

People of the Wine Stained Book

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

If you ask yourself whether Jews really deserve the appellation "people of the book" consider the following: every synagogue is architecturally designed to highlight the ark, which contains a book; in praise of the scholar, in the Talmud it was said, upon his internment that, "a scroll of the law was buried today." And for the most famous meal of our tradition it is not enough to eat and drink and talk — one must read out of the *Haggadah*, which is a book.

A used *Haggadah* is distinguished by wine stains. For even at the moment when we symbolically reenact the Exodus we do so with a book in hand. As we remember the plagues, the books stand beside our plates. We clear them off to eat, to be sure. But the moment we are done, the books return.

Now I am sure that the Seders of the future (or the present, for all I know) will feature wine stained Kindles and iPads. Disputes about the proper melody for *Ehad Mi Yodea* will be adjudicated by googling. Still it is ultimately about the book, a bound ark that carried the essence of a tradition across lands and time to lay open in our hand as we heed the ancient rabbinic command: "Go and learn."