



Passover

at Beth El
Congregation

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Haggadah FROM THE Heart

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There's something about Passover that speaks deeply to the Jewish soul. According to the 2014 Pew Portrait of American Jews, the Passover Seder is celebrated by even more Jewish people than Yom Kippur and Hanukkah.

Not surprisingly, many Jewish families have made the holiday their own by adding particular customs and unique traditions developed over many generations. Such is the case for two Beth El families - the Boonshafts and the Janets - each of whom created their own Haggadah to observe the Seder.

THE BOONSHAFT FAMILY

Jack and Marcia Boonshaft have developed quite a few family traditions in their 52 years of marriage, but none are as cherished as their Passover celebration.

“ I feel immersed in my Jewishness when preparing for Passover, Marcia said. ”

Anyone would be hard-pressed not to become engrossed in the Passover spirit at the Boonshaft Seder.

"Everyone in the family receives a personalized *Haggadah* with their name on it," Jack Boonshaft said. "A few days before Passover, I go through everyone's *Haggadah* and assign each person a portion to read based on their personalities and interests."

A few days before the first Seder, Jack can be found editing each guest's *Haggadah* with multicolored pencils. He changes the assigned readings every year, customizing each person's passage to encourage active participation and spur meaningful discussions.

"Our guests look forward to finding out their part," Marcia said. "One of our daughters is the family wine connoisseur, so she usually gets the blessings over the wine."

Inclusiveness is an integral part of the Boonshaft Seder.

"Everyone reads regardless of whether or not you know Hebrew," Jack said. "We're all part of the Exodus story, so we make sure everyone at our Seder participates, though sometimes the person assigned to the Simple Child takes offense!"

☆ **DISCUSSION:** We ask many questions during the Passover Seder.

What questions has Judaism encouraged you to ask (of yourself, your community, and the world)?

The Boonshafts invite their family - and friends who feel like family - to join them for *Seder*, no matter where in the country they live.

"We invite all of our Wandering Jews," Marcia said. "Once you have an invitation, it's for life!"

Among those to receive a lifetime invitation to the Boonshaft *Seder* is Beth El's Marketing Specialist, Esti Showell.

"The Boonshafts' *Seder* is so warm and joyous, I felt like a part of their family," Esti said.

Among those traditions is a Miriam's Cup.

"The Jewish woman's role is to keep Judaism and Israel alive in the home," Marcia said. "We include a Miriam's Cup to honor my mother and all the other women in our lives who keep Jewish values thriving."

The Boonshafts' matzah cover belonged to Marcia's mother and has been in the family since 1941. But the Boonshafts pass more than heirlooms through the generations.

"We have six grandchildren, and they've all celebrated their *B'nai Mitzvah* at Beth El," Jack said. "Two of our grandchildren were raised Jewish, and the other four have learned about their Jewish

heritage through holiday celebrations at our home. Passover is their touchstone to Judaism."

THE JANET FAMILY

The Janet family's lively *Seders* have become well known in the community.

“I've always loved Passover because it combines big family meals with a rich historical narrative as well as a lot of fun customs, said Howard and Rina, z”l Janet's eldest son, Andrew.”

"Our mom loved Passover and decided to make a family *Haggadah* to add a personal touch to our *Seder*."

The origins of the Janet family *Haggadah* go back to Rina's grandfather, who made elaborate poster boards to celebrate holidays and commemorate joyous life events. Rina carried on the tradition and, before long, applied her creative flair to the family's Passover *Seder*.

"She would research meaningful Passover texts, combined with pictures and stories of our family members both living and dead, songs we liked to sing, and even the inside jokes our family has told and passed down for many years," added Andrew's younger brother, Adam.

★ **DISCUSSION:** *Freedom is the central theme of Passover. When in your life have you felt most free? Describe a time when you, a friend, or family member made a journey to freedom.*

"Adam's great aunt used to tell this one joke every year, and Rina included that joke in our *Haggadah* at that specific moment during the Seder when his Aunt used to tell it," explained Adam's wife, Corinne. "Everything is in sequence."

In doing so, Rina curated a living chronicle of the Janet family's history.

"Rina would update the *Haggadah* following major milestones or when the Janets welcomed new family members," explained Anna, Andrew's wife. "When Andrew and I got married, Rina added pictures of my family to the *Haggadah*, which was so special for me and my parents."

The *Haggadah* serves as a snapshot of family memories. Among Adam's most cherished photographs is a picture from his *bris*.

"There's a note next to the picture of my *bris* that reads: We had to have Adam's *bris* early in the morning so that we could still serve bagels before we had to get rid of *chametz* for Passover," Adam said.

Rina wanted to celebrate her mother (now 95-years-old), so, like the Boons shafts, she introduced a Miriam's Cup to the Seder. At that point in the Seder, all the women grab tambourines and noisemakers

and dance around the table singing Debbie Friedman's version of "Miriam's Song."

"It's quite a joyous, unique, and unforgettable part of the Seder," Anna said. "It's an example of the flourishing and magnetic Jewish spirit of Jewish women."

Last year was the first Seder since Rina passed, but her legacy is preserved in the *Haggadah* she helped create.

"Not only did Rina design the *Haggadah*, but, as the leader of our Seder, she's the one who took us through the *Haggadah*," Corinne said.

"Without question we've carried on the tradition in her memory and spirit."



✧ **DISCUSSION:** What is the strangest place you hid the afikomen?