

Introduction - The Union Haggadah

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Source: The Union Haggadah, ed. by The Central Council of American Rabbis, at sacred-texts.com

The moral and spiritual worth of the hallowed institution of the Seder, which has become a vital part of the Jewish consciousness, is priceless. We should suffer an irretrievable loss, were it allowed to pass into neglect. To avert such a danger, has been the anxious thought to which the Union Haggadah owes its origin.

In "carrying on the chain of piety which links the generations to each other", it is necessary frankly to face and honestly to meet the needs of our own day. The old Haggadah, while full of poetic charm, contains passages and sentiments wholly out of harmony with the spirit of the present time. Hence the proper editing of the old material demanded much care and attention on the part of the editors of the first edition of the Union Haggadah. Benefiting by their labors, those entrusted with the task of its revision are able to present a work at once modern in spirit and rich in those traditional elements that lend color to the service.

The Seder service was never purely devotional. Its intensely spiritual tone mingled with bursts of good humor, its serious observations on Jewish life and destiny with comments in a lighter vein, and its lofty poetry with playful ditties for the entertainment of the children. It assumes the form of an historical drama presented at the festal table, with the father and children as leading actors. The children question and the father answers. He explains the nature of the service, preaches, entertains, and prays. In the course of the evening, a complete philosophy of Jewish history is revealed, dealing with Israel's eventful past, with his deliverance from physical and from spiritual bondage, and with his great future world-mission. In its variety, the Haggadah reflects the moods of the Jewish spirit. Rabbinical homily follows dignified narrative, soulful prayers and Psalms mingle with the *Ḥad Gadyo* and the madrigal of numbers, *Eḥod Mi Yode'a*.

The assignment to the child of a prominent part in the Seder service is in consonance with the biblical ordinance: "And thou shalt tell thy son in that day" (Ex. XIII: 8). The visible symbols, the living word of instruction, and the ceremonial acts, are sure to stimulate religious feeling. Parent and child are thus brought into a union of warm religious sympathy, which is all the more indissoluble because strengthened by the ties of natural affection. Their souls are fired with the love of liberty, and their hearts are roused to greater loyalty to Israel and to Israel's God of Freedom.