

Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

MOTHER'S DAY MAY 12, 2013

Letting Go

By Rabbi Heidi Hoover



Artifact:

Trunk, 1941

Located in the Rescue Stories case near the end of the third floor galleries.

Letting Go

Sacred Stories **MOTHER'S DAY**

Motherhood is a process of letting go. Our children start as part of us, but from the time they are born they begin to separate, becoming themselves at a rate that can feel agonizingly slow to a mother rocking a screaming baby, but that in retrospect goes far too quickly. For many women—though not all—motherhood feels like a biological imperative. It is wanted.

In the first book of Samuel in the Bible, Hannah wanted a child so badly that she invented a new form of prayer, pleading with God silently and extemporaneously. She promised that if God would allow her a baby boy, she would dedicate him to God's service, and that is what she did.

On this Mother's Day, we honor the love mothers have for their children...

When her son Samuel was weaned, she gave him up, sending him to serve in the House of God at Shiloh, after which she saw him once a year and brought him new clothing. How astonishing that she would be willing to give up her child, the child she had so longed for!

But this, too, is part of motherhood. Mothers kiss their children and let them go—to daycare, to school, to camp, to college, to their own families, and sometimes to whole new worlds. In Europe, Jewish mothers looking for a better life for their children kissed them and let them go, perhaps never to see them again. In the Museum is a 1940 letter written by Martha and Abraham Frankel to strangers in the United States who were taking in Martha and Abraham's son, Heinz. Heinz (later Henry) was one of approximately 1,000 unaccompanied children brought to the US by a network of Jewish and Gentile organizations and volunteers through quiet operations designed to avoid backlash from isolationist and antisemitic forces. Children like Heinz were placed in foster homes or with relatives in the hope that they would eventually be reunited with their families. Martha writes, "I must not delay to thank

you from the innermost recesses of my heart for your kindness and love which you have shown my child." She was able to join her son in 1941, but her husband did not manage to leave Europe and died in Riga.

Along the wall of the third floor immigration gallery there is a quote from Marcus Ravage, a young immigrant: "At the moment of departure... [my mother] lost control of her feelings. As she embraced me for the last time her sobs became violent and father had to separate us. There was a despair in her way of clinging to me which I could not understand. I understand it now. I never saw her again." Children cannot understand until later, perhaps when they are parents themselves, what it means for a mother to say goodbye to her child and let him or her go, whether for a while or forever.

On this Mother's Day, we honor the love mothers have for their children: the love that moves them to bring those children into the world, to hold on to them tight, and to do whatever it takes to get them a better life, even when it means letting go of them forever.

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

Trunk, 1941

National Museum of American Jewish History

This trunk once belonged to Martha Frankel. It was brought to the United States by Martha's brother, Arthur Einstein, and his family when they escaped Europe in 1941 aboard the SS *Navemor*. Mrs. Frankel traveled to America separately, reuniting with her son Heinz when she arrived.



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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.