



JEWISH COMMUNITY OF THE HILL COUNTRY

May–June, 2025

Passover Seder Photos April 12, 2025



Table beautifully set thanks to Rosa!



Quite a crowd!



*Greg Bitkower (L) and Moe Draznin
Founding Members of the JCHC*



*Our "Passover Papa," Michael Goldstein,
gives his yearly reflections.*

(cont.)



Shabbat Services

Friday, May 9, 2025 at 6:00pm

Friday, May 23, 2025 at 6:00pm

Friday June 13, 2025 at 6:00pm

Friday June 27, 2025 at 6:00pm



Torah Study

Saturday, May 3, 2025, 11:30am to 1:00pm

Saturday, May 17, 2025, 11:30am to 1:00pm

Saturday, June 7, 2025, 11:30am to 1:00pm

Saturday, June 21, 2025, 11:30am to 1:00pm

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Robert keeping an eye out for Elijah



Gunner, Magnolia, Sara and Jamie



Melissa, Dawn and Matt—I'm not even going to guess what they've been up to!



This could have been your dinner!

Thoughts On Passover 5785

by Michael Goldstein

Saturday, April 12, 2025

Tonight, Jewish children all over the world will hear the story of Passover, some for the first time. For many of them, their education into Judaism... its culture, its traditions, its heritage... begins tonight.

I still remember when I was 5 years old, my maternal grandfather, an orthodox *alta cocker* who laid *tefillin* twice a day, grabbed me by my shoulders at the Seder, shook me, and said, "Remember, you were a stranger in Egypt, the House of Bondage."

That seemed a bit strange to me since I didn't think I had ever been to Egypt and nobody ever tied me up where we lived in Brooklyn, except maybe my older sister, but I was five and he was who knew how old, so I just nodded my head and listened as my mother breathed a sigh of relief.

It scares me a little that that was 81 Passovers ago, and now I'm the *alta cocker*.

By the way, in Scripture, Egypt is described as the House of Bondage more than ten times... at least eight of which are in the Torah.

As time went on I learned more about our Judaic heritage, as I hope today's children will. Yes, I was a bar mitzvah in the orthodox synagogue to which my grandfather belonged, but after that I pretty much avoided going to services except to get out of duty on Friday nights during Basic Training at Fort Knox.

Although I have been an atheist for more than 70 years, I continue to treasure my heritage as a Jew... our heritage.

Every year at the Seder we say, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." This is our family story. We look at the matzah and we say, "This is the bread of affliction our ancestors ate in Egypt."

It doesn't matter whether or not it happened or whether or not we believe it happened... the telling of it is one of our treasured traditions. We must never fail to tell those who follow us about it.

All of us know the phrase "the Jews are God's chosen people." As a kid who

knew about the Nazi horror, I said, "if we're God's chosen, what were we chosen for?"

Then I learned about *Tikkun Olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning "repairing the world." That is what the Jews were chosen for... chosen to do.

Tikkun Olam is a core concept in Judaism, perhaps *the* core concept. It refers to our responsibility to work towards making the world a better place, encompassing social justice, environmentalism, and other forms of positive action. Like you, I've tried to live my life helping to repair the world just a little.

For me, other Judaic core concepts include humility, honesty, and benevolence.

Next month will mark the 80th anniversary of V E Day. The tears of joy that were shed on that day were mixed with the bitter tears of inexpressible grief and the hell beyond hell that had been visited upon Jews.

Passover is a celebration of freedom. It calls to all of us to not forget our heritage. Amnesia is a frightening illness. It can happen to an individual, and it can happen to a people.

More than a hundred years ago, Asher Ginsberg, the founder of Cultural Zionism, said, "It is not the Jews who have kept the Sabbath, but the Sabbath that has kept the Jews."

There are far too many Jews today who choose to not identify with... or to simply ignore... their heritage and do not participate in its customs and traditions.

Let us all try to do what we can, even within our own circles of friends, to reduce that number.

We Jews welcome serious commentary within our community. We see the value of multiple perspectives. We remember the past and we hope for the future, all while finding happiness and purpose in the present.

Have a zitsen Pesach.



Did God Write the Torah—and Does it Matter?

Marc Zvi Brettler

The traditional Jewish position is that the Torah is all divine in origin. Yet nowhere does the broader Bible suggest that it was all written by God and in no way is this belief necessary to live as an observant Jew. The Jewish Bible, the Tanach, attributes authorship of some of its sections to God, but these are few and far between.

Even the Torah itself – the first five books of the Bible—nowhere suggests that it is all divinely authored. Only in Exodus, the Bible's second book, does the ubiquitous formula "The Lord spoke to Moses saying" begin. Absolutely nothing in Genesis suggests that it was originally understood as given from God. The first words of the Bible are, "When God began to create heaven and earth" – not "God said to Moses, 'When I began to create heaven and earth.'" The final book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, presents itself as Moses's speech, not God's.

And yet, the traditional Jewish position is that it is all divine in origin. This position is taken for granted in rabbinic literature, but is already suggested by some late biblical books that call it "the Lord's Torah," "the Torah of Moses," or even "the Lord's Torah given by Moses" (2 Chronicles 34:14).

Modern biblical scholarship even casts doubt on the divine authorship of the sections of the Torah which explicitly claim to have come from God, including those that follow the formula "The Lord spoke to Moses." The Torah contains too many contradictions to all be seen as divine. Do servants get released after six years, as stated Exodus, or at the Jubilee year (once every fifty years), as noted in Leviticus?

Biblical scholars have shown that the Torah contains too many contradictions and infelicities to be divine, and it instead came into being over a very long period of time, reflecting the understanding of various an-

cient Israelites, living in different places at different times, of what God wanted of them. But a text that reflects people's understanding of God is quite different from a text dictated by God to Moses and preserved without error for three millennia – the view of Maimonides and a position upheld by many Jews within the Orthodox community.

Should this matter? Does scripture need to be perfect in order to retain its scriptural status?

For many Jews, the Bible does not get its power, or even its authority, from being a divine document. When reciting the blessing recited after reading from the Torah, we laud it as *Torat emet*— a Torah of truth. That need not mean that it is entirely true, but only that it contains profound truths. Sometimes these truths are close to the surface. Other times they are brought out through interpretation – even radical interpretation that fundamentally changes the original meaning of the text.

Truths can be found in many places, but as Jews it is our obligation to search out and to follow the truths we find in the Torah—to make the Torah, indeed the whole Tanach, into our central orienting text. The Jewish community has created the books of the Bible and placed them – most especially the Torah – as the central compass of Jewish life.

Being Jewish means adopting this Bible-centric position – buying into the Torah and using sections of it (along with other wise texts from other traditions) as a guide for our lives and to create continuity with our ancestors – even if we are not following the Bible as God's revealed truth.

Marc Zvi Brettler is a professor of Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University.