

From the Rabbi's Desk

March 2021

Friends,

This time last year, the pandemic was beginning to blossom. By Passover, we were all at home, and the suffering was beginning. Who could have imagined all that we have endured? Now, some of us have received our vaccinations; others are waiting their turn. The end of this pandemic may be months away, but the light is visible at the end of the tunnel.

This year, we'll need to have our second Zeder, that is, a Zoom Seder. In the coming weeks, we'll be planning this online event. We'll be using parts of the new Haggadah, Mishkan Haseder, published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. This new Haggadah will replace the Baskin Haggadah, so-called because of the watercolor artwork by Leonard Baskin. The Baskin Haggadah was first published in 1974 and is the only Haggadah I remember from my childhood. Each year it would appear on the dining room table. Guests changed year to year, but Baskin was always there, along with a few crumbs from the year before. But now it is time to continue our journey with a new Haggadah.

Mishkan Haseder will feel familiar to you. Our siddur, Mishkan T'filah, set the standard for pairing contemporary poetry with our ancient liturgy. Our Reform movement has embraced this paradigm because it strikes balance between *keva* and *kavannah*, tradition and intention. Just as ancient liturgy provides support with its foundational rigidity, while the openness and expressiveness of contemporary poetry provides a catalyst for our prayers of the heart. Executive Editor Rabbi Hara Person notes in her introduction to Mishkan Haseder, "For many years I dreamed of creating a Haggadah that would be rich and engaging for those with a strong Jewish background, inviting and open to those with little or no background, and welcoming to those not sure they should even be around the table—a Haggadah that would be beautiful and complex, that would allow us to challenge and be challenged, that connects the story of the Exodus with our personal stories, that would be authentic while recognizing the range of identities and backgrounds gathered around our tables."

Just like its predecessor, Mishkan Haseder engages us visually with beautiful artwork. Tobi Kahn has focused much of his life on creating miniature sacred spaces. Our new Haggadah combines his artwork with our ancient liturgy, contemporary poetry, and commentary to give us some of the critical building materials necessary to transform our homes into a *mikdash mi'at*, a little sanctuary. All we need now is to set our tables and add our own authentic story.

As we approach this Passover, let's consider the journey we are on now. Throughout the past year, we've endured many plagues: isolation, loneliness, anxiety, masks, dry hands, hidden faces, muffled voices, zoom rooms, hybrid schools, social unrest, political turmoil, and an astounding number of dead. As we put drops of wine or grape juice on our plates this year to recognize the biblical plagues, what contemporary plagues will also be in your thoughts?

What has been oppressing you? Where will you find redemption? What does freedom taste like? Take some time to consider these questions and ask more of your own. Share your plagues list, write a poem, or tell of your experience in a short narrative. Email them to me at marcekstrand@gmail.com, and we'll bring them into our Passover Zeder.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Marc