

## **HAGGADAH HA SHOAH – *Retelling the Holocaust story as Haggadah supplement before retelling the Exodus at Passover* by Robert A. Adelson**

**Leader:** At our *Seder* tonight we read the *Haggadah*, the “telling” of the Exodus from Egypt and soon partake our festive meal. While each of us has our complaints in our daily life, we come together tonight as free men and women, amid general prosperity. We meet in confidence. Our lives are secure. However, for we Jews, this was not always so. In the 1930s, most world Jewry faced each passing year with increasing *dread*. Fascist anti-Semitic regimes ruled most of Eastern Europe. They supported national boycotts of Jewish businesses and placed increasing hardships on Jewish life. No Western country would accept Jewish immigration. And worst of all, there rose the specter of the most virulent anti-Semitism the world has ever known – that of Hitler and Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg laws and *Kristallnacht* – the night of broken glass. .

**Leader:** Before beginning our Passover *Haggadah*, we will first recall times of not so long ago. We begin our *Seder* with a *haggadah*, a “telling” to bear witness to the greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people, and also to our renewal, as in times of old. This tragedy we retell surpasses even the slavery in Egypt 3,300 years ago. It surpasses the destruction of our ancient Temples, and the exile from Spain in 1492. This tragedy occurred in our times. It ended just 60 or so years ago. We recall now the Holocaust, in Hebrew *Ha Shoah*. It was the planned murder of the Jews of Europe between 1939 and 1945 by Nazi Germany and its leader Adolph Hitler.

**Reader:** In Hungary, Romania and Poland. In France, Belgium, Holland. In Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia. Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria. In Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic states. To the Channel Islands, Corsica and the Island of Corfu, no Jew was safe from this peril. Where the Nazi conquered, we Jews, were singled out, hunted down, made separate from our neighbors.

**Reader:** We were forced to wear the Star of David. That badge meant a license to be starved, humiliated and tortured. We lost every protection of the law. We faced every possible indignity. It did not matter whether you were Orthodox or Reformed or whether you observed Judaism at all. Even those who didn’t identify themselves as Jews were gathered up. If you had any Jewish blood or ancestry, you were the no 1. Target of hatred by the relentless Nazi state.

**Reader:** We were forced to give up our businesses and our life’s careers. Our possessions and family heirlooms were routinely looted. We were forced to leave our homes to move to overcrowded ghettos. We were systematically starved, subjected to slave labor and medical experiments. The least resistance, just talking back to an SS thug meant being shot like a dog, no questions asked. And when we didn’t die fast enough, the Nazis invented a new mechanized plan for our annihilation – their new machines of doom – the gas chamber and the crematoria.

**Reader:** Our Mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. One and One Half Million Jewish children. All of them were murdered in cold blood. No *Kaddish*. No *Yizkor*. No marker. No mercy. Lost to the smokestack of death. Their little bodies turned to ash.

**Reader:** We couldn’t believe it; we didn’t want to believe the evil end the Nazis had in store for us. The Germans had always been a cultured people, so we tried to hope for the best. The Nazis fed our hopes with lies and deception. Their program was called “Resettlement to the East” as we were packed into cattle cars. Music played as the sign entering the camps said “Labor makes you free.” Finally, we were told to strip for “delousing”. We waited for water from the shower heads, but no water came. It was gas – farm pesticide, Zyklon B gas – gas that ended our lives.

**Reader:** By 1945, the Nazis had murdered 6 million European Jews. They represented 1/3 of the Jewish people: 1 Jew out of every 3 Jews in the world perished in the Shoah.

**Reader:** We remember some of the most notorious of the scores of places of death, where the Nazis decimated the bright lights, faces and flower of European Jewry. We remember the ghettos of Warsaw, Lodz, Vilna, Minsk, Bialystock, Cracow, Riga. The concentration camps Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Theresienstadt. The killing grounds Ponar and Babi Yar. The death camps Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Belzec, and finally Auschwitz...

**Reader:** We were not military people. We were businessmen, professionals and working men. We were grandparents, mothers, students and children. We had no chance to defend ourselves.

**Reader:** Yet despite everything against them some Jews managed to fight back. We revolted in several of the camps and ghettos. We even burned and forced closure of Treblinka and Sobibor. Starting Passover night 1943, with few weapons and no outside support, we fought the German army for three weeks in the Warsaw ghetto. We resisted in other ways too. In the ghettos, we created underground schools, soup kitchens and health clinics. We held lectures, concerts, debates. Numerous publications flourished. With brutality, starvation, death in all directions, we never yielded our human dignity, or our Jewish sense of social values and human fellowship.

**Reader:** It was Hitler's mission to achieve the Final Solution, the extermination of the "Jewish race". He wanted to kill every last Jew and relegate us to the dustbin of history. The Nazis even gathered looted Jewish artifacts for a "Museum of an Extinct People". And it sure looked like Hitler would succeed. We were so weak and so few, and the Nazis so numerous and powerful.

**Leader:** But like so many tyrants before Hitler underestimated the power of truth and goodness and the resilience of the Jewish people and our ideals. We, the Jewish people, did not become extinct, and Nazi power lasted only 12 years. In 1945, it was Hitler who was dead, his regime toppled, and his despicable creed discredited throughout the world. In the years that followed, Jewish renewal gave the most powerful answer to Hitler. Just as we rebuilt and renewed ourselves after the assaults of Pharaoh, Haman, Antiochus, and all who would destroy the Jewish people, our ethics, ideals and all we stand for. So again we renewed ourselves after the Holocaust. We saw the miraculous rebirth of the State of Israel on our ancient soil. We saw Israel grow to a strong democratic beacon to the world. We have also seen the Nation of Israel live and grow as a light and conscience to nations throughout the Diaspora. ***Am Yisrael chai.***

**Group:** As we remember the Exodus so we remember the 6 Million. As we were once slaves in Egypt so tonight, ALL of us are survivors of the Shoah. ***Ani ma'amin:*** It was the prayer of the camps. ***Ani ma'amin. Be'emuna shelema*** I believe with complete faith in the coming of Justice to this world. Though we face setbacks and the forces of good may tarry. I believe this too will pass. With the Torah and the prophets as my guide, I will not give up our quest. I will seek justice and righteousness. I will seek to make this world a better place, for all people, today and tomorrow. To this, *in their memory*, I pledge myself. ***Ani ma'amin. Am Yisrael chai***

[Sing *Am Yisrael chai*]. [Alternatively, sing *Ani ma'amin*, or both]

[Then, begin continue *Seder with Passover Haggadah*].

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## POSTSCRIPT – ABOUT THIS WORK ... AND ITS AUTHOR...

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Besides being an attorney, Robert Adelson has always had an interest in history. Thus, when he was called upon to lead his extended family's first night's *Seder* for the first time for Passover in April 2005, a year which coincided with the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Adelson determined to add recognition of the Holocaust to his family's *Seder*. After some searching, Adelson failed to find a suggested reading that he felt suitable to convey his message. He wanted a reading that would involve the extended family and both give a sense of the depth of the tragedy in personal and historic terms and also convey meaning. He wanted a reading that would tell much of the full horror of the Holocaust but still not leave the family or congregation empty at the end. He wanted the group to also sense, as Adelson has personally felt, inspiration from the resilience and renewal that Adelson saw in the Holocaust and in all the low points in Jewish history. Thus, for once Adelson wrote about history rather than law and business. He wrote HAGGADAH HA SHOAH to both remember the events of 1939 to 1945 to both convey the message of horror and yet also inspire his family with hope and renewal of our faith.

In this postscript, the author wishes to dedicate HAGGADAH HA SHOAH to his *zede* (grandfather) and the family's patriarch William Cohen who left Russia (now Belarus) to come to the United States in 1910. As his family grew, Cohen never failed to inspire by his dedication to Jewish heritage. The author also dedicates this to his Adelson and Pitnof family relatives in Warsaw, Vilna and other places in Eastern Europe, relatives he never met, who perished in the Holocaust.

When he led a second night family *Seder* for Passover in 2001, Robert Adelson made reference to the popular movie of the time *Titanic*. After writing and first using HAGGADAH HA SHOAH at the first night's extended Cohen family *Seder* of 2005, Adelson used the work again as he led the smaller *Seder* the next night. In introductory remarks for that smaller second night *Seder*, Adelson returned to his *Titanic* reference of years before -

*There is a scene in the movie Titanic with stars Kathy Bates, Kate Winslet and others, all huddled in their lifeboats or holding onto pieces of wreckage and then they watch as the great ship now rises, capsizes and disappears forever deep in the sea. An eerie stillness*

*then follows. Reality sets in. The survivors, just 705, from a ship of over 2,200 passengers, now fully realize they are ALONE on the high seas. I think of European Jewry as our great “mother-ship” from whence American, Argentine, Israeli and most of the Diaspora Jewry came from. The difference is we are 1500 survivors while 750 went down with our mother-ship. Those numbers [times x800] are about right. So too is the loss our people suffered. For those who went down to a horrible death, were never be heard from again. With this HAGGADAH HA SHOAH, we will again recall tonight that loss.*

In commenting further, for this postscript, on the possible use of the HAGGADAH HA SHOAH in personal, family and communal observance, the author offers the following:

*Whether the vehicle is HAGGADAH HA SHOAH or a writing by someone else, the point is to bear witness, to remember, and through our remembrance to give what life we can to those whom the world abandoned and left to their fate. It is also the goal in our remembrance that we draw what lessons we can for our own survival, for renewal of our faith in God, and our hope and commitment to make this world a better place.*

*It is fitting and right that there is now a special place on the Jewish calendar, a holiday, Yom Ha Shoah, for the sole purpose of remembrance of the Holocaust. However, not all of us are able to observe this holiday, as we would wish. On the other hand, the Passover Seder is an observance central to the core of Jewish existence and survival. If there is one Jewish observance in the year we all try to observe regardless of circumstance it is the **Seder**.*

*I believe that the Passover Seder with its Haggadah – telling – is the right moment to retell of the Shoah. The Passover Seder is the time in the year when all the generations are gathered, often ingathered from different parts of the country, to tell and listen to central story of the Jewish faith. At that moment when attention is riveted is also a time to retell the story of the Shoah, the tragedy of our times, the greatest tragedy ever to befall the Jewish people or any people.*

*Perhaps the Holocaust re-telling is something we should do every year or every so often, perhaps on anniversaries of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943 or the Liberation of 1945. However or whenever we choose, or you choose, it is my hope this work will be of benefit and inspire your family as it has ours.*

*I once heard Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, asked how did he survive? He said, “The greatest thing in the world is to do a good deed. Can you imagine how many good deeds you could do in the Warsaw Ghetto?” I hope HAGGADAH HA SHOAH is one good deed. I hope we can all learn from the rabbi as we try to do good for others in days to come.*

*Robert Adelson  
Boston, Massachusetts  
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