

PASSOVER: 5768

Nicholas Gordon

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Once the older generation had died, the Feltzman family Haggadah went through a number of incremental changes to accommodate the younger generation, the following generation, and even the fears of that generation for the developing sensibilities of the next generation, either in infancy, *in utero*, or in the planning stages.

All of the changes were, after extensive family discussion, left in the hands of David Feltzman, who, as the only still-practicing Jew of the bunch, was in charge of continuing the tradition. And so every few Passovers he printed out on his computer a new edition of the text and made copies for all assembled, a job which got easier and easier as the ceremony became, predictably, shorter and shorter.

But it wasn't only the length of the ceremony that changed. The earliest changes had to do with political correctness. *Our fathers*, for example, became *our ancestors*. And God lost His gender, so that the Lord was never referred to by a pronoun but merely repeated, as in: *It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, because the Lord passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when the Lord smote the Egyptians.*

The next set of changes recognized that at least half of the participants in the Seder weren't Jewish. All three Feltzman children had married non-Jews, and the four of their seven collective children who were married had also married non-Jews, making the

grandchildren (five and counting) only one-quarter Jewish.

So it wasn't easy for the Gentile spouses to say "we" and "our" in recounting the story of the exodus. Nor did thanking God for making Jews the chosen people go over too well. References to God's choosing the Jews were excised, and "we" and "our" became simply, "the Jews," as in: *And the Egyptians dealt ill with the Jews, and afflicted them, and laid upon them hard bondage*, leading David's sister's son Patrick, Jr., to remark that the whole thing had begun to sound like a history lecture about someone else.

The third set of changes were made to satisfy Eunice, David's African-American wife, and his two half-African-American children. The Negro spiritual "Go Down Moses" was substituted for much of the exodus narrative, and a second Negro spiritual, "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," was substituted for the prayer beginning *Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations that know Thee not*, which David's brother's wife Brenda had found offensive.

The fourth set of changes, the most radical, came in the very latest edition, the one which David was now reading over before reproducing in quantity for the ceremony the following night.

While David continued to practice remnants of Judaism and his wife Eunice was active in her Baptist church, David's brother Michael and his wife Brenda were aggressively secular, and his sister Clare and her husband Patrick were lapsed Catholics. None

of the seven collective children was religious, though a number flirted with a variety of New Age beliefs.

So when David's daughter Samantha said after the last Seder that she didn't want her daughter Paris to grow up hearing obsequious prayers to God, most of those present heartily agreed. Samantha said that she wanted her daughter and even grandchildren and great-grandchildren to continue the tradition, but not by praying to a conception of God that was so distasteful to modern sensibility.

"The Feltzman Haggadah will continue to evolve," she said to a general hum of approval. "The Seder shouldn't be a museum piece. It's a living thing. It needs to change as we change, to reflect who we are. Otherwise it won't survive. And Tomas and I would hate to see it die."

So it was that David removed many of the prayers to God in the English translation while leaving them in the little bit of Hebrew that was still sprinkled throughout the Haggadah. So, for example, where the Hebrew would be translated, *Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Who createst the fruit of the vine*, the English read, *We are thankful for the gift of wine*.

Thankful to whom? David wondered. Well, given the conglomeration of beliefs and non-beliefs, perhaps there was no alternative to leaving a blank space there, to be filled in appropriately by each participant. But was this still a Seder?

David wasn't sure. All the passages celebrating freedom were left, the admonitions to remember when the Jews were slaves and in each generation to

safeguard the freedom of all humanity. The Feltzman Haggadah was a liberal, uplifting document with a vital universal message and beautiful songs.

God was still there as a character in an ancient story, but not as a Creator to be prayed to. Prayer was gone. The "we," "us," and "our" were gone. The ceremony had been universalized. Judaism was the source, but no longer the stream.

David's unhappiness with this latest edition of the Haggadah must have been obvious since Eunice took one look at him as they were about to turn out the light and said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter," he said.

"Then why you got a face seven blocks long?"

He was always amazed that she found him so easy to read.

"It's the Haggadah. I took all the prayers out."

"Because of what Samantha said last year?"

David nodded.

"Samantha can wait."

"Till we die?"

"Till she runs things. Then she can change the Haggadah however she wants."

David thought about that for a moment, then turned out the lamp on the night table next to the bed.

"It's your Haggadah now, baby," Eunice said, cradling his head against her breast. "Anybody wants to take it over from you, let them do the work. But you're doing it now. It's your call."

What a treasure it was to have someone always in your corner! David thought as he and Eunice began to make love. A woman of valor. A pearl beyond price.

Still undecided, he put the Haggadah back on the bookshelf of his mind and turned his thoughts to more delightful things. But all along he knew that this wonderful love, the most precious thing in his life, was precisely what had changed the Feltzman Haggadah forever, perhaps destroyed it, and might eventually destroy Judaism as well.

Even though his children wanted to keep this little spark of Judaism alive for their one-quarter Jewish children, albeit in impossibly bowdlerized form, what would happen as the generations became one-eighth, and then one-sixteenth Jewish, if they were aware of that sliver of their heritage at all?

"I love you!" he said to Eunice as she pulled him into her. "I love you, my darling, I love you!" as he rode her to glory, their black and white bodies contrasting even in the nearly lightless room, the Judaism of the Feltzman family like a tributary that had flowed for centuries from distant mountains, now disgorging its cultural and genetic contents into a broader, more turgid river that soon, soon would empty into the sea.