

Park Avenue Synagogue
Haggadah Supplement
Passover 2026/5786



Introduction

Another seder? Again? Already?

Every year my family and friends complain that we are expected to sit down together two nights in a row to retell the same stories and eat the same ritual foods. Isn't it boring to have essentially the same meal, two nights in a row, every year for a lifetime? The truth is that even though the core texts and traditions of the seder remain consistent, the world is different every year, and we are different. And so, our conversation around the table – the essence of the seder – is new every year, and two nights are hardly enough time to talk about it all.

Since the High Holidays, our community has been celebrating America at 250 – the semiquincentennial of the Declaration of Independence. Just as the Passover story tells of our freedom as Jews, so too American history tells the tale of the many freedoms we enjoy today in the United States. And, just as Passover provides an entry point for grappling with difficult, painful pieces of Jewish history, so too the texts below invite nuanced conversation that celebrates our liberties while recognizing that our republic still has a way to go in fulfilling its promise of freedom for all.

I hope these texts spark discussion at your seder table and act as food for thought long after your meal has concluded.

Hag sameah,

CLAIRE DAVIDSON BRUDER
RABBINIC INTERN

Using the Haggadah Supplement

The supplement includes six texts, each one tied to a point in the seder that addresses a fundamental Jewish and American value. There is no need to use them all, certainly not all in one night! Choose the ones that resonate most with you, or choose one that comes before the meal and one after the meal. Use one or two readings at the first seder and another one or two at the second.

You may want to ask seder participants to read the supplementary text out loud and then have everyone discuss the material together. Or, to get everyone actively involved, have people read and discuss the supplementary text in *hevruta*, the traditional Jewish method of studying texts in pairs. Then have each small group share their insights with everyone at the table. Or ask them to hold on to their thoughts and talk about them during the seder meal.

Ha lahma anya | Hakhnasat Orhim, Hospitality

Mah nishtanah, the Four Questions | Sakranut, Curiosity

Avadim hayinu | Avdut, Slavery

Dayenu | Herut, Freedom

Sh'fokh hamat'kha | Areivut, Collective Responsibility

Nirtzah | Atid, Future

Ha lahma anya | Hakhnasat Orhim, Hospitality



ENGRAVED BY T. JOHNSON.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY W. KURTZ.

Emma Lazarus.

Lazarus

At the beginning of the *maggid* section of the seder, before we recount the story of the Exodus, we recite *ha lachma anya*. In this paragraph, we identify matzah as the bread of our affliction, and then we make an invitation: “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” In doing so, we root our seder in hospitality, particularly for those who are in need. This type of hospitality is deeply ingrained not only in the Jewish tradition, but in American values as well.

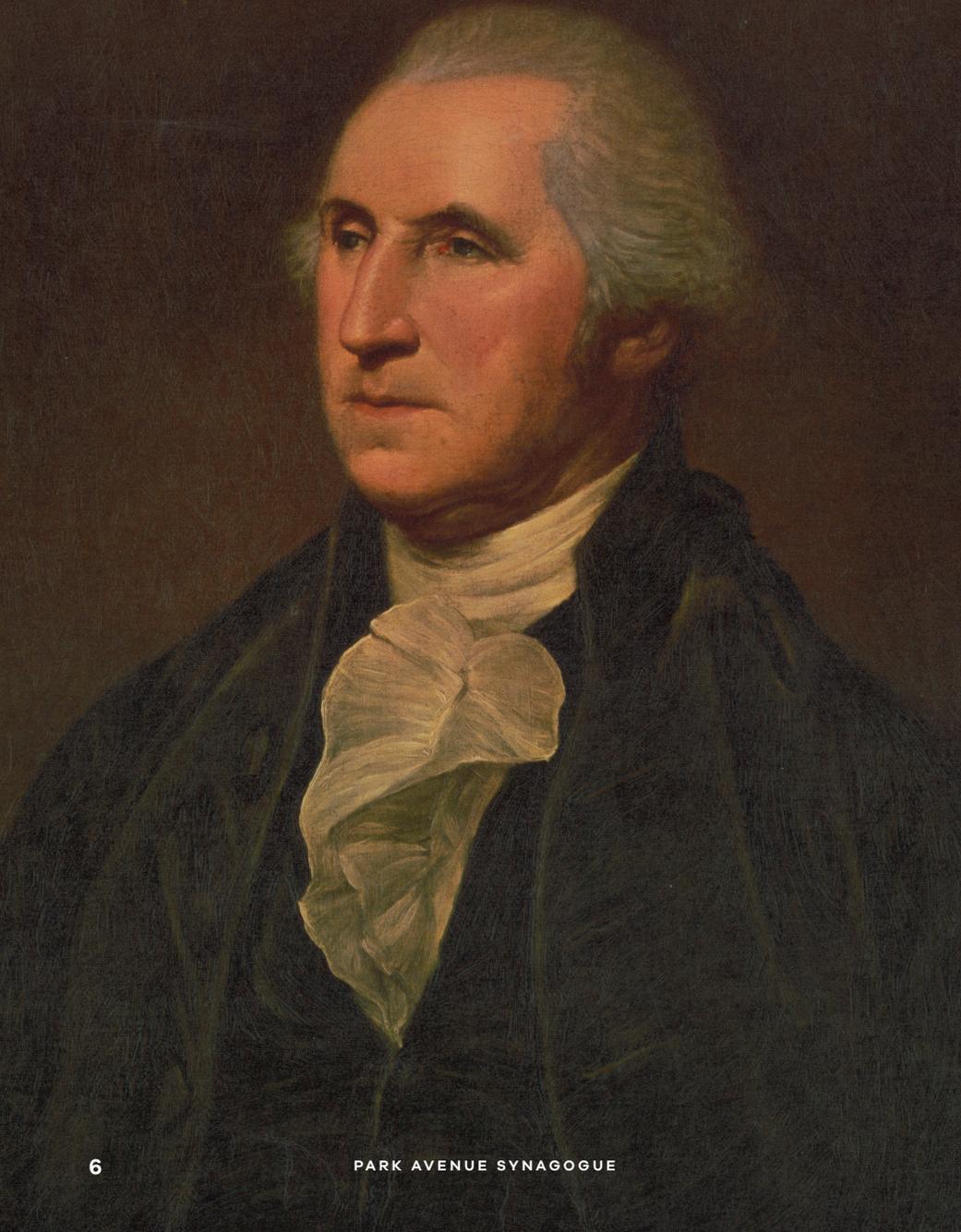
In 1883, Jewish poet Emma Lazarus penned “The New Colossus,” inspired largely by her work with Jewish refugees fleeing eastern Europe. She donated the poem to the auction raising funds to build a pedestal for the Statue of Liberty. The poem came to be engraved on the pedestal and continues to be quoted often today.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

What is Emma Lazarus’s outlook on immigrants and refugees?

How do we live up to her vision as Americans and as Jews? Where do we fall short?

Mah nishtanah, the Four Questions | Sakranut, Curiosity



Our retelling of the story of Passover begins with four questions: *Why is this night different from all other nights?* These questions are traditionally asked by the youngest seder participant, usually a child. But the Talmud teaches that even if there are no children at the seder, the questions must be asked. Even if two Torah scholars are making a seder together and each of them knows all of the laws of Passover, they must ask each other the questions. Curiosity, the desire to learn, is a necessary foundation for the seder, and for the study of Judaism.

In his First Annual Address to Congress in 1790, President George Washington spoke about the importance of learning.

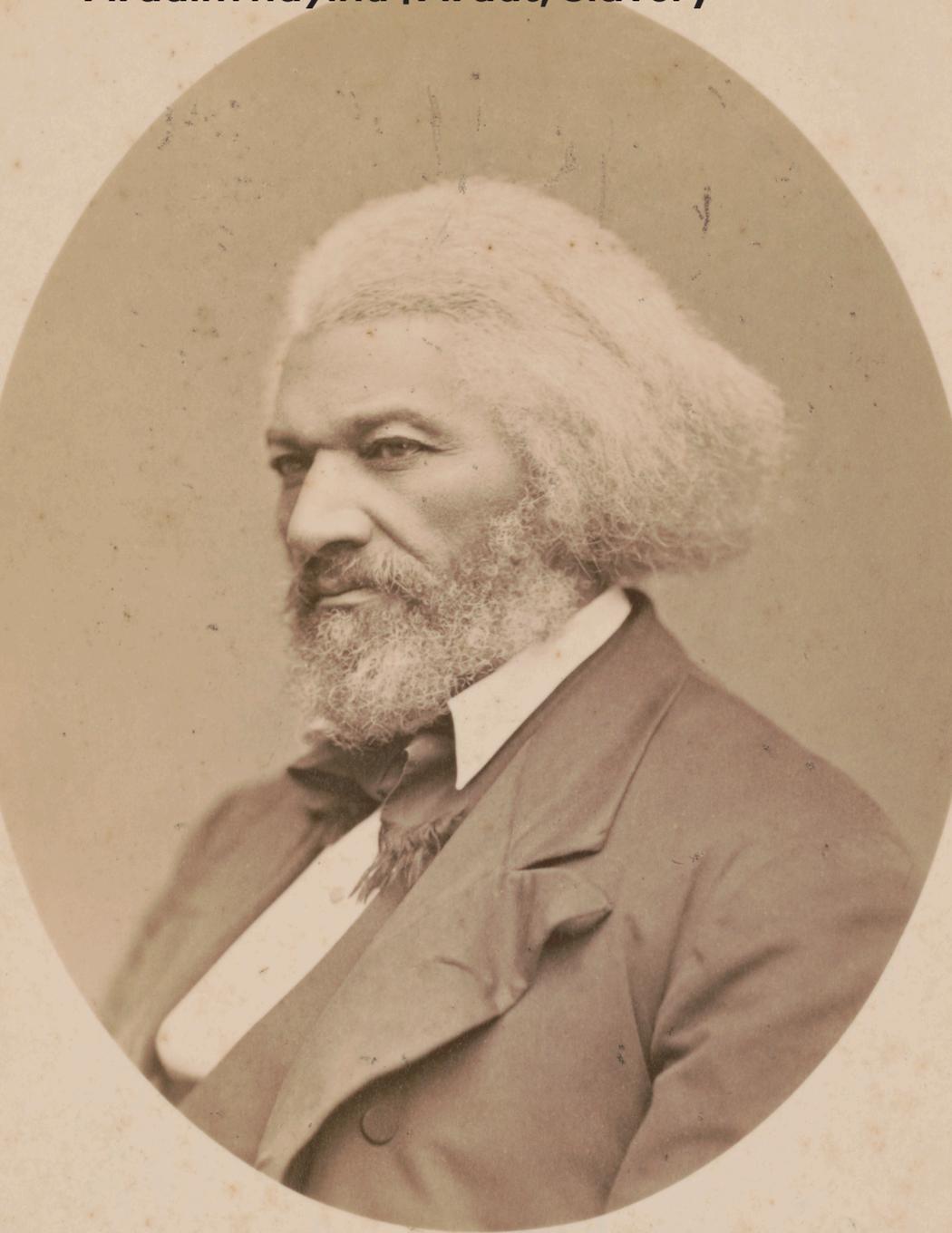
“Nor am I less persuaded that you will agree with me in opinion, that there is nothing which can better deserve your patronage than the promotion of Science and Literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. In one in which the measures of Government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the Community as in ours it is proportionably essential.

To the security of a free Constitution it contributes in various ways: By convincing those who are intrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of Government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people, and by teaching the people themselves to know and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burthens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of Society; to discriminate the spirit of Liberty from that of licentiousness, cherishing the first, avoiding the last, and uniting a speedy, but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the Laws.”

Why was knowledge so vital to George Washington’s vision for a new form of government?

What makes curiosity so integral to the celebration of Passover that we must play-act it, even when we already know the answers to the questions we’re asking?

Avadim hayinu | Avdut, Slavery



As we consider the story of our slavery in Egypt, we are forced to confront the history of slavery in America. Though chattel slavery ended in our country in the 19th century, its legacy continues to impact our lives today. The liberty promised to all Americans continues to be limited by race, religion, and creed.

In 1852, abolitionist Frederick Douglass was invited to speak at an event commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and while he began by acknowledging his respect for the Founding Fathers, he quickly segued into pointing out the hypocrisy of being asked to celebrate American freedom in a time of slavery. His speech, “The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro,” was published widely.

“Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrevocable ruin! Fellow-citizens, above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, “may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!” To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world.... I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July!”

How does the memory of slavery in Egypt shape our self-conception as Jews?

How do the vestiges of slavery in America continue to shape American society?

Dayenu | Herut, Freedom



When we arrive at *Dayenu* and express gratitude for the many gifts God has given the Jewish people since freeing us from slavery, we move from a mindset of lament to one of joy. And yet, we know that freedom is not always so simple.

In his 1941 Annual Address to Congress, as part of an effort to convince Congress to continue and increase its support for Great Britain in World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt famously spoke about four freedoms, which he considered foundational.

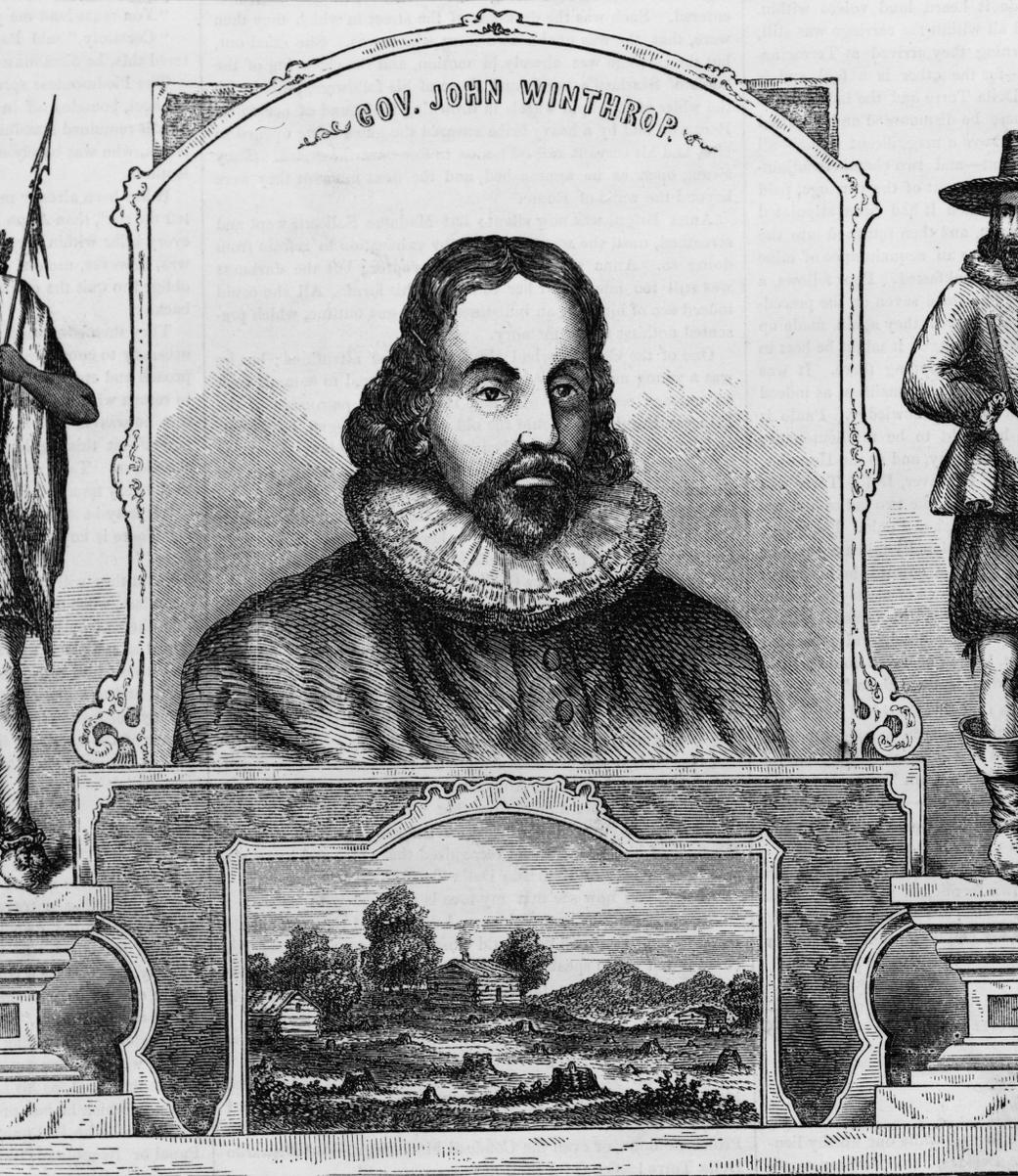
“In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way – everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want – which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants – everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear – which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor – anywhere in the world.”

Do you agree with FDR’s outline of fundamental freedoms? What would you add to his list?

How does the tenor of freedom change if it is granted without reserve as opposed to being hard-won?

Is true freedom ever achievable? What would that look like?

Sh'fokh hamat'kha | Areivut, Collective Responsibility



One of the most complex moments of the Passover seder comes with the third cup of wine. Immediately after drinking this cup, we recite a formula asking God to pour out divine wrath and destroy other, non-believing nations. It is understandable why the Israelites, leaving slavery, might carry such a revenge fantasy, but today this paragraph is incongruous with much of how Jews interact with the world. Rather than seeking revenge, we seek to set an example for others to emulate.

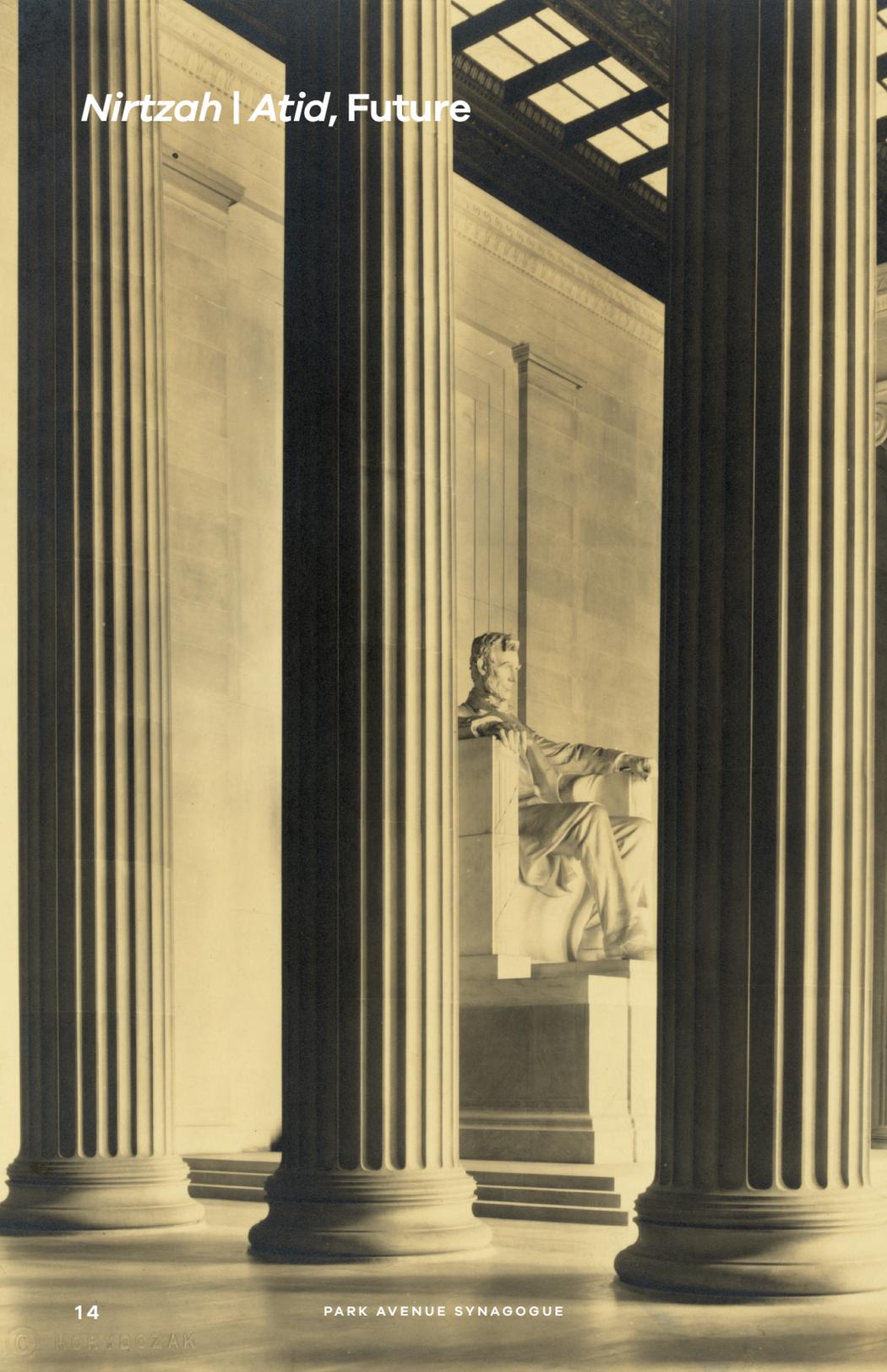
Aboard the Arbella en route to the New World In 1630, Massachusetts Bay Colony founder John Winthrop delivered a sermon that would reverberate through the centuries. In this sermon, he proclaimed:

“[W]e must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God’s sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

And to shut this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel, Deuteronomy 30. “Beloved, there is now set before us life and death, good and evil,” in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his ordinance and his laws, and the articles of our Covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other Gods, our pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.”

What does it mean to be a part of a “city on a hill”?

As Americans and as Jews, what kind of example do we want to set for the other nations of the world?



As we reach the end of the seder and say, “Next year in Jerusalem!” we imagine a better future. While the line was written to evoke visions of a Messianic age, it also gives us hope for a more immediate future. What do we hope to achieve by the time next year’s seder comes around?

Today, there is a great chasm in our country’s politics and government. The polarization that reigns can seem insurmountable. But this is not the first time in our history that we have been tasked with mending a seemingly irreconcilable rupture.

In 1865, in the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated for his second term. His inaugural address was both blunt about the challenges facing the country and hopeful for the future.

“Fellow countrymen: at this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends is as well known to the public as to myself and it is I trust reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it - all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place devoted altogether to saving the Union without war insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war - seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.”

Do our country’s current fractures reflect those Lincoln faced on the eve of his second presidency?

How do you envision the future of our country, for Jews and for all people? What are your hopes? Your fears?

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