

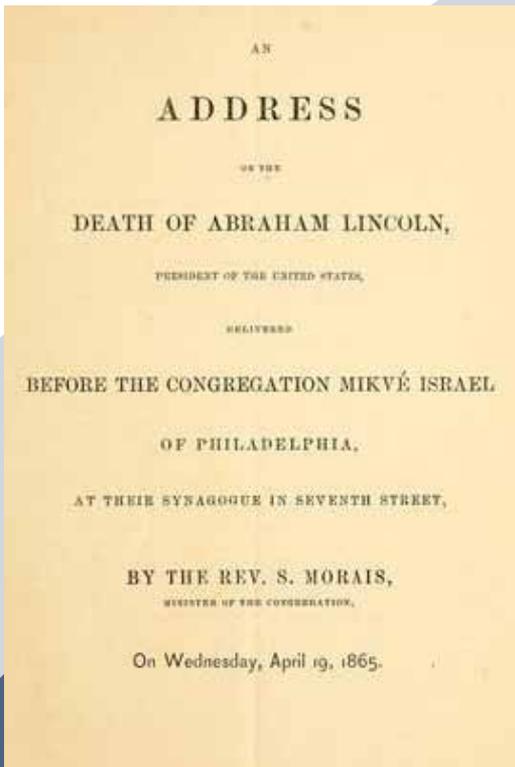
Sacred Stories

A Living Commentary on American Jewish History and the Hebrew Bible

SIMCHAT TORAH SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

Setting the Course

By Rabbi Rachel Ain



Artifact:

Address on the Death of Abraham Lincoln

Reverend Sabato Morais, Philadelphia: Collins, 1865

Library at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies,
University of Pennsylvania

Located in the small case in the Union and Disunion gallery on the fourth floor.

Setting the Course

Sacred Stories **SIMCHAT TORAH**

In every generation there are people who are able to recognize that in their time, in their day, it is their leadership that will make a difference in the world. The way in which the community understands a person's leadership will forever memorialize the impact of that individual. V'zot HaBracha is the final portion in the five books of the Torah. It is read not on a specific Shabbat but on the holiday of Simchat Torah, when Jews celebrate the renewal of the Torah reading cycle. In this portion, Moses takes his leave of the people of Israel and we can see the impact that he had. Moses was both a practical and visionary leader—he led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt and envisioned their freedom. But as we read about his death, we learn that he never reached the Promised Land. Although Joshua is named his successor, the Torah states, "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses." [Deuteronomy 34:10]

"One the grand scale the 'Moseses' and 'Lincolns' of the world demonstrate that it takes a great leader to be able to do as much as they can and hope that the next generation will take it a step further."

As you walk through the Museum's Civil War gallery, you will notice small case dedicated to President Abraham Lincoln. President Lincoln stands out for the ways in which he was a true Moses figure for Americans. Like Moses, Lincoln died before he saw his full goals recognized and yet, the power and effectiveness of his leadership was not diminished in the eyes of his supporters, even by his death. Like Jewish communities across the nation, Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel mourned the death of Lincoln which occurred during the holiday of Passover. Mikveh Israel's leader Sabato Morais delivered an address to the congregation just a few days after Lincoln's assassination. Before his address, Morais read aloud a Resolution passed by the

Congregation's Trustees which made the comparison to this week's portion, stating that Lincoln, "like our own law giver Moses, brought a nation to the verge of the haven of peace and like him, wasn't allowed to participate in its consumption."

The power of this sentiment is that we understand that one doesn't need to complete a task in order for its value to be realized. One the grand scale the "Moseses" and "Lincolns" of the world demonstrate that it takes a great leader to be able to do as much as they can and hope that the next generation will take it a step further. In our own lives, we know that we won't be able to set out all that we hope to do and yet we can look at those who will come after us – our children, our students, our loved ones, our friends, those we mentor, and know that if we can demonstrate what we care about our values will live on forever.

Rabbi Rachel Ain is the Rabbi of Sutton Place Synagogue, in Midtown Manhattan. In addition to her work with Clal's Rabbis Without Borders inaugural fellowship, she is the former Senior Director for National Young Leadership of the Jewish Federations of North America and previously served as Senior Rabbi of Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevre Shas, in Syracuse, NY. While working with Clal, Rabbi Ain was a commissioned Lieutenant (JG) for the US Navy Chaplains Corps. She is a member of the Jewish Outreach Institute's Board of Professional Advisors, sits on the Chancellor's Rabbinic Cabinet of JTS, is on the Clergy Task Force for Jewish Women International, and is currently is a member of the Executive Council of the Rabbinical Assembly.

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Sacred Stories has been made possible through the generous support of the Robert Lloyd Corkin Charitable Foundation.

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.