

Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

EMOR APRIL 27, 2013

Home for the Holidays?

By Rabbi Heidi Hoover



Artifact:

Rosh Hashanah card segment, 1909, Hebrew Publishing Co.
Located in the Coming to America gallery on the 3rd floor

Home for the Holidays?

Sacred Stories **EMOR**

Holidays anchor us: to family, to home, to memory. They remind us of who we are and where we come from, providing an element of constancy even when other parts of our life change. *Emor*, which means “speak,” is a section of the Hebrew Bible from the book of Leviticus. It includes a list of when the Israelites, and subsequently, the Jews, were to celebrate the holidays throughout the year. In the centuries since the Bible was written, the Jewish holidays have been celebrated at these same dates on the Hebrew calendar, in different lands, in different ways, through the generations. Among the holidays listed in the Torah portion is Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, which has found its own expression in the United States.

What were the thoughts and feelings of a new immigrant sending these cards?

The museum’s collection includes Rosh Hashanah pop-up cards depicting Miss Columbia (later replaced with imagery of Lady Liberty) opening the gate to new immigrants. They were sent by immigrants in the US to family members still living in Europe.

What were the thoughts and feelings of a new immigrant sending these cards? Perhaps the approach of the holiday causes a stab of longing for home as she thinks of preparing a festive Rosh Hashanah meal with her mother, with whom she knows she will never share the holiday again.

For another immigrant, perhaps America did not turn out to be as he had hoped, he is struggling. The Rosh Hashanah card is an act of bravado, communicating, “No, this was the right decision, and I’m doing great.”

For still another, reveling in the freedom of the United States, feeling safe and invigorated by opportunity, the message was, "Let's be together again for the holidays, but let's do it here, in this exciting land!"

As we get older, our experience of holidays deepens and becomes more complicated as each year's celebration adds a layer to the meaning of the day. Places at the table that were once full become empty, or we find ourselves in a completely different place, seeing simultaneously where we are and where we were in past years, on that day. Holidays anchor us and remind us of who we are, even when everything else has changed.

Rabbi Heidi Hoover, of Temple Beth Emeth in Brooklyn, NY, is a proud alumna of the Academy for Jewish Religion and Gratz College; she received smicha (ordination) and her Master's degree in Jewish Studies in May of 2011. Her undergraduate degree is from Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, PA.

ARTIFACT

Rosh Hashanah card segment, 1909
Hebrew Publishing Co.
National Museum of American Jewish History
Gift of Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett

The Hebrew at the bottom of the card translates to "Open the gates of righteousness for me" on the right from Psalm 118:19 and "The gates opened for the new righteous to enter" on the left.



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About this partnership:

Both the Jewish People and the United States of America are rooted in a quest for greater freedom and human dignity. Inspired by this parallelism, the National Museum of American Jewish History is collaborating with Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and its Rabbis Without Borders program to launch a new initiative, **Sacred Stories: A Living Commentary on the Hebrew Bible and American Jewish History**.

Sacred Stories weaves together Judaism's foundational sacred text, the Torah, with one of the most successful expressions of freedom in human history, the story of Jewish life in America. **Sacred Stories** explores our shared values by linking these two vital and compelling stories through contemporary commentary and 21st century media.

The **Torah** is a central feature of Jewish tradition. Used to refer generally to Jewish wisdom, it also refers specifically to the 5 Books of Moses which makes up the Hebrew Bible. A portion of the Torah text, a **Parsha**, is read on **Shabbat** (Sabbath). The whole Torah is read sequentially over the course of the year. Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest and begins on Friday evenings and ends Saturday night. Many Jews observe Shabbat to emulate God's resting on the seventh day of Creation. The fourth commandment is to keep Shabbat holy which Jews do with festive meals, resting, and learning.



The National Museum of American Jewish History, on Independence Mall in Philadelphia, presents educational programs and experiences that preserve, explore and celebrate the history of Jews in America. Its purpose is to connect Jews more closely to their heritage and to inspire in people of all backgrounds a greater appreciation for the diversity of the American Jewish experience and the freedoms to which Americans aspire.



Clal—The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is a think tank, leadership training institute, and resource center. Bringing Jewish insights to a wide American audience, Clal makes Jewish wisdom an accessible public resource. A leader in religious pluralism, Clal builds bridges across communities to encourage diversity and openness. Linking Jewish texts and tradition with innovative scholarship, Clal promotes Jewish participation in American civic and spiritual life, reinvigorating communities and enhancing leadership development.