

## H. Berkowitz and S.S. Cohon: Two Men Battle Over One Haggadah

*Mara W. Cohen Ioannides*

The first American Reform haggadah was published in 1892 as part of *The Union Prayer Book*<sup>1</sup> under the authority of Rabbi I. Moses.<sup>2</sup> However, it was not approved by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) before its publication.<sup>3</sup> This caused some serious discontentment among the conference members,<sup>4</sup> and thus a committee was formed to create an approved haggadah.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Silverman, president of the CCAR in 1902, gave the mission of the committee as: “A Pesach Hagada [sic] that shall contain a clear exposition of the story of the Passover, and, at the same time, be sufficiently modern in tone to arouse interest in the almost abandoned Seder service.”<sup>6</sup> An important phrase here is, “almost abandoned Seder service.” Rabbi Silverman, and much of the CCAR, believed that the festival of Passover was near extinction in the United States and that the key to preservation lay in the haggadah.

The Committee on a Pesach Haggadah began its work in 1903 with Rabbi Henry Berkowitz as a member;<sup>7</sup> by the next year he was chairing this committee.<sup>8</sup> Berkowitz was from the first graduating class of the Hebrew Union College (HUC) in 1883. As a charter member of the CCAR, he exercised a profound influence on American Reform Judaism. He was an ardent believer in the Pittsburgh Platform,<sup>9</sup> which lay the foundation for the theology and philosophy of American Reform Judaism. As the CCAR’s first secretary and oftentimes member of its executive board, he had occasion to influence the theology of this group. The board appreciated his devotion to Judaism and his humility to the extent that twice its members attempted to nominate him for the conference’s presidency. Berkowitz, who had suffered significant hearing loss, refused both offers because he felt his disability might hamper the position.<sup>10</sup> Along with chairing the committee that created the first *Union Haggadah* in 1905, Berkowitz wrote many books, including *Kiddush or Sabbath Sentiment in the Home* and the *First Hebrew Reader* and *Second Hebrew Reader*, all books to aid Jewish families in their practice of Judaism. *The Union Haggadah* was finally published in 1907;<sup>11</sup> Bloch Publishing advertised it as including a mixture of tradition and modernity.<sup>12</sup>

Eleven years later, at its 1918 meeting, the CCAR took the advice of its publications committee<sup>13</sup> and decided that the 1907 haggadah no longer met the needs of the Reform community because it did not present “the natural growth and development of Jewish life.”<sup>14</sup> A new committee was formed with Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon appointed chair.<sup>15</sup> Cohon, a 1912 graduate of HUC, was a

theist who believed in a personal god. Unlike Berkowitz and his cadre of early Reform Jewish theologians, Cohon believed in the importance of existing Jewish rituals and saw a place for mysticism in modern Reform Judaism. Mostly, he worked toward a Reform theology that met the needs of contemporary Reform Jews. For example, this was the time in America when social justice was developing, and Cohon wanted the Reform Jewish principles to mirror American ethics, when possible. He was not alone in his philosophy; many Reform rabbis had the same set of beliefs. In fact, the CCAR considered the Pittsburgh Platform antiquated and a new one, the Columbus Platform, was adopted in 1937. Many of Cohon's ideals were included, although it was not the platform he drafted. To gain the support of CCAR members who were not ardent theists, he couched his statements and asked for their requests before presenting the final draft for approval. Cohon's theology had a profound effect on Reform Judaism because of his influence in the revision of *The Union Haggadah* (1923), the Columbus Platform, and *The Union Prayerbook* (1951).<sup>16</sup>

The committee took upon itself the task of "supplying *The Union Haggadah* with those traditional elements that lend color to the service and that are in keeping with the sentiments of Reform."<sup>17</sup> In the 1919 discussion following the first presentation of the Committee on Revision of the Haggadah, the Conference decided that the new version of the haggadah should be provided to the CCAR members for review before being published.<sup>18</sup>

In March of 1921 the Committee completed its work<sup>19</sup> and had a proof copy of the haggadah printed and released to the Conference by the end of that year. Starting in mid-January of 1922, responses to the new text were being sent to Rabbi Cohon.<sup>20</sup> Almost all were positive responses, some of which included minor corrections or suggestions. However, in April of 1922, Rabbi Berkowitz sent all the members of the Committee (Cohon, G. Levi, S. Freehof, S. Schwartz, and S. Deinard) a three-page, single-spaced commentary on their work.<sup>21</sup>

Berkowitz's letter is very formal both in language and structure, and standard in organization (Appendix A). Even though the Committee sent an "urgent appeal," Berkowitz's response was not quick. The request was sent out near the end of 1921, and his letter did not arrive until April 1922. There are a number of reasons for this delay. One is that he sent the manuscript, intended for reading by Conference members only, to Elsi Pfaelzer<sup>22</sup> for her opinion. This opinion did not reach him until February 1922.<sup>23</sup> Another reason for the delay, which we will spend time discussing here, is the time Berkowitz spent researching and crafting his response to the revised haggadah.

To emphasize the weight of his input, Berkowitz reminds the Committee of his importance in the currently used haggadah (Appendix A). The implication in his letter is that the Committee is revising *his* haggadah, not creating a new one. Having identified himself as important in the process, Berkowitz explains to the Committee that he has been thorough in his work and that,

therefore, his suggestions should be considered carefully. More important, he is viewing the new haggadah strictly as a revision. Quite forcefully, Berkowitz emphasizes what he and his 1907 Committee had done. They had “the very same difficulty” of balancing “the contents of the ancient Haggadah...[with the] consideration of the actual needs of the American Jewish people”; however, they had reached an agreement. In fact, not only was this guiding principle included in the “Forward” of *The Union Haggadah*, but “that statement was adopted by the Conference and constitutes a distinct contribution which both explains and justifies our re-constructive reform.” Berkowitz is so enraged by this point in his letter that this statement was included as a separate paragraph, thereby highlighting its issues. His belief in the principles of the Pittsburgh Platform and the influence he carried within the Conference is the basis for his criticisms of the revised haggadah because he is both “surprised and filled with regret... that your Committee has... rejected the principle it enunciates.” Clearly, this is what has soured Berkowitz against the revised text.

He continues by criticizing the current Committee for something he admits his Committee did not realize either (something of an anomaly). How can one criticize someone else for something they originally did? Apparently, neither Committee addressed the needs of the audience, despite their claims; Berkowitz comments that American Jews do not have the biblical background needed to truly appreciate the context of the haggadah.

In looking for support, he sent his three pages to at least one member of his Haggadah Committee. Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler not only agreed with Berkowitz’s criticisms; he felt they did “not go far enough.”<sup>24</sup>

In less than a month, Cohon had written a response (Appendix B). Interestingly, there is a six-day difference between the manuscript for the letter and the typed copy. Obviously, the importance of the recipient warranted serious consideration. Cohon does not deign to respond to the first page of Berkowitz’s letter, which contained mostly rhetorical twists to boost the author’s ego, to emphasize his importance, and to outline his logic. He is careful to answer the specific criticisms. This is not to imply that Cohon did not use the formalities of letter writing; however, his style is far more brusque. The content is based upon the theological discussions that Berkowitz raised in his letter; however, here the lecture is turned and the younger rabbi reprimands the elder rabbi. Cohon also attempts to show Berkowitz his interpretation of the Committee’s goal. The Committee is still very concerned with the need to entice Jews back into practicing their festivals, just as the first Haggadah Committee had been.

Upon receipt of Cohon’s letter, Berkowitz responded with a far more composed and respectful two pages (Appendix C). Its opening is more personal. In it, he repeats almost verbatim the opening of Cohon’s letter, almost as if he is reminding Cohon of the promise he made. In Berkowitz’s view, Cohon’s letter is not a response but the opening of a debate, and he begins by delineating three points.

Cohon took Berkowitz's and others' comments seriously and made some changes to the draft. In June 1922, he sent these to the Committee for a vote. Cohon asked five specific questions of the Committee (Appendix D). Three of the five are in response to Berkowitz's suggestions.

The language Cohon uses to phrase his second question makes his feelings about Berkowitz's suggestion clear. Berkowitz explains his view in his letter (Appendix C), and his argument for inclusion is most interesting: The Conference debated this idea in open session and, therefore, the intended audience, the users of the haggadah, should know the debate. Rabbi Cohon, however, believes that this debate is adequately, and less aggressively, introduced in another section of *The Union Haggadah*.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps he also wondered if the users really needed to know the underlying factors in the creation of the text; after all, weren't the users more interested in their use of the haggadah than the history of its creation?

Question four refers to the second point in Berkowitz's letter, which he raised in his initial letter about the inclusion of the cup of Elijah and the opening of the door to greet Elijah. This is a fascinating debate because of the original purpose of the revision. Rabbi Silverman charged the first Committee "to arouse interest" in the seder before its practice was abandoned. In the 1907 edition these two practices were not included because of the debate concerning the Messiah as a personal or eonian concept. (Berkowitz goes into some of this discussion in his original letter.) Cohon views these two actions as entirely different, and this may have something to do with the differences in their personal theology or the theology of the Conference at the time.

The paragraph under discussion by the two rabbis from *The Union Haggadah* reads:

The attitude of mind of the modern man has completely changed in reference to such matters as these. He can no longer regard rites and symbols with the awe that vested them with mystic meaning, or supernatural sanction. To him they are, in truth, potent object-lessons of great events and of sublime principles hallowed and intensified in meaning by ages of devout usage. This fact has been honestly reckoned with in this reconstruction of the Haggadah. Furthermore, it was necessary candidly to recognize that to the present generation, much of the old Pesach Haggadah is obsolete. This is due to the commingling of religious sentiments with much that is purely didactic; of scholastic discussions, with the pronouncement of lofty precepts; the humorous with the tragic; psalms with folk-songs; universal truths with national concepts, and the like.<sup>26</sup>

One can see that the language in this paragraph could be construed as objectionable by some of the intended audience. This paragraph seems a bit odd, considering Berkowitz did not believe the users understood the historical

significance of the festival. It seems far more alienating than endearing which is the opposite of his purpose.

Only two responses to Cohon's letter have been preserved: Solomon Freehof's, dated 9 June, and William Rosenau's, dated 14 June (Appendix D). Freehof's response to question two shows that Berkowitz's concerns had been shared with the entire Committee. He wrote that he saw "no particular need for" the suggested paragraph to be included, "but if you want it, it is not worth arguing over."<sup>27</sup> Rosenau's response is similar; he says "no—[word illegible] attitude speaks for itself."<sup>28</sup>

The rewrite approved by the Committee and moved from the "Forward" to the section entitled "The Union Haggadah" reads:

In 'carrying on the chain of piety which links the generations to each other', it is necessary frankly to face and honestly to meet the needs of our own day. The old Haggadah, while full of poetic charm, contains passages and sentiments wholly out of harmony with the spirit of the present time. Hence the proper editing of the old material demanded much care and attention on the part of the editors of the first edition of the *Union Haggadah*. Benefiting [sic] by their labors, those entrusted with the task of its revision are able to present a work at once modern in spirit and rich in those traditional elements that lend color to the service.

The Seder service was never purely devotional. Its intensely spiritual tone mingled with bursts of good humor, its serious observations on Jewish life and destiny with comments in a lighter vein, and its lofty poetry with playful ditties for the entertainment of the children. It assumes the form of an historical drama presented at the festival table, with the father and children as leading actors. The children question and the father answers. He explains the nature of the service, preaches, entertains, and prays. In the course of the evening, a complete philosophy of Jewish history is revealed, dealing with Israel's eventful past, with his deliverance from physical and from spiritual bondage, and with his great future word-mission. In its variety, the Haggadah reflects the moods of the Jewish spirit. Rabbinical homily follows dignified narrative, soulful prayers and Psalms mingle with the *Had Gadyo* and the madrigal of numbers, *Ehod Mi Yode'a*.<sup>29</sup>

The first sentence is borrowed from the 1907 edition, and the rest can be seen as acknowledgment of Berkowitz. What they have done is take the sentiment, as Cohon said, and restated it in a respectful and educational way. Rather than informing the reader about what they do, or should, find "obsolete" in the service as Berkowitz's does, Cohon's version shows the reader the intention of the service. Cohon has also taken out the terribly academic language that Berkowitz used, words such as "didactic" and "object-lessons," and replaced them with more common language that the everyday Jew would readily understand, such as "devotional" and "historical drama."

The debate following the release of the first revision of the 1907 haggadah in 1919 is quite revealing as well. Seven rabbis voiced their opinions. Three of them (Cohon, Schulman, and J. Wise) were quite strong in their dislike for the 1907 haggadah. Cohon explained that the Committee felt “that it could get out [publish] an Haggadah that would be acceptable to all—orthodox as well as reform.”<sup>30</sup> To do this would require reinserting the more traditional elements.

Additionally, the Conference still had concerns about the preservation of the seder in American Judaism, as can be seen by the approved request of the Publications Committee in 1919 “to reprint the main portions of the Haggadah in the Union Bulletin with the hope of popularizing the celebration of the Sedar [sic].”<sup>31</sup> Part of this “popularization” may be the inclusion of the “fairy atmosphere,” as Cohon refers to it in his 1922 letter to Berkowitz. Berkowitz argues in his response that “that was the primary aim of our revision because. . . the old style rendition of the Haggadah was a solemn and tedious affair.”<sup>32</sup> He argues that because these actions are not historical but legendary,<sup>33</sup> they belong in the “Miscellany” section if anywhere.<sup>34</sup> He suggests that “the atmosphere desired by restoring or creating some new dramatic presentation of events of the Exodus” might work better.<sup>35</sup>

After polling the Committee, Cohon sent the 1923 haggadah to the publishers. The publication was highly praised. Berkowitz’s final comment in this dialogue was a letter to Cohon on 9 April 1923 (Appendix E) that, interestingly, was handwritten on stationery on which the address has been scratched out. This letter could be interpreted as less thoughtful; however, it should be interpreted as more friendly. The formalities of the previous letters do not need to be observed because the dialogue has ended, and the previous collegial relationship can resume.

Cohon felt the praise he received from Berkowitz to “carry the greatest weight because they come from one who has grappled, perhaps in a greater degree than I, with problems in reconstructing the unique ritual of the Seder, for modern use”<sup>36</sup> (Appendix F). In fact, Cohon submitted most of Berkowitz’s letter for his report at the annual conference. The Committee on Publications reported in 1924 that “the new Haggadah has met with instant success and the whole edition of 4,500 copies was sold.”<sup>37</sup>

This discussion is fascinating. The rhetorical posing of Rabbi Berkowitz and the clear responses of Rabbi Cohon give us insight not only into their arguments but also their personalities. These rabbis’ dialogue additionally provides us with an understanding of the changes happening among Reform Jews. The modern haggadah, which *The Union Haggadah* can be considered, is really the combination of two parts: liturgical and nonliturgical. As Cohen Ioannides and Cohen explain, this nonliturgical material is really an educational tool used to explain the history and practice of the Passover seder.<sup>38</sup> Berkowitz and Cohon, as well as their respective committees, felt the inclusion of this nonliturgical

material to be important because they felt that Jews did not have enough historical background to appreciate the ceremony.<sup>39</sup> The first Committee was charged with aiding preservation, while the second was charged with a return to tradition—as much as was permitted by Reform theology. In addition, we can see how the CCAR changed its attitude toward its members. Thus, this is a lesson in liturgy development, theology, history, and rhetoric; but we must not let that overshadow the original discussion between two men about one paragraph.

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*Mara W. Cohen Ioannides is an Instructor in the English Department at Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri. She has published numerous articles on the CCAR haggadah's development, codirected a documentary on and published articles about Ozarks Judaism, and published her first novel on post-Inquisition Greek Jewry.*

## Appendix A

I am sending a copy of this to each member of your committee HB [handwritten at top]

Suggestions submitted by

**Dr. Henry Berkowitz, Philadelphia**

**To the Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis on Revision of the Union Haggadah.**

**Dear Colleagues: —**

The printed Report of your Committee, embodying the Revised Text of the Union Haggadah, which has been submitted to the members of our Conference, has received my earnest attention. In response to your urgent appeal I submit herewith my impressions and suggestions.

As chairman of the Committee which compiled the Union Haggadah, I was more deeply interested than perhaps was any other member of the Conference in the fact that a committee had been appointed to revise this work. I was glad that the results of the experiences gained in the use of this little book since its publication in 1907 were to be gathered up and applied to the improvements of the same in a new and revised edition.

I was very much gratified to read in the Report your Committee submitted previously to the Conference and which is published in the Year-Book No. 39, p.31, that: "all that was valuable in the earlier edition has been retained and much that is distinctively Jewish in form and spirit is added."

I have made a page to page comparison of the Union Haggadah with the proposed Revisions submitted by you. I note with much satisfaction that, after fifteen years of experience with the little book, it remains, in your Revision, to so large a degree intact and unaltered. I am pleased also to note that you have found a number of appropriate pictures to add to the illustrations which

serve to give artistic interpretation and embellishment to the book; likewise, that the musical portions which make the Seder so delightfully effective, have also been augmented. In these additions you have, I feel sure, carried out the promise made in the same Report to the Conference from which I have quoted above, when you say: "We have been guided by the desire to make the work at once modern in spirit and rich in the traditional elements that lend color to the service."

No one realizes more keenly than I do, how difficult it is to compass this purpose, so clearly expressed. You will therefore receive in the sympathetic spirit in which I offer them, the criticisms herewith presented.

I respectfully submit, that your Committee has been more deeply engrossed with a consideration of the contents of the ancient Haggadah, than with a consideration of the actual needs of the American Jewish people. The Committee which undertook originally to revise the Haggadah was likewise hampered by the very same difficulty. That Committee, after a careful deliberation reached a definite agreement as to the principles which should actuate the work of re-constructing the Haggadah. These principles were set forth in a frank statement contained in the "Foreword" to the Union Haggadah.

That statement was adopted by the Conference and constitutes a distinct contribution which both explains and justifies our re-constructive reform.

I am surprised and filled with regret to find that your Committee has not alone expunged that statement from the Foreword but has rejected the principle it enunciates. I herewith quote the Statement in protest against its omission and with an earnest plea for its restoration. (See Union Haggadah, Foreword VI-VII).

"The attitude of mind of the modern man has completely changed in reference to such matters as these. He can no longer regard rites and symbols with the awe that vested them with mystic meaning and supernatural sanction. To him they are in truth, potent object lessons of great events and of sublime principles, hallowed and intensified in meaning by ages of devout usage. This fact has been honestly reckoned with in this reconstruction of the Haggadah. It aims to make it possible for the modern Jew to conduct the Seder conscientiously. This work aims to supply the demand of those to whom the old form of the Haggadah no longer appeals. It will be observed that the really valuable contents have been scrupulously preserved. The distinctively religious elements constituting the service have been carefully differentiated from the rest. Whatever does not belong to the devotional part has been relegated to an appendix. Here will be found properly classified, much of the ancient Haggadah, enriched by interesting and instructive material from history and literature, legend and lore. The lighter, more joyous and entertaining features of the celebration are thus to follow the more earnest devotional exercises."



Your Committee, without assigning any reason whatever, has abandoned this Miscellany entirely and restored as a part of the devotional exercises, some of the old folk songs and Rabbinical references which are barren of present day significance.

The juggling [sic] transition of Ki lo Noeh e.g. is impossible as a devotional exercise and citing why Hillel ate Matzoth and Maror together is a bit of dialectics whose literalism cannot be regarded to-day as very impressive.

My fifteen years' use of the Union Haggadah has brought home to me the keen consciousness of a fact which the Committee which compiled it failed to realize fully and to which your Committee has apparently paid still less heed. I refer to the fact that those for whom we are preparing the book differ entirely from these generations to whom the old Haggadah meant so much. They were steeped in a knowledge of the Bible and enveloped in the atmosphere of rabbinics. This is not the case with the modern American Jew with whom we have to deal.

A very earnest minded and intelligent member of my Congregation informs me that efforts to introduce the Seder observance among the families of her kindred and friends are very disappointing because whatever edition of the Haggadah be used, a degree of previous knowledge is presumed which does not exist. Thus, we aver that "It would still be our duty from year to year to tell the story of the deliverance from Egypt;" and again "Thou shalt explain the whole story of the Passover." Yet, nowhere is this really done. Children and adults alike are disappointed at this failure. What was taken for granted in the old Haggadah and dismissed with fragmentary references, must be squarely met and supplied to-day.

I suggest that this be done by inserting at appropriate places the proper excerpts from the Book of Exodus. This may best be done in providing the "Answers to the Questions" put by the child or children. The revision which restores the exact form of the questions from the ancient Haggadah and groups them all together is not, in my judgment, an improvement. It destroys the pedagogic value of securing, by separating them, the sustained interest of the child. But more especially are these questions too archaic to touch the mind of the modern child. "Why do we dip the herbs, etc." or the difference between sitting and reclining at a feast are matters as remote from the child-mind with which we are dealing as they are to the whole occidental world.

The real questions called out by the celebration and suggested by the symbolic articles used and other distinctive factors, are e.g.

- 1 – Why do we observe the Seder?
- 2 – Why do we use the lamb bone and bitter herbs?
- 3 – Why do we eat Matzoth?
- 4 – Why do we call this the "Watch-night"?

The answers given in the Union Haggadah, have not been simplified by the revisions you offer as far as I can see. I favor retaining the answers as they stand but supplementing them with readings from Scriptures e.g. as follows: —

Ex. III 1–16, IV, 27–31

1 – Ex XII 24–28

2 – Ex XII 1–8; 11–14

3 – Ex XII 16–18; 29–34, 39

4 – Ex XII 40–42.

The present service is generally deemed rather too short and abrupt. The addition of the above or kindred selections will not, I feel, extend it too much.

The Parable of the Four types of Sons is another feature that should be improved upon as the treatment of this Parable in the Haggadah fails to make it really vital. Dr. Ettelson has, I know, a Drasha on this theme, the gist of which would well serve our need.

I wish to register my earnest protest against restoring to the Seder table the so-called “Cup of Elijah” and against the act of “Opening the Door for Elijah.” The whole motive of modernizing the book is set aside by this reversal. Your own explanations, pp. 14 and 15 of the Revised Mss. indicate that this is all purely legendary. It has its place in the Miscellany (See Union Haggadah p 83–4) as to [sic] suggestive piece of folk lore but not as part of a service which shall express not our sires but ourselves. Even as symbols we cannot sincerely use the Elijah elements of the old Hagaddah [sic], for they embody the concept of the Personal Messiah whose actual coming was held to be, not figuratively but really imminent.

Reform Judaism having set free the Messianic concept from dependence on any personality, and having enlarged and spiritualized it as the sublime ideal and underlying motive and purpose of all human history we cannot consistently retain this Elijah episode as an integral part of the Seder service. The Conference has again and again gone on record as urging the great Messianic Ideal of Israel as an era of Social Justice which must be achieved by the active endeavors of men and not awaited as a supernatural miracle. We cannot reverse that record.

Similarly, I see only a weakness in deferring to those “who observe the second day of the festivals” as your Committee does by the reference on page 4 of the Revised Mss. Reform had the courage to abandon the second day observance when the reasons for the observance had passed.

“The Close of the Service” should, I feel be amplified somewhat to bring home to each individual participant in the Seder the direct application of the lessons of the celebration. We need to have these lessons made a source of inspiration to share in Israel’s age-long task of serving the cause of liberty. Here loyalty and gratitude to this land should be emphasized and the truth impressed that it was founded on, and despite its lapses, has continued to build upon the ideals of Israel commemorated in this Feast.

## Appendix B

**Chicago May 9, 1922.**

**Dear Dr. Berkowitz:**

Your letter dealing with the revised text of the Union Haggadah will receive the careful consideration of my committee, while I cannot anticipate its action on all of your suggestions, I wish to assure you most respectfully that it will do no violence to the theology of Reform Judaism. If a certain paragraph was omitted from the preface, it is because of its polemical tone. Its spirit, however, was adequately embodied in the section entitled "Union Haggadah" (pp 8–10). As to the Miscellany, our minds are open to conviction. Much that has [sic] given in the Miscellany of the first edition of the Union Haggadah is embodied in the introduction to the proposed edition. Several other passages may be retained and some new ones introduced.

Your objection to the cup of Elijah and to the opening of the door for him is something that I cannot appreciate. Must we take ourselves so seriously at the Seder as not to dare produce a fairy atmosphere for the children and adults? Who thinks of the Messianic importance of Elijah when a cup is filled in his honor? We rather think of the grand figure of the popular hero. If Elijah will not visit our prosaic homes, Santa Claus probably will. Your insistence that a line be drawn between the serious and the lighter elements does not appeal to me either. One of the members of the Conference, overlooking the reference to the Had Gadya, in the printed report, warned me that I may just as well leave out the Kiddush. The very nature of the Haggadah is to mingle the solemn strains with the mirthful ones. As to the Aggadic style of the Haggadah no defence is necessary. That is the nature of the ritual. Its absence from the first edition was the chief reason that impelled the members of the Conference to ask for a revised edition. We lay too much stress on the ignorance of our congregants. Why not think a little of the men who do know how to appreciate the beauty of the finer type of Midrash? The Haggadah, while thoroughly modern in spirit and social outlook, should retain the traditional atmosphere to link us with the generation of the past.

In going over the text of Vay'hi Ba-hatsi' Halayloh, it occurs to me that a different refrain should be provided for either the fourteenth or the fifteenth stanza. May I ask you as the author of this excellent poem to supply me with your own revision of the passages? Having been so successful with this poem, will you not try your hand also on the Ki Lo Noeh? I should welcome a paraphrase of this Hebrew jingle in loftier style, to come immediately after the "God of Might."

I am glad to know that you are well and that you are busy with literary work. Your proposed collection of Rabbinic humor should prove stimulating. During the summer, I may find a little time to write out a few anecdotes for you.

With cordial greetings from house to house, I am

**Respectfully Yours,  
Samuel S. Cohon (signed)**

## Appendix C

**Rabbi Samuel S. Cohon,  
Chairmn. Com. C.C.A.R. on Revision of Union Haggadah**

**Dear Friend and Colleague:**

I was very much pleased to receive your letter of May 9th with its assurance that my comments on the Revised text of the “Union Haggadah” will receive the careful consideration of your Committee and that “it will do no violence to the theology of Reform Judaism.”

You have taken the trouble to set forth in your letter your attitude towards various comments submitted by me and I appreciate the opportunity you thus accord to me to place before your Committee my response.

1. My protest was made against the omission of a certain paragraph from the “Foreword” for reasons I cited. You reply that “it was omitted because of its polemical tone.” I respectfully submit that if the “tone” is objectionable it may be modified but to summarily omit it is indefensible. This paragraph contains a statement of fact in reference to the attitude of the Reform Jew towards symbols and ceremonies. Of course it is polemical,—so is the very act of revising the Haggadah, the Prayer Book, etc.,—indeed the whole Reform movement may be declared polemical. This paragraph is reproduced from the Report adopted by the Conference in open session after several years of consideration. (See Year Book XVII).

If your Committee is set upon having the Conference reverse itself on a question of fact, I fail to see how “no violence will be done to the theology of Reform Judaism.” [sic] which is based on a refusal to blink at facts.

2. In responding to my protest against the inclusion of the Cup of Elijah, etc., as a part of the service, you ask: “Must we take ourselves so seriously as not to dare to produce a fairy atmosphere for the children and adults?”

I wish we could produce that very atmosphere. Indeed that was the primary aim of our revision because, I know from my own personal experience in childhood and from the like testimony of others, that the old style rendition of the Haggadah was a solemn and tedious affair in the average home. The whole Haggadah was treated as of equal solemnity and therefore we suggested holding the devotional exercises with due decorum and then providing in the Miscellany—at their honest value—the legendary and folk-lore elements for the entertainment and instruction of the domestic circle.

How the Elijah element may be fitly used tho’ I fail to see how you can divest it, (to the “intelligent members” who know anything about Jewish history) either of its theologic implications or of the gloom and tragedy with which the woful [sic] blood accusation has over-shadowed it.

You might, more readily I think, secure the atmosphere desired by restoring or creating some new dramatic presentation of events of the Exodus as described in the Union Haggadah p. 92.

3. “As to the Miscellany” you say: “Our minds are open to conviction.” (I trust I am not to infer that your minds are not open to conviction on the other matters.) You say “Your insistence that a line be drawn between the serious and the lighter elements does not appeal to me.” But you have offered no alternative by which to provide a service that shall “express ourselves and not merely our sires.”

No doubt the contents of the Miscellany might be improved. Much new material has been produced since 1907 when it was compiled. The introduction of some action in which the children especially take part as noted above might well be elaborated. Suggestions should be offered for each family gathering to provide its own interesting contributions to the evenings [sic] purpose. This is the case in my own family where the Seder is a genuine joy to old and young.

Your request that I provide a different Refrain for verses 14 and 15 of “Va hi Ba’hatzi Halaylo” has prompted me to re-examine these more carefully. I agree with you and suggest for verse 14

“Soon t’will pass,—the long-drawn midnight”

and for verse 15

“When its [sic] past—the long drawn midnight.”

I shall try my hand at an English rendition of Ki lo noeh but I doubt my ability to accomplish it.

I appreciate your kind personal message and shall look forward to receiving some contributions from you to my collection of Humorous experiences in the Ministry.

**Very sincerely yours,  
Henry Berkowitz (signed)**

## Appendix D

June 14, 1922

Dear Colleague:-

With the assistance of Rabbis S. Schwartz and G. Levi, the local members of the committee, I have attempted to embody in the Revised text of the Union Haggadah, the suggestions of various colleagues. To meet some objections raised by the Rabbis Landman and Berkowitz, I rewrote several passages. You will find these inserted in the enclosed copy, on typewritten pages. Kindly examine also, with special care, the changes in the English text of the Four Questions, and of the Grace after the meal, the repetitiousness of which met with objections on the part of a number of correspondents. The Hymn "To Thee Above" belongs before Grace, and "Ki Lo Noeh" should follow "God of Might". "En Kelohenu" concludes the service.

Kindly send me your vote on the following questions:

1. The local members of the committee deem it advisable to employ the Ashkenazic pronunciation, because of its use in our Synagogues, as the basis of all transliteration; and to designate ן by h and צ by ch. Do you see any objection to such procedure? [*Rosenau's handwritten answer: No*]
2. Dr. Berkowitz has asked that we retain in our introduction, the passage of the old Union Haggadah (pg. VI, par. 2), setting forth the attitude for the modern man towards ceremonies. Do you think that the place for such polemics is in a Haggadah? (Of course, the spirit of the passage is embodied in the entire text.) [*Rosenau: No—(word illegible) attitude speaks for itself*]
3. Do you agree with our tentative decision to omit the footnotes from the text of the Haggadah, in accord with the precedent established by the Union Prayer Book? [*Rosenau: Yes*]
4. Shall we retain the traditional custom of opening the door for Elijah, in order not to rob the Seder of its fairy atmosphere? [*Rosenau: Yes*]
5. Shall we add a Miscellany to our text? [*Rosenau: I see no objection*]

I have secured the services of a young Jewish illustrator, Mr. I. Lipton—a man of scholarship and artistic accomplishment. His work will make the Haggadah a real joy. I expect to have a complete set of proposed illustrations at the Conference.

If the enclosed report meets with your approval, be so good as to sign and return it to me, together with your answers to my questions, at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely yours,  
Samuel S. Cohon (signed)

[*The Rev. Doctor William Rosenau*  
*1515 Eutaw Place, Baltimore Md.*  
*William Rosenau (signed)*]

## Appendix E

9 April 1923

**Rabbi Samuel Cohon, Chicago**

**Dear Colleague and Friend:**

Let me congratulate you on the success of the revised Haggadah. It is a real achievement in every way. Whatever may have been the doubts and criticisms expressed by me in my correspondence with you on receiving the “proofs”—I am free to say have all disappeared through the admirable manner in which you have worked out the details of the whole service and the thorough, scholarly and frank manner in which you have elucidated the whole subject.

The illustrations are a delight to my heart. Please tell the artist that they are received with acclaim by all to whom I show them! I was glad to see that you have included so fine a rendition of “Ki Lo Noeh” — “Our Souls we Raise in fervent Praise.” Whose translation? It is the only one you failed to cite on pp 158–9.

When you get out another edition insist on wider margins to the pages. The fine illustrations ought not to be marred by lack [of] ample space. It will add greatly to enhancing the book. I was greatly disappointed that the book came so late. I wired Bloch for copies after receiving the specimen. “All sold out.” I had Seder down here. My whole family and some friends came—24 at table. I was so eager to use the new book—but had to be satisfied merely to show it.

From Dr. Morgenstern I have just had word that on his recommendation you have [been] elected to the post of Prof. of Theology at the H.U.C. My sincere congratulations. My wife joins me in extending to you and your dear wife our warmest good wishes for the future.

**Faithfully yours,  
Henry Berkowitz (signed)**

HENRY BERKOWITZ, D.D.

Royal Palace Hotel  
Atlantic City, N.J.  
April 9th. 1923

Rabbi Samuel Cohen, Chicago

Dear Colleague and Friend. Let me congratulate you on the success of the *United Haggadah*. It is a real achievement in every way. Whatever may have been the doubts and criticisms expressed by me in my correspondence with you on occasion, the "Lodge". I am glad to say that all disappeared through the admirable manner in which you have worked out the details of the whole service and the thorough scholarly and good manner in which you have illustrated the whole subject.

The illustration on a slight of my last letter tell me also that by an unusual bargain, all to which I refer above. I am glad to see that you have written a fine article on the "Lodge" in the *United Haggadah*. I am glad to see that you have pointed to note on p. 158-9.

When you get out another edition, insist on wider margins to the pages. The fine illustrations may be cut to be inserted in simple space. It will all greatly enhance the work. I was much disappointed that the work came so late. I would thank you for signing after writing the "Lodge". "All well and out". I am glad to hear from you when you can and hope to see you next year - at all events. I am so glad to see the book and will be glad to see you when you come to see it.

Yours very truly,  
Henry Berkowitz  
My wife joins me in best wishes to you and your dear wife. I am  
wishing you good wishes for the future. Faithfully,  
Henry Berkowitz

Copy of original letter dated 9 April 1923 from Berkowitz to Cohen.  
(Courtesy of American Jewish Archives)



## Appendix F

**April 20, 1923**

**My dear Dr. Berkowitz:**

Your pleasant remarks concerning the revised Haggadah have made me feel very happy. While I have received quite a number of Mi Sheberachs, your sentiments carry the greatest weight because they come from one who has grappled, perhaps in a greater degree than I, with problems in reconstructing the unique ritual of the Seder, for modern use.

My failure to cite the name of the translator of the Ki Lo Noah [sic] is due to the fact that Mrs. Cohon and I are the culprits.

I agree with you about the need of a wider margin. My specifications called for the side of page of the old Haggadah. I trust that in the future editions this defect will be remedied. We used the ritual at our congregational Seder, with three hundred people, and I was very much gratified with its effect upon the participants.

I am very grateful to you also for your congratulations on my election to the chair of Theology at the Hebrew Union College. It was only after a great struggle with myself that I resolved to sever my connections with Temple Mizpah. I don't know yet, whether I have done the wise thing, but I feel that at the Hebrew Union College, I may have a wider field to serve the cause of Judaism.

I trust that you are enjoying good health. Mrs. Cohon joins me in extending hearty greetings to you and to Mrs. Berkowitz.

**Faithfully yours,  
(Rabbi)**

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Ritual Committee, *Union Prayer Book* (Chicago: Central Conference of American Rabbis [CCAR], 1892).

<sup>2</sup>M. Mielzner, "Report of the Ritual Committee," *CCAR Yearbook* 4 (1894): 8.

<sup>3</sup>This question is examined in detail in Mara W. Cohen Ioannides, "A Lost Liturgy," *CCAR Journal* (Spring 1999): 79–83.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>"Motion on the Report of the Ritual Committee," *CCAR Yearbook* 4 (1894): 9.

<sup>6</sup>Joseph Silverman, "Message of President Joseph Silverman," *CCAR Yearbook* 12 (1902): 35.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Krauskopf and Henry Berkowitz, "Report of Committee on a Pesach Haggadah," *CCAR Yearbook* 13 (1903): 64.

<sup>8</sup>Henry Berkowitz, J. Stolz, and H.G. Enelow, "Report of the Committee on Haggadah," *CCAR Yearbook* 14 (1904): 83–85.

<sup>9</sup>Gerald Sorin, "Varieties of Religious Belief and Behavior," *The Jewish People in America: A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 170–190.

<sup>10</sup>Harry W. Ettelson, "Memorial Address in Memory of Henry Berkowitz," *CCAR Yearbook* 34 (1924): 174–176.

<sup>11</sup>CCAR, *The Union Haggadah* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1907).

<sup>12</sup>Berkowitz, Stolz, and Enelow, "The Union Haggadah" advertisement, 23 January 1908, CCAR Records 34/4/8, AJA.

<sup>13</sup>Report of Publications Committee, 1 June 1917 to 1 June 1918, p. 7, 34/11/7, AJA.

<sup>14</sup>Schulman in discussion after Samuel S. Cohon, Samuel N. Deinard, Maurice Lefkovits, Charles S. Levi, and Samuel Schwartz, "Report by the Committee on Revision of the Union Haggadah," *CCAR Yearbook* 29 (1919): 58.

<sup>15</sup>Revision of Union Haggadah, Louis Wolsey, Samuel S. Cohon, 12 November 1918, Samuel Cohon Papers, 276/3/6, AJA.

<sup>16</sup>Michael A. Meyer, "Reorientation," *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 296–334; Samuel S. Cohon Inventory Description, MS-276, AJA. Accessed at <http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/Cohon.htm> (2003). Julian Morgenstern, "Samuel S. Cohon," *CCAR Yearbook* 70 (1960): 176–177.

<sup>17</sup>Cohon, Deinard, et al., 55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. Minutes of Post-Conference Meeting, 17 April 1921, 34/12/20, AJA.

<sup>19</sup>Samuel S. Cohon to Charles Levi, 30 March 1921, 276/3/6, AJA.

<sup>20</sup>Jacob S. Raisin to S[amuel] S. Cohon, 11 January 1922, 276/3/6, AJA.

<sup>21</sup>Henry Berkowitz, Suggestions Submitted, April 1922, 276/3/7, AJA. (Appendix A)

<sup>22</sup>Pfaelzer was one of Berkowitz's congregants and an active and respected supporter of Jewish and non-Jewish causes in Philadelphia.

<sup>23</sup>Elsie Pfaelzer to Henry Berkowitz, 6 February 1922, Henry Berkowitz Papers 25/1/26, AJA.

<sup>24</sup>Kaufmann Kohler to Henry Berkowitz, 2 May 1922, 25/1/18, AJA.

- <sup>25</sup>Samuel Cohon to Henry Berkowitz, 9 May 1922, 25/1/5, AJA. (Appendix B)
- <sup>26</sup>CCAR, *The Union Haggadah* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1907), vi.
- <sup>27</sup>Samuel S. Cohon to Sol[omon] B. Freehof, with Freehof's responses, 9 June 1922, 276/3/6, AJA.
- <sup>28</sup>Samuel S. Cohon to William Rosenau, with Rosenau's responses, 14 June 1922, 276/3/6, AJA. (Appendix D)
- <sup>29</sup>*The Union Haggadah: Home Service for the Passover* (CCAR, 1923), viii–ix.
- <sup>30</sup>Cohon in discussion after *CCAR Yearbook* 29 (1919): 57.
- <sup>31</sup>Leo M. Franklin et al., "Report of Committee on Publications. Proceedings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis," *CCAR Yearbook* 29 (1919): 45.
- <sup>32</sup>Henry Berkowitz to Samuel Cohon, n.d. (post-9 May 1922), AJA. (Appendix C)
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup>Samuel S. Cohon to Henry Berkowitz, 20 April 1923, 276/3/7, AJA. (Appendix F)
- <sup>37</sup>Isaac E. Marcuson, Clifton Harby Levy, Morris Newfield, and Julian Morgenstern, "Report of Committee on Publications," *CCAR Yearbook* 34 (1925): 78.
- <sup>38</sup>Mara W. Cohen Ioannides & Stephen M. Cohen, "The Transformation of the Haggadah's Preface as Influenced by the Development of Public Education in Europe and the United States," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 18, n. 2 (2000): 27–44.
- <sup>39</sup>Berkowitz, "Suggestions"; Samuel Cohon to Henry Berkowitz, 9 May 1922, 25/1/5, AJA. (Appendix B)