

By GILA WERTHEIMER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

WHEN I first glanced at the **60minute Seder** (yes, it's really spelled that way), I wondered: "What's the hurry?" Then I flipped it open and tucked inside was the **30minute Seder**.

Now that really *is* a hurried seder!

Both are by ROBERT KOPMAN and available in soft cover book form, the 60-minute version for \$10.95, the 30-minute one for \$6.95, and as a download (60minuteSeder.com and 30minuteSeder.com) for \$19.95 each.

The *30minute Seder* was first published in 2006, with the *60minute Seder*, subtitled "Complete Passover Haggadah" new for Passover this year.

Attractively designed and produced in a magazine format, the English and Hebrew type, overlaid on colorful, attractive backgrounds, is easy to read. The glossy cover and pages mean the Haggadah can be cleaned of the inevitable matzah crumbs and wine spills that are

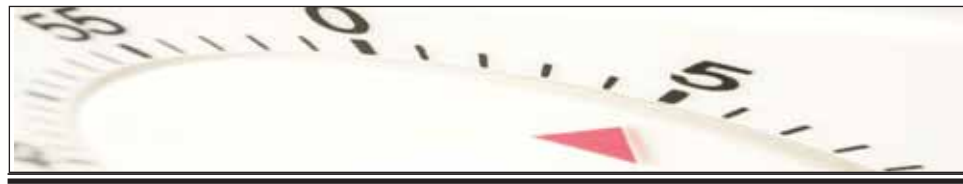
Re-telling the Passover story

part of any seder.

It opens and reads as any English-language book, which is fitting as aside from the blessings and the Four Questions that are in Hebrew (as well as transliteration), the rest is in English.

As for the traditional Haggadah text, it has been condensed and re-written in an interpretive translation (especially notable in rendering, to the degree of neutralizing, the four children) that seeks to get to the heart of the matter of all 15 parts of the seder.

So, for example, in this Haggadah there are no rabbis studying in Bnei Brak, no multiplying of the plagues, no tangents of Talmudic discourse.



BOOK MARKS

What there is, is the basic Passover story with the seder rituals — the parsley in salt water, the Four Questions, the Ten Plagues (and the removing of a drop of wine for each one), the maror, the Hillel sandwich, and so forth — and the (always difficult) task of bringing everyone back to the Haggadah after the meal. That part is vastly abbreviated here.

This is not a Haggadah for the participant who wants a seder experience down to last verse of *Dayenu*.



But that's not the intended user of the *60minute Seder*. Perhaps a shorter, more readily understood seder will engage participants — including those who have come more for the matzah balls and brisket than

the matzah and maror — to seek out more. Maybe then they won't have to be enticed with the assurance that the seder will only take an hour.

On Passover eve, after all, what's the rush?

WHILE SOME COMPLAIN about the length of the seder, others prefer to expand on the Haggadah text, inspired to add to the Exodus story and the yearning for freedom that it embodies by introducing additional readings.

Haggadah Companion: Meditations and Readings by ALDEN SOLOVY (Kavanot Press, 30 pp., \$12.99 pb) is a collection of 18 readings, with suggestions of where in the Haggadah they can be incorporated.

Solovy, a poet and liturgist originally from the Chicago area who made aliyah in 2012, offers poems with themes of freedom, social justice, past and future, and praises.

Such additional readings are well within the Passover tradition, as we are told in the Haggadah, "The more one speaks of the story, the more praiseworthy."

The background to these readings is a story of

loss that Solovy outlines in a brief introduction.

Just before Passover began one year, Solovy's wife of 27 years, mother to his daughters, died. As they prepared the seder table, his daughters added a chair, to remain empty, for their mother. This act followed a practice from the 1970s, of adding an extra chair or sheet of matzah, a reminder that Jews in the Soviet Union were not yet free to observe their religion, or attain their freedom.

Solovy's poems can be meditations or prayers, personal or universal.

"This is the season that calls us to stand together. The season that summons us to God's law, The season that leads us home."

Or this:

"This I confess to myself: 'I have taken Egypt with me.'"

And this:

"Hallelujah
A song of hope,
A harmony of justice,
A chorus of mercy."

This is a collection to review beforehand, select a reading or two, and you'll be likely to open up some fruitful discussion. ☑

By MICHAEL FOX
FILM CRITIC

AN EARNEST AMALGAM of free-association Bible story, dire disaster movie, and family melodrama, "Noah" is a more thoughtful and provocative movie than one has any right to expect.

Sure, it's ludicrous and ponderous at times, and embellished with gratuitous special effects, but it also succeeds in prodding the viewer to reflect on his or her behavior toward others and relationship to God.

DARREN ARONOFSKY, a Brooklyn Jew by birth and upbringing, has concocted a sporadically inspired film with enough fodder for a month of sermons. It's a compelling saga up until the great flood, when key plot elements collide with enough force and absurdity to sink an ark.

Metaphorically speaking, that is. After all, the species (plural) must go on.

In terms of contemporary resonance and relevance, the film's depiction of religious absolutism pushed to the point of tyrannical self-righteousness — in the name of God, of course — neatly undercuts the inclination by zealots of any faith to claim "Noah" as gospel.

REMEMBER NOAH as a mild-mannered supercarpenter and reluctant zoologist in my Hebrew school classes of yore, but you don't cast Russell Crowe to play a guy grappling with internal and existential dilemmas. His Noah is a decisive survivalist who doesn't hesitate to kill to protect his family or to fulfill God's plan.

Channeling God's wrath, humankind's fallibility

Noah can only infer and deduce that plan from the occasional wondrous sign or disturbing dream, aided by his sage, Merlin-esque grandfather, Methuselah (Anthony Hopkins).

Aronofsky and co-writer Ari Handel (who is also Jewish) resist the temptation, and the arrogance, of having God speak directly to Noah.

We have no doubt, though, that Noah is the last true believer in the Creator, as the Lord is referred to throughout the picture. Indeed, he has a real talent for channeling God's merciless fury.

In this regard Noah is reminiscent of Moses, who was up to the task of meting out vengeance — or justice, in the vernacular of the film — when the time came.

That association aside, Aronofsky's most Jewish picture remains his mystical black-and-white debut, "Pi," in which Handel has a cameo as a Kabbalah scholar.

It is much more difficult to discern a Jewish sensibility in "Noah" than it was (to summon another Biblical adaptation) to detect Mel Gibson's deep-seated anti-Semitism in "The Passion of the Christ."



FRONT ROW



"NOAH" — Russell Crowe (right) is the biblical Noah seen here leaving the ark he's building, in what Michael Fox calls a "sporadically inspired film with enough fodder for a month of sermons." ☑

THE MOST JARRING element in "Noah" from a Jewish perspective is the presence of angels, called Watchers and manifested as angry, hulking, walking, talking rock piles.

Punished by God for trying to intervene on behalf of Adam and Eve, the Watchers decide to help Noah — and, by extension, serve their Creator — build the ark and then repel the hordes who desperately attempt to board when the hard rain starts a-fallin'.

At a crucial moment, the Watchers are redeemed for their sacrifice and return to the heavens like Roman candles.

Polls report that a majority of Americans believe in angels, so for some viewers this sequence will mark the emotional high

point of the movie.

Amidst the concessions to visual-effects-driven miracles, "Noah" manages to convey the nasty, brutish world of the Bible. At the same time, it demolishes Noah's cloak of absolute good to demonstrate that no person is devoid of flaws and fallibility.

The film does not, alas, evoke the strength and power of the Bible's matriarchs, for its female characters — Noah's wife, named Naameh in the film (Jennifer Connelly), and a young girl (Emma Watson) saved and raised by the family who grows up to be Noah's son Shem's love interest — are given little to do in the second half except cry, shriek and sob.

THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE to a visual rendering of Noah's mythic saga, though,

is that we know how the reboot of civilization turned out. We're living it.

So the optimistic rainbow at the end of "Noah" has all the credibility and gravitas of a Hallmark commercial.

Whether we see the modern world as the inevitable manifestation of human nature in all its glories and depravities, or as a technologically supercharged Sodom, "Noah" makes us ponder the fate of the world as a function of our interdependence as well as our individual morality.

Should we fear God's anger and another flood, or (as the movie hints) is a self-inflicted die-off from environmental destruction just as likely?

Either way, "Noah" represents a powerful admonition to humankind.

What's intriguing about a repeat apocalypse is that it would be a communication from a God who's been silent for centuries.

The power of "Noah," one could say, is to remind us that every cloud has a silver lining. ☑



CALENDAR

April 4 - 10

Arts & Entertainment

Sun., Apr. 6 — "Fiddler's Fortunes: The Mighty Afterlife of a Broadway Musical" with Alisa Solomon, author of *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* (JEWISH STAR review, Dec. 6, 2013), 2 p.m., Spertus Institute, 610 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Tickets 312-322-1773; go to spertus.edu/fiddler

Passover

Sun., Apr. 6 — Volunteer drivers are needed to deliver Passover food parcels for Maot Chitim. Pick-up is at the warehouse, 3411 Woodhead Dr., Northbrook (north of Dundee off Huehl Rd.). Call 847-674-3224; go to maotchitim.org

Sun., Apr. 6 — Chabad of Northbrook Model Matzah Bakery for children of all ages to learn about Passover and bake their own matzah, 2-3 p.m., Northbrook Whole Foods, 840 Willow Rd; no charge.

Call 847-564-8770; go to ChabadNorthbrook.com

Speakers

Sun., Apr. 6 — Chicago YIVO Society presents "Children Must Laugh: The Medem Sanatorium", an illustrated talk by Magdalena Kozłowska of Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland, 7 p.m., Wilmette Public Library, 1242 Wilmette Ave. Call 312-408-9410. ☑