

The Shofar

March, 1991



Why Is Passover So Important?

Pesach has been described as the most popular and cherished of Jewish holidays. Many Jews who are not otherwise particularly observant make it a point to attend a Seder, as if responding to "some stirring in their inmost parts." The celebration of our people's dramatic escape from bondage in Egypt over 3,200 years ago serves to remind us of the importance of continuing the battle for freedom in every generation.

According to Rabbi David Goldberg, "the Exodus from Egypt occupied a unique position, for it was seen as the supreme demonstration of God's love for His people, fulfilling His promises to their ancestors and setting the scene for the consummation of His Covenant with them at Sinai. It marked, in effect, the beginning of their history as a self-conscious people with a sense of common purpose and destiny. Furthermore, because the event was a liberation from slavery, the celebration of it became a celebration of freedom."

The Passover observance is actually a combination of two separate springtime holidays celebrated long before the Exodus — *chag hapesach* (festival of the paschal lamb) when Jews who were mostly nomadic shepherds celebrated the coming of spring with an animal sacrifice — and *chag hamatzot* (festival of unleavened bread), an agricultural festival in which Jewish farmers celebrated the beginning of the grain harvest. Both festivals came in time to be associated with the Exodus.

The Passover service as prescribed in the Torah was not observed for many centuries after the Exodus until King Josiah of Israel instituted reforms mentioned in II Kings 23 and revived the practice.

After the establishment of the Second Temple (sixth century B.C.E.), major celebrations were held in Jerusalem at which Jews from all over would come to sacrifice a paschal lamb and then eat it together with their families. Over the years, ceremonies, symbolic foods, psalms, and songs were added to evolve into what we know today as the modern seder.

UJC Seder to Stress Family Participation

New Haggadahs Geared to Children's Understanding

Seats still available as planners near capacity

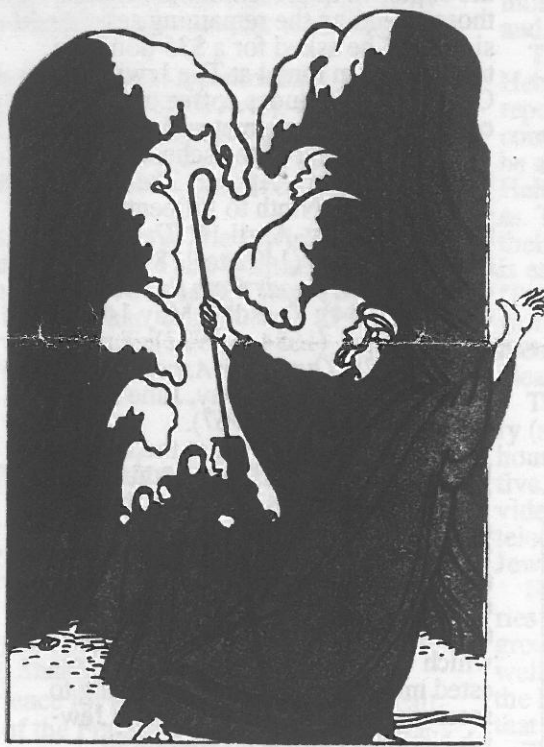
Over 150 members of The UJC, their friends, and visitors are expected to attend a community Passover seder at The American Club on March 29. Organizers Janet Golden, Kathy Goeld and Veronica Frankenberg have spent many hours making the arrangements for this important event on the Jewish calendar. Bob Meyer will conduct the Seder with the assistance of Victor Falk, on the electric keyboard, and the choir. Those who still haven't booked should call Kathy Goeld at 812-6549.

With the understanding that Passover began and remains a family holiday, special

attention is being given to making the service easily understandable to children. New Haggadahs from the U.S. emphasize the family nature of the Seder with an easy-to-follow format, English that is within the grasp of school-age children, and translations and transliterations of essential Hebrew texts. The Haggadahs also list activities and discussion questions that parents can use to help pre-school children relate to the holiday and Seder. For those who wish to buy them, the Haggadahs will be available after the Seder at \$30 each.

Children attending the Seder will be assigned reading parts and all children participating in the hunt for the *afikomen* will receive a prize.

The Haggadah is the story of Exodus. Introduced almost 2,500 years ago to comply with the biblical verse, "And you shall instruct your son on that day" . . . (Exodus 13:8), it is basically a book of instruction, particularly for the young. It is with this thought in mind, in fact, that influences the choice of the youngest child present to ask The Four Questions. The whole ritual of the seder is designed, "through sight and sound and taste, to make the greatest impact on participants, particularly children, so that in their imagination they may relive the liberation of their ancestors; for that is the purpose of the exercise. As the Haggadah puts it, 'In every generation the individual should regard himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt.'" (The Jewish People, Penguin Books, David J. Goldberg and John D. Ravner).



"The struggle was not only a liberation from servitude. It was the crucial event in Israel's self-conception. But it was more than that. For the Exodus would become a metaphor for all human history in the struggle for freedom." Abba Eban.

JWA Plans Gala Evening For Israeli Independence Ball

With top entertainment lined up, a beautiful venue booked, great food, exciting raffle prizes, and the Gulf War off our mind, this year's Independence Day Ball promises to be one of the biggest and best celebration yet of this important date on the Jewish social calendar.

The ball is set for Wednesday, April 17 in the ballroom of the Grand Hyatt Hotel. There will be dancing to the Tony Carpio band (remember what a great job they did at Jason Cohen's bar mitzvah?) and a special performance by Israeli singer Yaffa Yarkoni. Ms Yarkoni, according to Anne Godfrey, Chairman of the Jewish Women's Association, has a versatile, international repertoire and has sung on tours all over the world. She is known particularly for her songs of love and war. Among the raffle prizes (tickets will only be available on the night) will be a return ticket to Israel.

Tickets for the ball are \$330. Given the anticipated demand (last year's were sold out well before the event), it's important to book earliest possible. Call Mira at 813-2959 or Veronica at 813-0173 or send your check to JWA Independence Day, The Jewish Club, 4/F Melbourne Plaza, 33 Queen's Road Central, HK. A healthy contingent of UJC members are expected to attend, so please join us.

The Shofar

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Heritage, Hebrew Classes Off to Healthy Start

The UJC's Heritage series kicked off its first few sessions with a healthy turnout of 25 to 30 people each time. The series centers on a nine-part telecourse narrated by Abba Eban.

Each viewing is followed by group discussion based on that night's segment and readings distributed beforehand. Many thanks are due Jonathan Kriegel, Bob Meyer, and Mark Michelson who have led the discussion at the first three sessions.

The course is open to members and all other members of the community and any of the meetings may be attended without commitment. To offset the expenses of presenting the course, those attending the remaining sessions will be asked for a \$35 donation to cover room rental at The Jewish Club (which includes coffee or tea and cookies) and course materials.

The remainder of the schedule is as follows: Tuesday, April 2, *The Crucible of Europe* (Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries); Tuesday, April 16, *The Search for Deliverance* (1492 to 1789); Tuesday, April 30, *Roads from the Ghetto* (1789 to 1914); Tuesday, May 14, *The Golden Land* (1654 to 1932); Tuesday, May 28, *Out of the Ashes* (1914 to 1945); and Wednesday, June 5, *Into the Future* (1945 to 1967).

There were 14 people at the first lesson of the crash Hebrew course "Five Easy Lessons." Most of the students have made steady progress and a few "hard core" members are already talking about an extension. Bob Green found some Hebrew conversation tapes during his trip to the U.S. which will be made available to interested members. He is also expecting to receive some materials from The Jewish National Outreach Program in New York.

Director General of Israeli Foreign Ministry to Speak

Mr. Reuven Merhav, former Consul General of Israel in Hong Kong and an honorary member of The UJC, will speak on the current situation in Israel and the Middle East on Sunday, March 24 at 8:30 p.m. in The Jewish Club.

A buffet dinner will be served from 6 p.m. Please book by calling 801-5440.

From the Chairman . . .

A tale of several cities and a determined pursuit

I thought that one of the benefits of a buying trip last month would be to escape from the demands that arise from being chairman of The UJC. Our conscientious treasurer Victor Falk was determined not to let that happen.

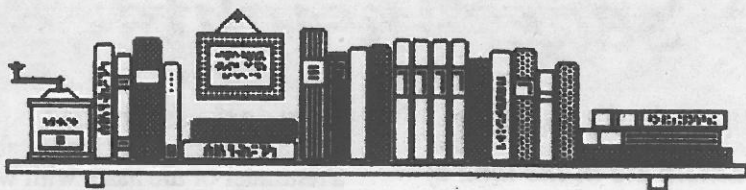
The night before my departure, he deposited a lengthy legal document on my doorstep dealing with The UJC's application to become a limited society. It required replies to rather technical questions and comments from the Registrar General regarding 27 different clauses and sub-clauses. Victor imagined that nothing would interest or amuse me more on the 14-hour flight to Frankfurt. (He confesses to being trained as a nitpicker by his father and enjoys making the other Committee members his victims.)

With my wife as his accomplice, he proceeded to track me down. Without advance hotel bookings, I had managed to drop from sight in Germany and Spain. And the need to stay an extra few days in New York caused me to cancel hotel bookings for a merchandise show in Las Vegas.

When I called home, I got word from my mother that someone was on my trail, but she couldn't remember the name or find the slip of paper she had written it on. The mystery caller had told her that when he failed to find me at the Las Vegas Hilton, he managed to find (without a precise idea of the time difference in mind) — a Robert Greenberg at another Hilton. Needless to say, Robert Greenberg was not too happy getting a call from somebody called Victor in Hong Kong at 5:30 in the morning.

What this story illustrates mostly is how dedicated some of our committee members are. All of us have come away with enormous respect for the job Victor has been doing to keep the books and monitor expenses, in addition to handling this laborious task of making us a limited society.

It also shows that Victor Falk loves a challenge. Despite the appearance of my having gone underground with an assumed name in Las Vegas, (possibly on a drinking and gambling binge in the company of some bimbo for all Victor knew,) and undeterred by false clues along the way, he stayed on the trail. As a result, Victor Falk will always be remembered by a bewildered, 79-year-old lady in Akron, Ohio as that man who was trying to find her son in the interests of The UJC.



Monograph Offers New Insights On Jews in Hong Kong and China

A newly-published monograph from the Jewish Historical Society of Hong Kong makes fascinating reading for those with an interest in the Far Eastern Jewish community. Articles judiciously selected and edited by Dennis and Mary Levantthal reflect the diversity of the Jewish experience in this part of the world and how our community has been influenced by the course of events in China.

The Preface by former Israeli Consul in Hong Kong, Yoel Sher, touches upon latest developments in China-Israel relations. Mrs. Paul Sandfelder shows an astute eye and talent for research in her prose snapshots of our community taken at several points from around 1900 to 1940.

In a story by long-time resident Jeremy Zimman we learn of difficulties that were faced by Jewish refugees passing through China while a scholarly piece by Professor S.V. R. Cammann clarifies some historical inaccuracies regarding "The Miscalled 'West China Jews.'"

Perhaps of greatest interest to residents is the results of a community-wide survey conducted by Mr. Levantthal for the JHS in early 1989 showing the composition and religious leanings of members of Ohel Leah Synagogue and The Jewish Recreation Club. What the editor describes as "this small, complex, but dynamic outpost of the Diaspora" turns out to be even more secular and diverse than what was generally believed.

The monograph, Volume III in the series, is available at The Jewish Club for \$100. per copy. Volume I, "Sino-Judaic Studies: Whence and Whither" (including "The Kadoorie Memoir") by Mr. Levantthal and Volume II, "The Jews in Kaifeng: Reflections on Sino-Judaic History," by S.J. Chan, are \$50. and \$25., respectively.

Host a service at home and make Shabbat **SOMETHING SPECIAL**

To give a special meaning to Shabbat, try hosting a service in your home. From the experience of members who have, Shabbat somehow becomes a warmer, more intimate and friendlier experience for everyone. Many of us recall fondly the recent service held in the home of the Frankenberg's and the Shabbat Shuvah service last fall at the Green's. Not only does The UJC benefit financially (every service in a public venue costs the Congregation nearly \$2,000.), but having a service at home also represents an excellent way to celebrate a family success or special occasion. Those interested should contact Janet Golden at 812-1624 or Robin Krieger at 803-1526.

Services Set for April 12, 26 & May 17

April 12, 6:15 p.m. - Kam Shan Room, The American Club, 49th floor, Exchange Square II

April 26, 8:15 p.m. - Home of Bob and Grace Green, No. 1 Robinson Road, Apartment 4A. (Bear left coming off Garden Road roundabout (avoid going onto overpass), take first driveway on left, enter building with lobby in red motif; limited parking available)

May 17, 6:15 p.m. - Service + BBO Buffet, The American Club, Tai Tam

Please be on time so services can start promptly.

Jews by Choice Group Attends Classes, Plans Discussion Forum, Seeks Members

At six o'clock Wednesday evenings, a work-weary but enthusiastic group trudges into a conference room at The Jewish Club. As most of Hong Kong sits down to dinner, the Jews by Choice (JBC) contingent begins another battle with Hebrew pronunciation and vocabulary.

Ages range from 20-something on up. The group comprises housewives, artists, community leaders and executives. Although core members so far are all female, a devoted group of men — spouses and significant others — make a supportive appearance as well. What these people all have in common is a desire to learn about Judaism and, hopefully, one day become Jews.

Teacher Yakov Moselle of the crash Hebrew course "Five Easy Lessons" reports that this committed group is coming along very well and will soon be able to follow some of the basic Hebrew texts used at Shabbat services. The students, too, are pleased with their progress. Kathy Goeld says she is eager to sign up for more lessons. "I'm really beginning to recognize words and that gives me encouragement. . . I think the course is a great idea."

The Heritage series on Jewish history (see article on page 2) helps put the hours of Hebrew study into perspective. Designed around the nine-part video series hosted by Abba Eban, the telecourse traces the history of the Jewish people through the millennia.

For the JBC Group, the Heritage series provides a basic context and background for further religious study as well as an opportunity to partake in the lively and analytical discussion that conclude each session.

To balance the intellectual content of the JBC program, an informal discussion group focusing on more personal issues is being organized. Aimed at non-Jewish spouses and friends who are seeking to convert, the discussion group will meet informally once a month to share ideas and concerns.

Several UJC committee members have offered to lead these discussions and it is hoped that converts among the congregation will join the group as well. Visiting rabbis will also be invited to address and advise the group whenever possible.

JBC members will be contacted directly with information on times and dates for these meetings. Those interested in joining should call Martha Josephson at 849-8567 or 865-0118.

■ *Martha Josephson*

Wide Choice of Foods for Passover On Sale in Jewish Club

A wide variety of special foods for Passover may be ordered from The Jewish Club or purchased in the King David Room from March 24 to April 8. A packing and delivery service is also available. All purchases must be paid for by cash or check. Since there are only limited quantities for some items, it's best to order early. For more information, call Captain Chu at 801-5433.

In addition to Passover staples such as matzo, matzo meal, and cake mixes, The Club has potato pancake and kugel mixes, gefilte fish, various soups, cookies and macaroons, jams, salad dressings, horseradish, chocolates, wines and juices, condiments, chicken, turkey, veal, steaks, and much more.

It is not necessary to be a member of Ohel Leah or The Jewish Club to make a purchase.

Seder, Seminar Planned for Jewish School Students

There will be a model seder for students of the Ezekiel Abraham Jewish School at 11:30 a.m. on March 24. This will include Passover activities and a run-through of a seder celebration. Children are asked to wear white shirts.

Children four to twelve are invited to take part in a three-day Jewish and Hebrew study seminar on religion and traditions from Wednesday, April 10 to Friday, April 12 beginning at 10:30 a.m. The program will feature educational games, movies and music and end with a Kabbalat Shabbat.

Both events will be held in The Jewish Club. For more information, please contact Mrs. Nurit Malachi at 572-4683 or 801-5476.

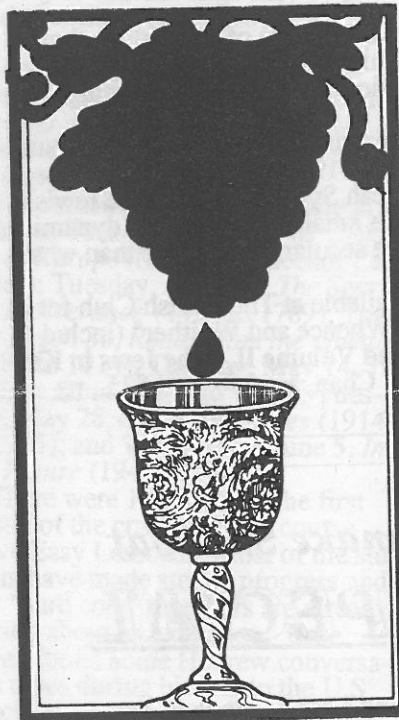
Looking for a Summer Camp?

If you'd like to send your child to summer camp in the U.S., The UJC can provide addresses for a number of camps, particularly on the East Coast, including a few geared particularly to Reform Jewish students. Please contact Bob Green at 463-8156.



Seder Insights

"This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, let them come and eat — all who are needy, let them come and celebrate Passover with us. Now we are here: next year may we be in Israel. Now we are slaves: in the year ahead may we be free men."
Passover Haggadah



Why do we drink four cups of wine?

According to the most popular explanation, the four cups are drunk because, in the Book of Exodus, four different verbs are used to describe the drama of redemption from slavery in Egypt: "I will bring you out . . . I will deliver you . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you for My people."

Why is a special goblet, the Cup of Elijah, placed on the Seder table?

The cup symbolizes that the prophet Elijah will be a welcome guest at every Seder and the opening of the front door expresses the belief that the Messianic Age might come at any time.

Why do we eat matzo?

Matzo is eaten during Pesach as a reminder of the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt. "They took up their dough before it had time to leaven" (Exodus 12:34). Also, in accordance with a repeated biblical prohibition, strict abstention from any leaven (*chametz*) or food containing a mixture of leaven became, in traditional practice, an important feature of the Passover observance. Exodus 12:15 is very severe about those who eat bread during Pesach: "You shall celebrate this event each year (this is a permanent law) to remind you of this fatal night [the night the first-born males of Egypt were killed]. The celebration shall last seven days. For that entire period you are to eat only bread made without yeast. Anyone who disobeys this rule at any time during the seven days of the celebration shall be excommunicated from Israel."

Why is a piece of matzo (the *afikoman*) hidden during the seder?

During the seder, a piece of the middle matzo (called *afikoman*, a Greek word meaning dessert) is wrapped in a napkin and set aside to be distributed after the meal and eaten as a dessert. The custom developed around 700 years ago of hiding it to make the seder more exciting for children who receive a gift if they find it. After it is returned, the leader of the seder breaks it up into small pieces which he shares with everyone at the table.

Why are matzo perforated and square in shape?

Matzo are perforated to allow for the escape of air, thereby retarding fermentation. They also prevent the dough from rising and swelling during baking. An automatic perforating machine makes lines about one-quarter to one-half inch apart. Matzo originally were round until the invention of a matzo baking machine in 1875 in England that made square matzo.

Why do we spill ten drops of wine in the Seder?

When the Haggadah reaches the story of the Ten Plagues that afflicted the Egyptians, every one at the table spills a little wine from his or her glass as each plague is named. Why? So that their cup of joy, even when celebrating a moment of deliverance, should not be full. The sages taught the Jews not to rejoice over another's misfortune. "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth"