaves would wait on him, and that they would take care of him and that he would not have to do anything for himself. But as he got older, he began to watch, and he began to feel that there was

something wrong with one people treating another people so badly just because they were different.

One day he was out walking on the palace grounds, and he saw that a guard of the Pharaoh was beating a slave, and he said to the guard that he had to stop, but the guard didn't want to stop. So Moses asked again for the guard to stop, but the guard didn't want to stop. And so Moses struck the guard, and he fell down, and he died. And then Moses was afraid because he knew that this was something terrible that he had done: killed one of the guards of the pharaoh. So he went back to his room, packed his things, and he ran off into the desert.

He wandered in the desert for many days, and eventually he came to an encampment, and he saw that there were some young women and they were watching sheep. They were at a well, and they were trying to draw water from the well, but there were men trying to stop them. So he went to the well, and he stopped the men, and he allowed the women to get the water to give their sheep. The women were grateful. They were sisters. There were five of them and the oldest one was named Zipporah, and Zipporah said, "You need to come home to our father's tent so that he can thank you. Our father's name is Jethro."

So Moses came home to Jethro's tent, and he stayed with Jethro and his daughters. He tended the sheep, and he became a shepherd. He didn't tell Jethro and his family that he had come from Egypt or who he was or what he had been before or what he had done. Time went on, and he and Zipporah found that they cared for each other very much, and so they were married. Still, Moses tended the sheep with his father-in-law Jethro, and he was content. One day, as he was out tending the sheep he looked over into the distance and saw a light he had never seen before. Something called to him to follow that light and see what it was. He went out into the desert, and he looked at the light. He got closer to it and closer to it. He saw that it was a bush, and it was burning.

That in itself was unusual - you didn't usually see a bush burning for no reason. There was no one around; no one had lit a flame. There was no lightning to make it burn, but when Moses looked at it more closely he saw that the bush really wasn't burning up. The fire burned, but the bush stayed as though there were no fire. He got closer and closer to see if he could see what this was. When he got very close to it, he heard a voice, and it called his name. Now, Moses had no idea who that voice was. He looked around, and he saw no one. He looked at the bush and he saw no one. He looked at the sheep, and he knew they weren't talking. But the voice called him again, and it said, "Moses" and so Moses looked at the bush and said, "Who calls me?" And the bush said, "It is I, it is the god of your fathers, the god of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. I have a task for you."

Moses didn't know what to think so he said, "What?" And the voice in the bush said, "I want you to go to the pharaoh. I want you to tell him to let my people go." Moses said, "Why would Pharaoh listen to me? I'm no one. I'm slow of speech. I'm no one." And the voice in the bush said, "I am God, and I will be with you, and I will help you, and Pharaoh will listen to you, and the people will listen to you, and you will bring the people out of slavery." So Moses went back to his tent, and he packed his things. He told Zipporah, and he told Jethro that he had to go back to Egypt, and so he went.

When he got back to Egypt he went into the king's presence. The king did not recognize him. Moses looked completely different; he didn't look like a prince anymore, he looked like a shepherd. Moses said, "I come from the god of the Hebrews - the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I say to you, 'Let my people go.'" The pharaoh laughed. He said, "Why should I let the Hebrews go? They work for me. They build my storehouses. They serve me in my palace. Why should I let them go?" And Moses said, "Because God has said that you must let them go into freedom." The pharaoh laughed again. He said, "I don't know your god. Why should I listen to what he has to say?" Moses said, "My God will send you signs, and you will let the people go. I will show the power of my God," and he took his staff, his walking stick, and he threw it on the ground. When it touched the ground it turned into a serpent.

The people were amazed, but Pharaoh laughed and said, "My magicians can do as well." And his magicians threw their staffs onto the ground, and they too turned into serpents. As everyone was laughing someone pointed and said, "But Pharaoh, look!" Because Moses' serpent had eaten all the other serpents. Now there was only the one, and Moses took the staff in his hand, and he left the presence of the Pharaoh.

The next morning when Pharaoh woke he found that all the water had turned to blood: the water in the palace, the water in his cup and the water of the Nile. But the water where the Hebrews lived was still clear, and so he sent for Moses and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" Moses said, "It is. You must let my people go." Pharaoh said, "I will let these people go." But when Pharaoh agreed to let the people go, the water became clear again, and so he changed his mind and said, "No, I will not let these people go."

The next morning when Pharaoh awoke, there were frogs, frogs all over the palace, frogs all over the house, frogs all over the countryside, frogs eating everything, frogs jumping everywhere. Pharaoh said, "Moses, are these frogs the work of your god?" And Moses said, "They are." And Pharaoh said, "Then, I will let these people go if he will remove the frogs from my land." So God did remove the frogs from the land, but then the Pharaoh hardened his heart again, and he said, "No, I will not let these people go."

And so there came lice. Pharaoh and all the Egyptians and all of his courtiers from the poorest to the richest were infested with lice in their clothing and their homes, but the Hebrews were free of lice. Pharaoh sent for Moses again and said, "Moses, is this the

work of your god?" Moses said, "It is. You must let my people go." And so Pharaoh said, "I will let the people go." But when the lice were gone, the Pharaoh hardened his heart again and said, "I will not let these people go."

And so then came flies and they infested everything. Everywhere that the people looked, there were flies, and they couldn't get rid of the flies. They were everywhere, but there were no flies in the homes of the Hebrews. And Pharaoh sent for Moses, and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" And Moses said, "It is the work of my god. You must let the people go." So Pharaoh said, "I will let the people go." But when he did that, then the flies were gone, and so the Pharaoh hardened his heart again and said, "I will not let the people go."

Then there came a plague on the cattle of all the Egyptians. The cattle became ill, and they fell over, and they died. But the animals that belonged to the Hebrews were safe and did not die. The Pharaoh called for Moses, and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" and Moses said, "It is the work of my god." Pharaoh said, "Then I will let these people go." But when he agreed to let the people go, the plague was gone, and Pharaoh hardened his heart, and he would not let the people go.

Then came boils, terrible sores all over the bodies of Pharaoh and all the Egyptians, but the Hebrews were free of boils. Pharaoh sent for Moses, and he said, "Moses, is this work of your god?" Moses said, "It is the work of my god. You must let the people go." And so Pharaoh said, "I will let the people go." But when he agreed to let the people go, then the boils were gone, and he hardened his heart, and he would not let the people go.

So then came hail that fell out of the sky. And when it landed on the ground it burst into flame, but it landed only among the Egyptians. And in Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, there was no hail, and there was no fire. So Pharaoh sent for Moses, and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" And Moses said, "It is the work of my god." And Pharaoh said, "Then I will let the people go." But when he agreed to let the people go, the hail stopped, so he hardened his heart, and he said, "I will not let these people go."

So then there came darkness to the land of Egypt. No one could see, and there was no light, and the sun did not shine. But in Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, there was light and there was sunshine. Pharaoh sent for Moses and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" And Moses said, “It is the work of my god." Pharaoh said, "Then I will let these people go." But when he agreed to let the people go, there came light again, and Pharaoh hardened his heart, and he would not let the people go.

Then, Moses came to Pharaoh and he said, "Pharaoh, nine times my god has sent plagues to you, and nine times you have agreed to let the people go, and nine times you have hardened your heart, and you will not let the people go. You must let my

people go." Pharaoh said, "I will not let these people go." Moses said, "Then, there will come a plague to your land such as you have never seen. There will be crying in all of the land in Egypt and you will let my people go." Moses went home to the Hebrews and he said, "You must slaughter a lamb, and you must take the blood of the lamb and put it on the door posts of your house because tonight the angel of death will travel through the land of Egypt, and it will visit all the homes of the Egyptians, and it will slay the first born. The first born of the cattle and the first born of the people, but the angel will pass over the homes that have blood on the doors."

So the Hebrews did as Moses commanded, and they slaughtered a lamb and they put the blood on the door posts of their houses. The angel of death visited the land of Egypt. There was a wailing in the land as the first born of everyone in Egypt, from the poorest person to the Pharaoh himself was taken by the angel of death. The son of Pharaoh also died. But in the homes of the Hebrews there was no wailing for the angel of death had passed over their homes. And Pharaoh called for Moses and he said, "Moses, is this the work of your god?" And Moses said, "This is the work of my god." And Pharaoh said, "Take your people and go out of my land. I never want to see you again."

Moses gathered the people very quickly and had them pack all that they had, and they left the land of Egypt. They went out into the desert, and they traveled in the desert. But Pharaoh, seeing that there was no one to serve him in his palaces or storehouses, once again changed his mind, and he got all of his soldiers, and he said, "We will go and we will bring those Hebrews back or they will die." And so he charged out across the desert after the Hebrews with his horses and with his men. He traveled much faster than the fleeing Hebrews who had women and children and animals with them. So, very quickly they caught up with the fleeing slaves, and the people looked across the desert, and they saw Pharaoh's army coming, and they looked to where they were going and they saw only the sea of reeds, and they turned to Moses and said, "Is it for this that you lead us out to the desert - to be slaughtered here by Pharaoh's army?" and Moses said, "Trust in God and see his mighty hand."

Moses went forward, and when he came to the sea it parted, and on either side there was a wall of water, and in the middle there was dry land. Moses and the people passed through the dry land and, as the last slave got to the other side, the Pharaoh and the soldiers started to cross. And when all of his soldiers were into the water, the walls met again, and the sea was whole, and the pharaoh's soldiers drowned. The people saw that this great miracle had been created by God in order that they could be free. They wandered in the desert for forty years, and they experienced many things, and in the end they came to the promised land, the land of Israel that God had promised to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob and to their descendants. Moses was not able to pass into the promised land with the people, but still there never has again risen up in Israel a prophet like Moses who spoke with God man to man - face to face.

Voices of Faith

The Story of Nigun

Summary

In this story, students hear of the Shabbat. The storyteller was not raised in a family which observed the weekly Shabbat ritual, but tells a folk tale about a man named Moishe. Moishe goes to the village to purchase all the things needed for Sabbath. On his way home, he is distracted by his desire for a wordless song, called the Nigun, that he hears off in the distance.

Research Option

The storyteller refers to challah as one of the items given to the gypsies in order to learn the Nigun. What is "challah?" Recipes for challah are readily available, students may be encouraged to make challah to share with the class. Encourage students to research the uses of the three items Moishe had purchased in town within the ritual of Shabbat.

Discussion Questions

- What three items did Moishe purchase in the village?
- The song which Moishe brings back to his home becomes a symbol of the mysteries of God. Why might it be acceptable to his family to sing a song without words as a way to open the Shabbat? How does a wordless song reinforce the Jewish understanding of God as mysterious?
- How does this story reinforce the importance of song as a part of the Jewish tradition?

Transcript of recorded story: The Story of Nigun

My name is Peg Lewis, and I live in Durham, NC. Here in NC I am a member of a congregation called The Chapel Hill Kehillah. I moved here from Allentown, Pennsylvania where I was very active in another Jewish congregation. And it was really there that I became very active in terms of my Jewish religious life, something that I was not raised with. I was raised in a family that was very assimilated and in fact didn't particularly identify as Jewish, and so this has been a very exciting and fulfilling journey of reconnection with my Jewish heritage. The story that I chose to tell is about my very, very, very favorite holiday, and it is a holiday that comes, fortunately, every week. It's the holiday of the Sabbath or Shabbat or Shabbos as we might call it. It begins Friday evening and lasts through Saturday evening. The name of the story is The Nigun.

Preparing for Shabbos was Moishe's greatest joy. Every Friday he would walk to the next village, and there he would purchase all the things that he needed for Shabbos: the wine, the challah and the candles. Then, he would return home, go on from there

to the mitzvah for the ritual bath, on to the shul to pray and then back home again where he and his wife Raizel would welcome in the sweetness of the Sabbath with a festive and savory meal.

So, one Friday Moishe went to the village and, having purchased all the things that he needed for Shabbos, he was on his way home again through the woods when he heard the most beautiful song. It was a nigun really, one of those wordless songs that you can just sing over and over and over again. It was so sweet he could almost taste it. It was so savory that he hungered for it body and soul. "I must have that nigun," cried Moishe, and off he rushed through the woods to find its source. And soon he did, for he came upon an encampment of gypsies. Moishe rushed up to the gypsies and cried, "I must have that tune. Please, I beg of you, teach it to me." "Very well," said the gypsies, "but you must pay." "Oh, oh - of course, of course" said Moishe, and he reached into his one pocket; not a coin was in there. He reached into his other; there was no money there either. He had spent it all in the village. What to do? He reached into the sack, and he pulled out the bottle of wine. "Here," he said to the gypsies, "Would you accept this bottle of wine as payment?" "Very well," said the gypsies. And they took the bottle of wine and proceeded to teach him the tune: "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …"

And so off went Moishe through the woods, homeward bound again. And as he walked he sang the nigun, "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …," when cracked down upon his head a big branch that had just fallen off of a tree. It knocked Moishe flat on to the ground. "Woof," said Moishe, "Woosh." And he got up very slowly and kind of dusted himself off and shook his head. As he took that first step towards home again, he opened his mouth, and he realized he had forgotten the nigun. It had gotten knocked clear out of his head. "Ya di? Ya di? Ya di di oi oi oi," said Moishe. Back he turned upon his path, back to the gypsy encampment. Moishe again rushed up to the gypsies and said, "Please, I must have this tune, and I've lost it. Teach it to me, I beg of you." "Very well," said the gypsies, "But, you must pay." "Oh, oh - of course, of course" said Moishe, and he reached into his sack again and pulled out the challah. "Here," he said to the gypsies, "would you accept this bread as payment?" "Very well," said the gypsies accepting the loaf of challah, and they proceeded to teach him the tune once again: "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …"

And so off went Moishe through the woods homeward bound again. This time concentrating very, very hard on remembering the nigun so that it wouldn't be knocked out of his head again. "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di … whoa!" When suddenly Moishe tumbled head over heels having tripped over a low stone wall that he never even saw, so hard was he concentrating on remembering the nigun! "Whoof," said Moishe from his position once again flat on the ground. And he got up slowly and dusted himself off and shook his curly head of hair and realized that the nigun wasn't in his head anymore. It had gotten knocked out of him once again. "Oi," said Moishe, and back he turned toward the gypsy encampment. Moishe went up to

the gypsies again and said, "I must have this tune. Please, I beg of you - teach it to me again." "Very well," said the gypsies, "but you must pay." "Oh - of course, of course," said Moishe, and he reached into the sack and he pulled out the candles. "Here," he said, offering the candles to the gypsies. "Would you accept these as payment?" "Very well," said the gypsies and they proceeded once again to teach him the nigun: "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …"

And so off went Moishe through the woods, homeward bound again. This time concentrating very, very hard on remembering the nigun, and at the same time watching his path very, very carefully, lest any other mishaps befall him. "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …" So Moishe reached his home safe and sound, and as he came through the door his wife Raizel greeted him. "Moishe, husband, you're home," she said, "but Moishe, the sack it's empty. Where are the things that we need for Shabbos?" "Wife, Raizel," said Moishe, "I have something very special for Shabbos, listen: "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …" And as Moishe sang, the look of understanding and delight grew upon Raizel's face. And so that Shabbos, Moishe and Raizel celebrated not with wine and not with challah and not with candles, but with the sweet and savory nigun that they sang together : "Ya di di di di du di di di di ya di di …"

Voices of Faith

The Story of the Rabbi of Nemirov and the Litvak

Summary
This story introduces the role of the rabbi in the community. The people of the community look to the rabbi for leadership, and they ponder where the rabbi is at all times and what he does with his time. Note that the rabbi is a wise and learned man, a scholar. Also note that the rabbi is somewhat elusive. He is not easily found or understood.

Research Option
Encourage students to create a working understanding of the role of the rabbi in the Jewish community. See the glossary included in this material, as well as other sources for additional information.

Discussion Questions

- What hints does this story give to the role and function of the rabbi within Jewish culture?
- In the story, the Litvak can remember and picture a page of the Torah without seeing it. Ask students to consider what pages they know so well that they can imagine them in great detail without seeing them again.
- How does the Litvak misunderstand what the rabbi is doing?
- Why would the rabbi pretend to be a poor peasant when he comes to the house?
- Why would he sell them the wood, rather than merely give it to them?
- What does the Litvak mean when he says at the end of the story that the rabbi is "in heaven, if not higher?"
- How does this story reinforce the Jewish commitment to charity?

Transcript of recorded story: The Story of the Rabbi of Nemirov and the Litvak

I'm David Winer, and my wife and my two sons and I moved here to Chapel Hill about 11 years ago, and one thing we've really enjoyed in this area is the rich Jewish life. There's quite a variety, and one aspect of Jewish life that my wife and I've enjoyed particularly is Jewish storytelling. This is actually one of my most favorite stories, and I hope that it will be one of your favorites after you hear it from me as well.

In the year 300 before the Common Era, a Jewish sage said that the world stands on three things: on Torah, meaning study, on prayer and on good deeds. Throughout Jewish history, all of those three activities - study, prayer and good deeds - have been important to the Jewish people. But at various times in our history, some Jewish sects have tended to emphasize one or another over the other two.

The story I am about to tell concerns an encounter with the rabbi of Nemirov, a very righteous person who lived about 200 years ago. On many a cold, bleak, wintry afternoon the rabbi of Nemirov was no where to be found. He wasn't in the house of study; he wasn't in the house of prayer; he wasn't even in his little shtiebel, the small cottage in which the rabbi lived. Where could the rabbi be? The townspeople, on such occasions, were fond of saying, "Perhaps, our rabbi is up in heaven pleading with God to forgive us our sins and relieve our sufferings."

One day, a man from Lithuania came to the town of Nemirov. He was a very bright, knowledgeable man. He had studied at the very best yeshivas in his hometown in Russia. He knew all about the Bible and the Talmud and the various commentaries. And he had learned different principles of logic and how to argue and how to interpret the law of our tradition. And this fellow from Lithuania, who was known as a Litvak, as they were called at that time, he was quite interested in meeting the rabbi of Nemirov whom he had heard something about - about what a righteous man the rabbi was, how he was actually a tzaddik of his generation. But on that particular day that the Litvak arrived, the rabbi was no where to be found, and when the Litvak heard the townspeople say, "Perhaps our rabbi is up in Heaven pleading with God to forgive us our sins and relieve our sufferings," the Litvak laughed, and he sneered at the townspeople. He even tried to show to them how foolishly ridiculous they really were. He used various logical arguments he had learned from the Talmud, and he even pointed out to the townspeople, he said, "Why your rabbi isn't even here to lead you in the three evening prayers, which every Jew is supposed to say as evening falls on everyday." But the townspeople paid him no mind whatsoever. They had great faith in their rabbi. This proved rather frustrating for the Litvak, so he decided to further investigate for himself.

The next day, when again the rabbi was no where to be found, the Litvak went up to the little shtiebel in which the rabbi lived, and he knocked on the door. Knock knock knock. He heard no answer within, and he gently pushed the door open. He didn't see anybody inside so he walked over to where the bed stood against the wall, and he crawled under the bed, and then he laid back in the shadows right next to the wall - waiting. The Litvak didn't have to wait too long before he heard a coughing and wheezing from outside the door. Then, from underneath the bed he peeked up, and he could see the door opening, and he saw a man in rabbinical garments come into the little shtiebel, and the Litvak realized that this must be the famous rabbi of Nemirov. The rabbi took off his garments and put them into a little closet, and then he heaved himself up on top of the bed, and he laid back. As the Litvak listened very closely he could hear the rabbi chanting and muttering, and he realized that indeed the rabbi was pleading with God to forgive the sins of the townspeople of Nemirov and to relieve their sufferings. Then silence and not long after, a long, low snoring sound - the rabbi had fallen asleep.

Well, the Litvak lay under the bed quietly, but he began to feel a little bit strange lying underneath the rabbi as the rabbi snored and slept above him. So, to comfort his mind and to wile away the time the Litvak pictured in his mind's eye a page from the Babylonian Talmud. It was an unusually difficult page actually from Tractate Bava Metziah, in which the rabbis were discussing and actually disputing whether a particular article was in fact suitable for use as an oven. The Litvak was so keen in terms of his knowledge and his memory, he was able to actually picture that page in his mind, and he followed the various lines of arguments down the page, back and forth as the rabbis argued the point. And when the Litvak had gotten about three-quarters of the way down the page, he heard a snorting and a sneezing from up above, and he realized that the rabbi was waking up. The Litvak saw the rabbi's legs swing over the side of the bed and land on the floor with a big plop, and then the rabbi got up, and he walked over to the closet and he took out what looked like a bundle of schmattes, or rags. And then, as the Litvak watched, the rabbi proceeded to put on these various rags, and they were actually clothes - very peasant-like clothes - and in no time at all the Litvak saw that the rabbi looked exactly like a poor peasant from the tip of his peasant-like cap to the toes of his peasant-like boots. Then, the rabbi stopped by his little stove, and he snatched up an ax, and he stuck it into his peasant-like sash, and then he threw around his shoulders a very large peasant-like cloak and then out the door the rabbi went into the evening.

The Litvak slithered out from under the bed, and he ran to the doorway, and he looked out, and he could see the rabbi walking steadily in the moonlight, for a full moon was out. The Litvak fell in behind the rabbi, about 50 paces back, wondering where could the rabbi be going on this cold, cold night? The rabbi proceeded steadily along the road he was on, and then the rabbi came to a crossroads where he could turn off to the left and go right to the center of town, but the rabbi didn't do that. He continued along this road which was now leading away from the center of town. The Litvak kept about 50 paces behind, again really wondering where could the rabbi be going. Finally, the road the rabbi was on ended on the very outskirts of town in front of a very deep-looking woods. There was a crossroads there and the rabbi could go to the left, and go to the next town over, or he could make a right turn and go to another town, but the rabbi didn't turn to either the left or the right. He plunged straight ahead into these deep dark-looking woods.

The Litvak rushed to catch up with the rabbi. He was afraid he might lose sight of him in the dark woods, and he closed to within about 20 paces. And the rabbi continued about 50 paces more until he came to a clearing in the midst of which stood a small dead tree.

The Litvak stayed on the outer edge of the clearing, and he hid behind a very big tree that was there. As he peeked out, he saw the rabbi throw down his large cloak and bend down by the tree and take the ax from the sash and begin to chop chop chop at the base of that small dead tree. Chop chop chop went the ax, and finally the tree

fell over and toppled down. Then the rabbi took the ax, and he began to hack, hack away at the branches of the tree. He hack, hack, hacked away at them and cut them into very small pieces of wood, and then he took the ax again and began to work on the trunk of the tree, cutting that up into small pieces, also about a foot long each with his ax. Then, the rabbi bent down, and he took all the wood he had cut and threw it into the middle of his great cloak that lay on the ground, and then he took the four corners of the cloak, and he tied them up into a very large bundle. He then stuck the ax back into his sash, threw the whole bundle over his shoulder and started back out of the woods the way that he had come.

The Litvak had been watching all this, mesmerized by this feverish activity that the rabbi was doing. And he was rather astonished to see the rabbi coming towards him. And he quickly ducked behind the big tree, and he didn't think the rabbi noticed him, actually. But the rabbi passed within just a foot or two of him. Then, the rabbi went back along the road that he had come in on out of the woods, and the Litvak again fell in behind about 50 paces. The rabbi didn't go too far along this road, though, until he came to a side street, and he turned off onto that side street, and the Litvak could see there were only a few houses on it, and it looked like one of the poorest, most wretched streets that the Litvak had ever seen.

The houses on this little street were dilapidated. They needed repair and, as the Litvak watched, the rabbi went down to the very end of that street to the poorest, saddest-looking little house of all. The Litvak wondered: "What could the rabbi want at this sad-looking house?" There was no light within. There was no smoke coming from the chimney. It didn't look like anybody was home at all. The rabbi went right up to the door of this house, and he knocked on it with his hand: rap rap rap. A voice from within the house cried out, "Who's there?" To the Litvak, it sounded like a woman's voice, and she seemed to be rather frightened. The rabbi responded, "It's only me, Vassili the peasant. I have wood to sell very cheap." And without waiting for any response, the rabbi pushed open the door, and he entered into this little house.

The Litvak rushed to the doorway, and he peeped in, and he could see in the far corner of the little house an older-looking woman lying under some ragged bed clothes, some schmattes. And she looked rather ill and very worn and tired. The rabbi continued by saying, "Yes, I have some excellent wood here. I'd like to sell it to you and the price is very low. It's only 60 kopecks for the whole lot." The woman answered, "Well, I really don't have any money to pay you with." And then the rabbi said, "Oh, don't worry. You have faith in God don't you? Surely, if you believe in God, I can believe in you for 60 kopecks." And then the woman said, "But, who can light the fire for me? My son is away at work, and I am too ill." And the rabbi said, "Don't worry, I will light it for you." And having said that, the rabbi took the bundle off from his shoulder, and he laid it down near a small stove that the woman had by the bed. The rabbi began to load some of the wood into the stove, and as he did so, he said the first evening prayer. And then the rabbi struck a match, and he lit the fire, and as he did

so, he said the second evening prayer. As the fire grew and gave light and heat to the little cottage, the rabbi said the third evening prayer. And that is how a Litvak became the most enthusiastic follower of the rabbi of Nemirov. From that day onward on those cold, bleak, wintry days when the rabbi of Nemirov was nowhere to be found, and the townspeople were fond of saying, "Perhaps our rabbi is up in Heaven pleading with God to forgive us our sins and relieve our suffering," the Litvak would no longer laugh or sneer, but instead, he would just smile and say quietly, "In Heaven if not higher.

Voices of Faith

A Passover Story

Summary
This storyteller recounts her childhood experience of the annual celebration of Passover.

Research Option
Read the first story "The Story of Passover" and add history to this story by listening to the story of Moses and the Exodus.

Discussion Questions

- At its center, this story is a coming of age story, the memory of a little girl beginning to participate in an important ritual. How does the child prepare? How does she feel about being allowed to participate?
- What preparations does the family make for the Passover seder? How does this story enrich students' understanding of Passover?
- Within the homes of students, what preparations are made for special events? Are they similar to the preparations Helena's family makes for Passover?

Transcript of recorded story: A Passover Story

My name is Helena, and I grew up in London, England, in an orthodox Jewish home. When we got married, my husband and I emigrated to Canada, and then we came to the United States, and we've lived all over the United States and for the last three years have been enjoying North Carolina. Today I want to tell you a story of a memory of mine.

I loved being a child growing up in a very big extended family in London. My days as a little girl were defined by the school holidays and the Jewish holidays. One of the Jewish holidays, of course, happens every week, it's called Shabbos. And every week I'd go with my father and grandfather to the synagogue, and afterwards I would say, "Good Shabbos, Mr. Levine. Good Shabbos, Mrs. Cohen." Whatever my father told me to say, whoever he told me to greet. And Mr. Levine would touch me on the head and say, "A blessing on your head little girl. What a nice little girl you are. Look how big you are for six." And I said to him. "But Mr. Levine, I'm almost seven." Cause that's how I liked to think of myself.

Well, that was Shabbos, and that happened every week. But there were special holidays as well. The Jewish holidays were great occasions: the house was cleaned, new clothes were bought, and I was able to go downstairs. We lived in a two family home, you see, and my mother and my father and I lived upstairs. And my bubbeh and zaideh (bubbeh is Yiddish for grandmother and zaideh is Yiddish for grandfather),

they lived downstairs. And whenever I had something new to wear or new toys to play with, first thing I did was to take it downstairs to show to bubbeh and zaideh. So this is how my life was. It was defined, really, by being a young child in school and by being Jewish. And I loved the Jewish holidays. First of all, in the fall, there was Rosh Hashanah, a very solemn occasion, the beginning of the new year and the beginning of the ten days of repentance.

Then there was Yom Kippur, when all the grownups would have to fast for twenty four hours, and they all got so ratty, and it was very difficult. Very hard to be six years old on Yom Kippur. And nobody wanted you around and they didn't really want to feed you, but they had to, and it was altogether much nicer when it was all over. Then there was Sukkos, but that's a story for another day.

Today let me tell you about my favorite holiday. My favorite holiday came in the spring. It's called Passover, or in Hebrew, it's called Pesach. It's a festival that lasts for eight days. And it celebrates the time when Moses and Aaron were finally allowed by Pharaoh to take the Hebrews out of the land of Egypt where they had been slaves. And now, when they went out of Egypt, they were free men. The celebration of that exodus from Egypt was a wondrous occasion. For one thing, when they were allowed out of Egypt, they didn't have time to put yeast in the bread to make it rise. They didn't have any leavening in the bread. And the bread they baked on their backs, and it became flat, flat - wafers really. And today we call them matzo. And in celebration of this fact and to remember it, for eight days on Passover we eat matzo. And in order to make sure we don't have anything in our houses with leavening in them at all, we clean. Oh, boy do we clean.

So, when I was a young girl coming home from school, for about four weeks before Passover, every day something new had been cleaned. I'd walk in the house and my mother would yell, "Don't walk into the living room! The floors have just been waxed. Don't touch the furniture! It was just cleaned and it's still wet. Be careful where you put your things down please. I've spent an hour polishing that table. And when you go into your bedroom, don't worry, I've started cleaning the closets." Such turmoil. Everything was upside down. Everything was topsy-turvy. Oh, it was wonderful! It smelt of fresh furniture polish and freshly hung curtains. And open windows. It was wonderful! It was spring. And if it was spring, how far away could Passover be? Everybody would be there: all my aunts, all my uncles, a big extended family. Twenty-five people around one table. My cousins would be there too, Berel and Susan. Berel and Susan were younger than I was. They probably would have to go to bed. But maybe I would be allowed to stay up. I kept hoping somebody would say something, and finally my father said to me one day, "Would you like to stay up for the seder this year?"

Now the seder is the big feast that we have on the first night of Passover where we read from a special book called the Haggadah. And it tells the whole story, in order, of the exodus from Egypt. It's a very big feast. All my aunts and uncles would be there

sitting at my grandparents' table, and I was going to be able to stay up. "Sure Daddy! Sure Daddy! Of course I want to stay. Can I really, really stay Daddy?" "Yes you can, on one condition. I want you to be able to say the four questions, in Hebrew. And I'll coach you."

Well that's a big order. Ah, this was tough. O.K., I agreed. I agreed; I was gonna do this. "Yes, Daddy I'll do it."

And I practiced. Oh, how I practiced (singing in Yiddish). And my grandmother would say, "Go outside and sing." My grandfather would say, "You're doing very well. You don't have to practice any more today." (singing in Yiddish) On top of my voice I sang. I sang all the way to school. I sang all the way home. I sang until my parent's couldn't stand it. My grandparents couldn't stand it. But I was going to do it. I knew that I could stay up for the whole Seder if I could do it. And my cousin Berel and my cousin Susan, they'd be put to bed. Ha!

Well the big day came. I had a new dress. All the dishes were the different dishes that we used every year, just for this occasion. The aunts and uncles were assembled. Berel and Susan went to bed, and I got to stay up in my new dress. At the top of the table my zaideh sat like a king - surrounded by cushions and surrounded by pillows with everything a king could want in front of him. This was because we were free men that night and not slaves, and this was a symbol of our freedom. Everybody had a wineglass in front of them. Mine was filled with grape juice. And everybody had shiny cutlery, beautiful plates, and everybody was beautifully dressed.

"Now…," said my zaideh. "Shall we start? Shall we begin? We'll be eating at ten o'clock tonight." "OK." We all shuffled into our seats. I sat very close to my father, and I had a cushion on my chair cause I couldn't quite reach. And we began. All the men ritually washed their hands. We had the first couple's blessings. And then my grandfather took the middle of three matzos, broke it in half, wrapped half in a special napkin and hid it. I'd never seen this before… but then I'd never been at the seder before. I whispered to my aunt, "What's he doing?" She said, "Watch where he puts that, because, afterwards, I'll help you get it. We'll steal it and hold it for ransom, because we can't finish the seder without it. It's called the afikomen." I said, "Steal it from Zaideh?" She said, "Yes it's a joke." I didn't know whether to believe her or not. But, I didn't have much time because after that, my zaideh said to me, "It's your turn. You're up."

Me? No no no! It couldn't be my turn yet. Everybody was looking at me, and after all, I knew I thought I was nearly seven, but you know, really, I was only six. I didn't know if I could do this. My father hissed, "Do you want to go to bed?" And I said "No." He said, "Well." So I stood up on my two wobbly legs and looked around at everybody looking at me. And I thought, "Maybe I do want to go to bed." But, no I didn't. So I had to begin. And I started (Singing softly). And my father said, "Louder!" And I said (Singing a

little louder). And he said, "Do you want to go to bed?" Well, my pride was on the line now: "No, I do not want to go to bed." So I started (Singing louder).

And Aunt Lillian, Uncle Alfred, Uncle Maury, Aunt Sissy, Aunt Doris, my mom, my daddy, everybody started singing with me! They didn't let me do it all alone. They loved me. They weren't going to just sit there and watch me do it. They all helped me out. And then it was over. And I sat down. And I felt so good. And my zaideh said, "No. Maybe next year you'll do it so you'll do it all by yourself." "Yes Zaideh." But everybody was smiling at me. It was good. And my zaideh began (singing in Yiddish): "Because we were slaves in Egypt and the almighty brought us out of there with an almighty hand."

And the seder began. And he told the story of the exodus from Egypt. And he told it in Hebrew, with the drone, with the cadence; a singsong way that all orthodox Jews have. And it was all in Hebrew, and it was very hard for me, because I was a little girl. And the cadence and the warm room made me sleepy, and I almost dozed off, but my mother would nudge me. And I sat up straight because I didn't want to be sent to bed. And I would doze off a little bit, and my father would nudge me, and I would sit up straight because I didn't want to go to bed. And then they began songs, where you sang (singing in Yiddish). I didn't know what it meant. But it sounded so good. And somehow I knew the tune. And everybody looked at me, it seemed, when they sang, because they were teaching me the songs, they were singing to me. I felt so important. And every so often one of my uncles would stop and say, "Dad, tell her the story. Tell her what's going on." Because the most important thing to do at the seder is to teach the children. And so my zaideh would tell me. He would teach me. He told me little stories, and my uncles and my aunts told me little stories. And the evening progressed. And I learned. And then it came to the big seder dinner. First of all there was chopped liver. Don't turn your nose up at the chopped liver. If you've never tasted it, it tastes wonderful. And then gefilte fish. Gefilte fish is chopped up fish that is made into patties, and really it's boiled- it sounds terrible when I say it that way but, oh!, the taste is wonderful! - with horseradish. Then matzo balls, which are very light fluffy dumplings, chicken soup, baked chicken. All the accompaniments to that, until everybody was groaning, "Oh my goodness we can't eat another bite. Let's have the afikomen, and we can get on with the songs. But my Aunt Lillian and my Uncle Victor, they had stolen the afikomen from behind the cushions on Zaideh's couch when Zaideh had gotten up to go to the bathroom. And they gave it to me under the table.

"Give it back to Zaideh, and ask him for something. Don't just give it to him. You have to ransom this." I couldn't do that. He was my zaideh, and he was asking for the afikomen so I said, "Zaideh I have the afikomen." Well, he knew what the joke was so he said, "Well what do you want for it?" I said, "Nothing Zaideh, you can have it." And he said, "No! No you're supposed to ask me for something for it."

And all over, this is how it starts. This wasn't just our house. It's the tradition for the children to steal the afikomen and then ransom it back. How can I ask my zaideh for

something in order to give him back something that's stolen from him? I had tears running down my face. I really did. But my aunt and uncle they rescued me. They said, "I'll tell you what Dad, she'll take a new bike for the afikomen. " I grinned and said, "Yes I would." And he said, "Is that what you want?" And I said, "Yes please, Zaideh." So he said, "So give me the afikomen." So I did. And two weeks later the bike came. I knew better the next year. The next year I was prepared with what to ask for when I stole the afikomen.

The night continued. Then we had to say the grace after the meal. I knew this. I knew a lot of this because every Friday night and Saturday after lunch, my father and I and my mother and anybody else who was at the table, we always made grace after the meals. So I knew when they started (singing in Yiddish). Oh, I was on home ground. This was home territory. I knew this. And the adults drank their third cup of wine because everybody's supposed to drink four cups of wine during the seder, and now they came to their third cups of wine, and I came to my third cup of grape juice. And they started to sing songs. They sang songs I'd never heard before but they sounded so good it woke me up. I wasn't sleepy then. They sang (singing in Yiddish).

And they sang other songs, too. I didn't know what any of them meant but they sounded good. And we were waking up the neighbors. My mother was sure every year that we were waking up the neighbors. And they drank another cup of wine - mind you, they were only little cups - and we got to the end of the seder, and we sang the final song. Now by this time I wasn't sleepy at all, and I should have been. It was almost midnight. I had never seen almost-midnight. I should have been very tired, but I was too excited. Everybody was gathered in the kitchen, saying their goodnights, having a final glass of water, a final cup of tea, a final glass of juice. My mother said to my father, "You'd better take her up to bed." I said, "No. I'm not sleepy. Honest. I can stay up as long as anybody; I really want to say goodnight to everybody." And my Uncle Alfred, my very favorite uncle in the whole world, he said, "Let her sit on my lap for a minute." And I sat on his lap, and the next thing I remember was waking up in my own bed in the morning.

Well that was the first of my seders. The first of a series of wonderful seders year after year to be looked forward to and relished when I was a child, and I didn't have to do any of the work. And later when I helped my mother when we had the seders in our house with my mother and my father and my sister and myself, and relatives and guests. And later still, when I had my own house, and it was a seder in my house, and I did all the work, all the cleaning, all the food, all the preparation, and all of it with joy as I still do today - and this year, for the first time, with my grandchildren present. And so the world goes on. And all over the world, wherever there are Jews, on the same night, at the same time, Jews will gather around their tables to celebrate the Passover and to hold a seder service

Glossary

covenant

a binding agreement made between two parties in which each party has responsibilities. Generally applied to the agreements between God and the Jewish peoples.

halakhah

(Hebrew: 'he went') The Jewish Law. The word implies movement, a way, a path. It is used to describe compliance with the Jewish law. The acceptance of this yoke of compliance to the Jewish law is seen by many Jews as a distinctive essence of Judaism.

Hanukkah

(Hebrew: 'dedication') Jewish Festival of Lights, an eight-day commemoration of the rededication of the Jewish temple and the survival of the Jewish people. In contemporary American culture, Hanukkah includes the giving of gifts to children. The Hanukkah lamp, or Hanukkiah, is a ritual object used within the Hanukkah celebration. (see Judaism poster)

kedushah

(Hebrew: 'holiness') In the biblical commandment, You shall be holy as I am holy, it is this word: kedushah. As with many words, this one has many meanings and implications. Kedushah is applied to certain parts of Jewish services. It also implies an awareness of God's holiness within the context of human history

Kiddush

(Hebrew: 'sanctification') Prayer recited over a cup of wine in order to sanctify the Shabbat. The Kiddush cup is the name given to the cup which holds the wine at the first meal of Shabbat.

Law of Moses

613 laws revealed to Moses pertaining to all aspects of life; the laws are recorded in the Torah. These laws have been interpreted and analyzed by rabbis throughout Jewish history. The rabbis' writings are recorded in the Talmud.

Midrash

(Hebrew: 'to demand and to preach') Midrash has come to be thought of as the additional things read or seen in the sacred texts. It can also be thought of as those things offered "by way of example"

rabbi

(Hebrew: 'my master') a learned Jewish man who has received ordination. In contemporary Judaism, the role of rabbi varies greatly from community to community. In Reform congregations, the rabbi performs many functions comparable to a Christian minister, regarded as the spiritual leader of the community. In Orthodox congregations, rabbis may have taken on that role as well, but the rabbi is principally the one who interprets and explains the sacred texts. In modern Israel, rabbis also have a role as jurists, presiding over legal concerns relevant to all aspects of Jewish life.

Rosh HaShanna

(Hebrew) the ten-day, annual observance of the Jewish New Year during which Jews consider their actions and reaffirm their commitment to living a moral life. Rosh HaShanna and Yom Kippur are the High Holidays of Judaism

Shabbat

(Hebrew) the seventh day of the Jewish week during which Jews may refrain from work, gather with family for ritual meals and attend synagogue for services. The central ritual of Judaism. This ritual commemorates the creation of the world as recorded in the book of Genesis, in the Torah. On the seventh day of creation, God rested. Jews are instructed "to remember the Shabbat" by the fourth of the Ten Commandments. The Shabbat begins on Friday evening and continues through sunset on Saturday. Also called the Sabbath. "More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews" Ahad ha-'Am

Synagogue

Jewish meeting house and place of worship (refer to Centers for Worship: The Synagogue)

Talmud

second only to the Torah in its importance in Jewish life, the Talmud is a vast literary resource of commentary, interpretations, explanations of the commandments and the law. The Talmud is a compendium of information pertaining to Jewish life, including folklore, manners, prayers, medical remedies. Study of the Talmud is considered by many Jews to be a religious duty.

Ten Commandments

the core commandments revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

- I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage: You shall have no other gods besides me.
- You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
- You shall not swear falsely by the name of the Lord your God
- Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy
- Honor your father and mother
- You shall not murder
- You shall not commit adultery
- You shall not steal
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
- You shall not covet

Exodus 20: 2-14

Torah

(Hebrew) the sacred text of Judaism, which, along with the Prophets and the Writings, comprises the Hebrew Bible. The Torah was originally written in Hebrew.

Yom Kippur

The Day of Atonement: the most important day of the Jewish year. According to Leviticus 16:30, "On this day shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord."