

# The Haggadah

Contributed by [donna leventhal](#)

Source: Jonathan Saffran Foer

Here we are. Here we are, gathered to celebrate the oldest continually practiced ritual in the Western world, to retell what is arguably the best known of all stories, to take part in the most widely practiced Jewish holiday. Here we are as we were last year, and as we hope to be next year. Here we are as night descends in succession over all the Jews of the world, with a book in front of us.

Jews have a special relationship to books, and the Haggadah as been translated more widely, and reprinted more often than any other Jewish book. It is not a work of history or philosophy, not a prayer book, user's manual, timeline, poem, or palimpsest - and yet it is all of these things. The Torah is the foundational text for Jewish law, but the Haggadah is our book of living memory. We are not merely telling a story here. We are being called to a radical act of empathy. Here we are, embarking on an ancient, perennial attempt to give human life - our lives - dignity.

The need for new Haggadahs does not imply the failure of existing ones, but the struggle to engage everyone at the table in a time that is unlike any that has come before. Our translation must know our idiom, our commentaries must wrestle without conflicts, our design must respond to how our world looks and feels. This haggadah makes no attempt to redefine what a Haggadah is, or overlay any particular political or regional agenda. (It is called New American Haggadah not because there is anything uniquely American about it, but in the tradition of naming Haggadah after where it was made). Like all Haggadahs before it, this one hopes to excite the mind and heart. Like all Haggadahs before it, this one hopes to be replaced.

Here we are: Individuals remembering a shared past and in pursuit of a shared destiny. The seder is a protest against despair. The universe might appear deaf to our fears and hopes, but we are not waiting for this moment for thousands of years - more than one hundred generations of Jews have been here as we are - and we will continue to wait for it. And we will not wait idly.

As you read these words - as our people's ink-stained fingers turn its wine-stained pages - new Haggadahs are being written. As future Jews at future tables read *those* Haggadahs, other Haggadahs will be written. New Haggadahs will be written until there are no more Jews to them. Or until our destiny has been fulfilled, and there is no more need to say, "Next year in Jerusalem."