

# Passover and Our Identity as American Jews



## **The Original Proposal for the Great Seal of the United States**

On July 4, 1776, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams were given the task of designing the American seal. Franklin's design included Moses "standing on the shore and extending his hand over the Sea, thereby causing the same to overwhelm Pharaoh who is sitting in an open Chariot, a crown on his Head and a Sword in his hand. Rays from a Pillar of Fire in the Clouds reach to Moses to express that he acts by command of the Deity." The seal's proposed motto was "**Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God**," coined by Oliver Cromwell, leader of the Puritan revolution in England. BASED ON A COMMENTARY FROM "A DIFFERENT NIGHT HAGGADAH"

## **Although Franklin's design was not chosen, it raises some interesting questions:**

- Why do you think the Exodus experience spoke so forcefully to Americans in 1776?
- Does Passover have some special meaning to us as American Jews, today?
- Why do you think Franklin's design was not chosen?
- What lessons does the Exodus experience offer for the U.S. today?

*We can continue the discussion at services on the first day of Passover.*

*Hag Pesah Sameah! - Rabbi Lindemann*

## TEMPLE BETH SHOLOM PASSOVER 5776



Reciting the Four Questions is one of the highlights of the Seder. The youngest child in the family practices for weeks for that moment when s/he sings the *Mah Nishtanah*. These questions mark the beginning of the *Maggid*, or storytelling, section of the *Haggadah*. We begin the story of the Exodus with questions from children to help them feel like this story is their story, and to help us fulfill our duty to pass our stories on to the next generation.

This illustration of the Four Questions comes from *Asufa Haggadah*. Four years ago a group of more than 40 Israeli artists came together to illustrate a *Haggadah*. Now they produce new illustrations for the same text every year. This depiction is by Ovadiah Benishu. What strikes me about this picture is the emphasis on the second answer to the question of “Why is this night different from all other nights?” In most *Haggadot*, the Hebrew answer to that question, *kulo matzah*, is translated as “[we eat] only *matzah*.” Here it is translated literally: “All is *Matzah*.” And the illustration, with everyone *ooing* and *ahing* a piece of *matzah*, drives home this point.

Certainly, a few days into the holiday, it can certainly feel like all is *matzah*. At the *Seder*, however, we pause to think about the meaning behind this bread we eat. *Matzah* is a contradiction. It is both “the bread of affliction” and the ultimate symbol of our redemption. It is made from grain that if cooked for more than 18 minutes is *hametz*, and forbidden on Passover, but if cooked for less than 18 minutes is *matzah*, which we are commanded to eat on Passover. *Matzah* represents the tensions that we feel at the *Seder* between slavery and freedom, sorrow and joy, good and evil. It also represents the tensions we feel in our world today between rich and poor, justice and injustice, and Jewish tradition and the secular world. This night is different because all is *matzah* – all these contradictions fade away when we tell our story, with the people we love, and celebrate our freedom to live Jewish lives.

### QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN:

- What questions do you have about Passover?
- If you had to choose one adult to sing the Four Questions, who would it be?
- What does *matzah* make you think of?

### QUESTIONS FOR TEENAGERS AND ADULTS:

- How are you different tonight from all other nights?
- What tensions do you feel most acutely in the world today?
- What other meaning do you see in this illustration of the Four Questions?

***Hag Pesah Sameah!* - Rabbi Peltz**