

Rabbi Reflections

Was the Last Supper a Seder?

By Rabbi Ari Rosenberg



Perhaps you've heard the joke about the apocryphal meeting of the rashei yeshivot of Yeshiva University, the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Hebrew Union College. The Rosh Yeshiva of YU boasts, "our students know the most about the Halacha." The Rosh Yeshiva of JTS brags, "our students know the most about Tanach." The President of HUC replies, "Maybe, but our students know the most about the Christian Scriptures!"

It's not a true story. It's not even very funny. But, like most humor, it may possess a kernel of truth. HUC did require me to study Christian

Scripture, and I must say that I found the class fascinating. One of the lessons I learned was the fact that, with all respect to Leonardo da Vinci, the "Last Supper" was most likely not a Passover Seder.

First of all, the Gospel of John states quite clearly in Chapter 19 that Jesus was crucified on the "day of preparation" before Passover. That is to say that Jesus died while everyone was preparing for the Seder. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that by the time the Seder occurred, Jesus had long since consumed his last meal, been crucified, and died, at least in the opinion of the writer of the Gospel of John.

Secondly, the Gospel of Mark records that Jesus "took bread" at the meal. Now, Mark was originally written in Greek, a language which has separate words for "leavened bread" and matzoh. In fact the word for matzoh does appear elsewhere in the Christian scriptures. However, Mark 14:22 clearly states that what Jesus ate was leavened bread. It was probably pizza! Whatever it was, if it had been Passover, Jesus would have been eating matzoh, not leavened bread.

Lastly, Rabban Gamliel made it absolutely clear that one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of the Passover Seder unless he has discussed the importance of the sacrifice, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs.

In Mishnah Pesachim 10:5, Gamliel goes on to explain that the Passover Sacrifice must be understood in terms of God "passing over" the houses of our ancestors in Egypt. The unleavened bread must remind us of the haste in which our ancestors fled Egypt. The bitter herbs serve to recall the bitterness our ancestors endured as slaves in Egypt.

In contradistinction to Rabban Gamliel, Mark 14 describes the "Last Supper" with no mention of the bitter herbs, no interpretation of the sacrifice, and (leavened) bread interpreted as the body of Jesus. Therefore, it would



The Last Supper – 'it just wasn't a Seder'

not have been a kosher Seder in the opinion of Rabban Gamliel, who is thought to have created the Seder as we know it.

Consequently, my studies of the Christian Scriptures themselves have taught me that the "Last Supper" could not possibly have been a Seder. Surely Jesus must have had a "Last Supper" of some sort before he died; it just wasn't a Seder.

Why is it so important to dispel the myth that the "Last Supper" was a Seder? When the "Last Supper" is incorrectly depicted as a Seder, it gives the false impression that Christianity either fulfills Judaism or is equivalent to it.

Christianity is a fine religion, but its conceptions of God and Messiah are quite different from Judaism's. Christianity believes that God has a Son who is also the Lord, while Judaism affirms the belief in one indivisible God. Christianity believes in a Messiah who dies for the sins of the people, while Jewish beliefs in the Messiah describe one who heralds an age of world peace and prosperity.

We do both religions a disservice when we try to equate the two.

Let us embrace plurality, and celebrate the unique contributions of Judaism to the world. This Passover let us not forget that the Hebrew slaves were not brought out of Egypt to be just like everyone else.

We were brought out of Egypt for the purpose of bringing Torah to the four corners of the earth. Every time we celebrate Passover, we are bringing the light of Torah to wherever we may be.

Rabbi Ari Rosenberg serves Hevreh of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington

Young Judaism

Passover, Reaffirmation, and Remembrance

By Joshua M. Cutler



The coming of spring has always been a joyous time for me. As I lament the cold temperatures and snowy roads which the winter brings to the Northeast, I make it an annual practice during the winter of counting down the days until April 1st, a symbolic date which marks the beginning of a new cycle of exciting events.

Not only do the months of April, May, and June represent the return of pleasant weather to the beautiful Berkshire Hills, they also mark the beginning of the baseball season for my beloved Red Sox, the final days of a long but insightful school semester, and, most importantly for me,

this precious time marks the coming of the Passover holiday, our annual springtime reaffirmation of our core beliefs as Jews and descendants of Abraham.

The Passover holiday has always been an extra special occasion in my household, largely due to the family reunion-like atmosphere which the occasion represents for us, not to mention the delicious food cooked by my mother, aunt, and grandmother.

In my younger years, my family and my paternal grandparents (all seven of us) would squeeze into our car and spend the holiday at my Aunt Roz and Uncle Neil's home in Norwood. For us, the observance of our Passover Seder and reading of the *Haggadah* not only served as a reminder of the events of our past, but it served as a celebration of seeing family and old friends, some of whom we would only see on this day each year, and some of whom were returning north having spent the winter months in Florida.

Passover services also served as a symbolic transition from generation to generation (*l'dor vador*), as my siblings and cousins were each given greater service-leading responsibilities each year. Of course, the culmination of Passover always resulted in a reward for our successful search of the *Afikomen*, always found under the cushion of Roz and Neil's living room couch.

While we now celebrate our Passover Seders at home in Pittsfield, the importance of celebration and remembrance still rings true to our values. It's always a great delight to be

able to share a delicious meal with my grandparents, aunts and uncles, and close friends, but at the same time we strive to recognize the importance of the work our predecessors did for us to arrive at our Seder.

Each year at our home Seder, we continue to use the clay Seder plates and Kiddush cups which my brother Zach, sister Julie, and I created when we were in religious school (thanks to the Harold Grinspoon Foundation for making the project possible).

We designed the plates to serve two purposes: One was to emphasize our symbolic holiday foods: the *maror*, *charoset*, *karpas*, *z'roa*, and *beitzah*, and the other was to commemorate relatives who are no longer able to share in the Passover holiday with us. While physically they may not be able to be with us sharing our holiday meal, by etching their initials in each section on the plates, their spirit remains embodied in our presence.

As a Jew, Passover remains steadfastly important to me because the simple act of gathering together for a meal is evocative of the sentiment that we as a people have survived countless struggles for freedom, whether it was enslavement by the Pharaoh, the Roman occupation of Judea, or the demons of the Holocaust.

We have had to endure countless challenges to our survival which have required us to adapt our culture to the circumstances of society, so, for me, our ability to join together to commemorate this festival is our "victory party."

May this Passover holiday bring joy to those families reuniting, but let us never forget the struggles our forefathers endured to secure the sense of unity we enjoy today.

Joshua M. Cutler, a member of Pittsfield's Temple Anshe Amunim, is a senior majoring in political science at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is the son of Ellen and Dr. Alan Cutler



Seder plates designed to commemorate relatives who have passed on ...so, their spirit remains embodied in our presence

Texts and Tunes

Sparks of a New Jewish Music

By Seth Rogovoy



Tim Sparks, a native of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was raised on traditional country blues and the gospel his grandmother played on piano in a small church in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

At the prestigious North Carolina School of the Arts, he studied classical guitar with Andrés Segovia protégée Jesus Silva. While recording three albums with the seminal vocal jazz ensemble Rio Nido, Sparks also became proficient in jazz styles from Brazilian to bebop. In 1993, he won the National Fingerstyle Guitar Championship at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, for playing his bluegrass adaptation of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*.

Not exactly the obvious ingredients for the making of one of the world's greatest interpreters of Jewish music on guitar, but that's exactly what Sparks has become over the last decade, as he has applied his talents and omnivorous musical appetite to Jewish folk, jazz, and klezmer, along the way establishing a niche for himself as one of Jewish music's most highly respected guitarists, along with Marc Ribot and Gary Lucas, who have perhaps dubious or superfluous benefit of Jewish backgrounds.

But listening to Sparks's recordings, including "Little Princess" (Tzadik), arrangements of classic tunes by legendary klezmer clarinetist Naftule Brandwein, and to his contributions to the French group Le Freylekh Trio's "Goulash System" (MusiKaKtion), makes clear that Sparks is both inspired by and has an intuitive feeling for the Jewish sound.

Indeed, as he once told an interviewer, "I get asked, 'Why are you playing this music? You're not Jewish.' The answer is, first of all, it's beautiful music. Jewish music shares a quality with gypsy music of touching on a diverse array of cultural and musical boundaries, especially Middle Eastern and Eastern European, with a particular soulfulness that moves me There's a mystery in it; you never get tired of it. Like the blues progression. That 'Hava Nagila' scale pushes a button for me."

But Sparks is more than a mere interpreter. As heard on previous recordings, including "Neshamah," "Tanz," and "At the Rebbe's Table" (all also available on Tzadik, www.tzadik.com), Sparks is a full-fledged participant in the renaissance of klezmer and Jewish music, immersing himself in the roots so that he can approach the age-old melodies and scales as a living, contemporary artist, reinvigorating the music and making it speak with the language and accent of its time and place.

Our time and place. His time and place.

So that, for example, on "The Rebbe's Hasid" – one of the Brandwein arrangements from "Little Princess," a melody that probably began life as



Tim Sparks, fingerpicking that's orchestral

a Hasidic *nigun*, or wordless chant, that was then transmogrified into a klezmer processional before Brandwein turned it into a showcase for his own virtuoso playing – as in "Der Yid in Jerusalem," there's a 'juicing' with Latin rhythm; not such a stretch, as the *clave* beat that underlines and pretty much defines Latin music is also at the rhythmic heart of most Jewish dance music.

But perhaps more than any of this is Sparks' guitar playing. He favors the acoustic guitar on "Little Princess," on which he is accompanied by bassist Greg Cohen and percussionist Cyro Baptista, and his gorgeous fingerpicking is orchestral.

I mean it as the greatest of praise when I say that it doesn't even sound like guitar playing – Sparks is one of those rare players, like Bill Frisell, who transcends the inherited vocabulary of the instrument to create something other than guitar music with it – something both simpler and more complex. In a word, music, and not just any music, but music of multi-dimensionality, music that shimmers and sustains and speaks directly to the soul of a listener ...in much the same way as the crying voice of the cantor.

Seth Rogovoy (seth@rogovoy.com) is the editor-in-chief of Berkshire Living Magazine and the author of *The Essential Klezmer: A Music Lover's Guide to Jewish Roots and Soul Music*. His book, *BOB DYLAN: Prophet, Mystic, Poet*, was recently published by Scribner.

Jewish Education Today

Binding Us to Ourselves... and to One Another

By Debora Cole-Duffy



As I write this column, the days are cold and snowy, but I look to be inspired by spring – by extended days of light and by thoughts of Passover. The joy and festivity of Purim will find their way to what we crave in Passover: the celebration of the redemption and survival of the Jewish people.

We relish this remembrance with our families and in our community as it is a commemoration not to be celebrated alone. Inherent in the Passover Seder tradition is how the story is told by the order of its memory within the order of its community.

As Jews we 'welcome the stranger,' and as the Torah describes the need for each one of us to be counted amongst one another, then each one of us must be part of that count.

It is community that binds us to ourselves and to one another.

As this spring arrives with the pall of the earthquake in Haiti, our world's nations work to help the survivors; parents and educators work to assure the safety of the children and the safety of schools; and religious and community groups mobilize with offers of hope and strength by raising money and transporting volunteers and supplies.

In times of tragedy and sadness, we seek the comfort of community; in times of joy, we delight to kvell with others.

It is community that binds us to ourselves and to one another.

As I – and school leaders across the country – wonder about enrollment, demographics, and the drive for school selection, I can't stop thinking about 'where' the count falls and 'why.'

What guides the choice for a Jewish based education? Economy, religion, family values, or social desires?

According to anecdotes and readings about the attraction of children attending a Jewish school, I have learned that it is student attention, social appeal, and the value of a Jewish community. The fact that Jewish principles and study guide it only enhances its desire.

It is community that binds us to ourselves and to one another.

As I explore thoughts of Jewish school community, I can count the blessings of students, parents, faculty, rabbis, and Jewish leaders, and deep community support offering advice, guidance, education, and assistance.

It is community that binds us to ourselves and to one another.

A waning economy, changing demographics, and changes in family needs make all Jewish school communities take strong notice.

Should they be sustained? Yes!

Why? So each child and their family as members of a Jewish community can stand and be counted.



How?

We learn from *Exodus*, Chapter 25 Verse 2, that any heart that makes a contribution will receive special blessings. As in our tradition to reach out to one another this call to do the difficult can transform the individual voice of "Hineini, Here I Am!" to "Hineini – Here We Are!"

At Passover with the hope and promise of blessings within our community, we tell and retell the story of redemption and survival....

It is community that binds us to ourselves and to one another.

Debora Cole-Duffy is the Head of School at Sinai Academy of the Berkshires in Pittsfield.

Letters to the Editor

The Goldstone Report: A Response to Rabbi Caine

Dear BJV Editor,

In response to Rabbi Ivan Caine's letter, published in the February 19 issue of the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*, regarding the "Goldstone Report" and opposing the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires' Community Relations Committee's letter to United States Representative John Olver expressing disapproval of his vote failing to condemn "the Report," I point out the following:

1 – As he notes, Rabbi Caine's quotes in support of 'the Report' come from *Haaretz*. It is my view that *Haaretz* is a left-wing daily and that Gideon Levy, the journalist responsible for the material Rabbi Caine cites, is one of *Haaretz*'s most extreme left wing writers – who, I doubt, even other left wingers in Israel take very seriously.

2 – While in a democracy, everyone is entitled to voice their opinions – even if these distort the facts – the more extreme one is, left or right, the further away one gets from the facts; and Levy, always ignoring the facts, has never had a good or positive thing to say in print about anyone or anything – nor does he propose any realistic solutions.

3 – Therefore, as most Israelis most often do take the facts into consideration, I find Levy's opinions, and by association those of Rabbi Caine, not at all reflective of the average, mainstream Israeli – nor, do I believe that they reflect the opinion of most U.S. Jews.

With regard to the points Rabbi Caine made in his letter, I believe that it is important to judge these in the following light:

1 – Even Goldstone has admitted that his report is not encompassing and based only on what he heard from Palestinians. None of the allegations were actually proved, except the bombarding of innocent citizens by Hamas, prior to and during "Operation Cast Lead" – and again subsequently. Of course Hamas has since claimed it had no intention of targeting citizens, only military installations!

2 – Being Jewish was the reason Goldstone was chosen for the role; which is a tactic akin to a male accused of rape hiring a female lawyer.

3 – The Israeli army has actually investigated various actions taken during "Operation Cast Lead" and at least two senior officers have been indicted for

mistakes made.

4 – As for Rabbi Caine's use of the phrase "zealot element" in describing a supposed infusion of right-wing extremism into Israeli programs of study and military service. I find reported that only one – out of thirty-six – "study and serve yeshiva programs" had its status canceled because the Yeshiva Rabbi had an extreme far right view that did not correspond with the practices of the Israel Defense Forces. All the other yeshivot have publicly denounced this rabbi's views and absorbed the students who wanted to continue the program. A handful of (religious) soldiers have refused to participate in evacuation of settlers, especially from their own families or neighbors. But, this does not make that phenomenon a standard form of accepted behavior – on the contrary, as a much larger number of Israeli youth refuse (or "draft dodge") to serve in the army citing religious or moral objections. Thankfully, Israel is a democracy based on the rule of law and everyone is both entitled to their opinions and to act upon them, as long as they are legal.

5 – Tzipi Livni was Minister of Foreign Affairs when "Operation Cast Lead" occurred. She was part of the decision making process that led to the operation, which by most Israelis was seen as a very late reaction to the bombardments by Hamas and was supported by eighty-five percent of Israeli Jews. No one in Israel favors what Rabbi Caine terms "grievous violations of human decency" – certainly it is not the policy or the behavior of most Israelis, nor is it tolerated.

6 – Lastly, I find offending, Rabbi Caine's statement that, "It is a grievous error to criticize a legislator, or any civic leader, who accepts or endorses the 'Goldstone Report'." Since when is criticizing a politician on anything, a "grievous error"?

Representative Olver needs to know that some of his constituents disagree with him on this issue. Right or wrong – they (we) disagree.

He wants our vote. He will only get it if we agree with his views. How else can we have a meaningful dialogue with our elected officials?

Sincerely,

Eiran Gazit
Lenox

Urgent – "Be The Match"

Dear BJV Editor,

I am reaching out to you on behalf of my uncle Jeff Tohl, a Jewish father of three, who was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma (a form of cancer). Please, take a moment to watch this one minute video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMHBhMJ-Tsw>

They say the best odds of matching a donor is within the same ethnic community. However there is such a low population of Jewish people registered both domestically and internationally, that they haven't found a match for him. And my uncle is not the only Jew struggling to find a match.

In our search for a donor for Jeff, we have been introduced to the Mandels, who have a family member diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia, and we've learned that many more Jewish families across the country are struggling to find matches.

This is an issue that our family is immediately encountering, but this should concern every Jew. We need to pull together as a community, take action, and join with "Be The Match."

Alert Jewish organizations, friends, and family and encourage them to join the donor registry.

Ask synagogues to make an announcement at services, to further encourage their congregants join.

Contact "The City of Hope-Be The Match" by calling Sharlene at (626) 227-5719.

Visit <http://join.marrow.org/hope4jeff>, www.Marrow.org, and www.cityofhope.org to find out more that you personally can do.

The site <http://join.marrow.org/hope4jeff> was set up specifically so that if you sign up to take a DNA swab test – to see if you are "a match" – the "City of Hope" will pay for the cost; there will be no cost to you.

Please help us. So many patients are in need, pass this along and urge the Jewish community to join with Be The Match. Anyone who can help out will be doing a great mitzvah not only for my uncle, but the entire Jewish community... and we're praying for some "hatzlacha!" I thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Michael Tohl
Los Angeles

Thanks Federation For Trip To Israel

Dear BJV Editor,

My thanks to the Jewish Federation of the Berkshires for providing the very generous grant that allowed me to participate in the Hevreh Teen Trip to Israel. This trip was an amazing experience! I had one of the best times of my life.

I got to see my friends from Israel who we had hosted in America over a year ago. I also got to make new friends, not only from Israel, but from our group as well.

I learned a lot about my Jewish identity. One week wasn't nearly enough to take in all of the beauty and culture of Israel, but it was more than enough to learn that I am part of something special and that being able to say I am a Jew is

an honor.

The friends I made on this trip will be so for a very long time. I will miss them dearly, but it will be easy to stay in touch with online messaging through Facebook and email.

I know that I will return to Israel and I want to learn more Hebrew on my own so that I tie myself closer to Israel and its people. I can never thank you enough for this experience.

Thanks,

Matt Gellert
Hillsdale, New York

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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