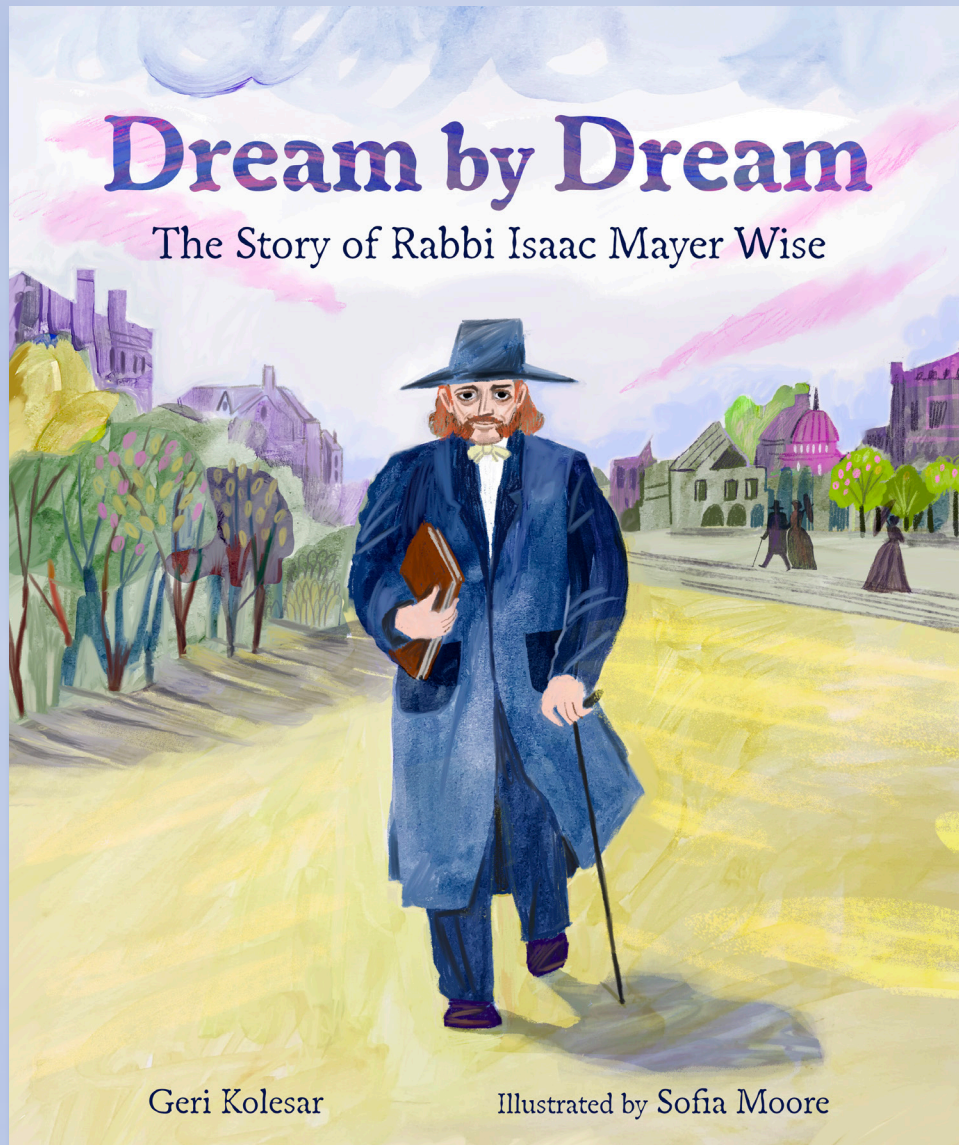


Educator Guide

Resources for Teachers, Students & Curious Minds of All Ages



Geri Kolesar

Illustrated by Sofia Moore

© KAR-BEN Publishing, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group

This guide may be downloaded for free at www.karben.com

This guide may be used expressly for educational purposes only and cannot be sold.

Please send questions or inquiries to publicity@karben.com.

HC: 978-1-7284-6793-1 | PB: 978-1-7284-6794-8

Ages 5-9 | Grades K-3

To purchase the book, call 1-800-4KARBEN or visit www.karben.com

Educator Guide by Geri Kolesar

Dream by Dream

The Story of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise

The Author

Geri Kolesar has taught environmental education in Maine, worked for a United States Senator on Capitol Hill, and practiced law in Manhattan. Geri lives in Cincinnati, Ohio where she dedicates her time to family, community and writing for children. Visit her at www.GeriKolesar.com

The Illustrator

Sofia Moore is a Ukrainian-American artist and illustrator based in Las Vegas, Nevada. She grew up reading folktales and drawing princesses on the back of textbooks. She loves painting traditionally, and layers textures on paper and digitally. Visit her at www.SofiaMooreArt.com

This Guide was created by the author, in partnership with **Educator Barbara Dragul**, who served as Adjunct Instructor of Education on the Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion. Before joining the HUC-JIR faculty in 2018, Barbara spent 25 years developing curricula and overseeing the Education and Lifelong Learning programs at Isaac M. Wise Temple in Cincinnati, Ohio.



Acknowledgements

With grateful appreciation to Rabbi Lewis H. Kamrass and Rabbi Karen Thomashow for sharing their significant expertise, time and support for this project.



Contents

Story Summary and Context	2
Pre-Reading Questions & Activities	3
Post-Reading Questions & Activities.	4 - 7
Additional Challenges for Older Students	8 - 12
Selected Bibliography	13

This Guide is a supplement for the picture book biography, *Dream by Dream: The Story of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise*. You will find a story summary and context, followed by suggested discussion questions and activities for a range of ages.

Topics Covered

This Guide can be used to facilitate meaningful age-appropriate discussion and active learning on the following topics:

- ◆ The Emergence of American Judaism
- ◆ The Jewish Immigrant Experience
- ◆ Standing Up for One’s Beliefs
- ◆ Appreciating a Community Comprised of Different Cultures and Religions

For each topic area, you will find an “enduring understanding” * (big idea) to help place book-related activities in the context of broader learning, suggested questions to stimulate discussion, and related learning activities.

Grades 1 - 6

Questions and activities are geared to students in grades 1 to 6. Educators are encouraged to adapt these materials to fit the unique developmental needs and capabilities of their students. Most questions and activities have “add-ons” for students in upper elementary grades or older.

Grades 6 - Adult

For those who wish to use this picture book as a launching pad for more advanced readers, a final section of the Guide contains additional related historical information and follow-up activities that can be used in group format or for independent study.

* “Enduring Understanding” is a term developed by nationally recognized educators Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. Simply put, enduring understandings are big ideas that students can apply more broadly to their lives outside a specific classroom or lesson.



I thought of my dream, and took courage.

~ Isaac Mayer Wise *

Dream by Dream is a picture book biography about Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, a key figure in American Jewish history. The story captures Isaac's indomitable spirit as a young boy in Bohemia in the early 1800s through his adulthood in the United States, where he inspired a new American Judaism that thrives today.

Isaac was born at a time when European Jews were treated harshly and were subject to restrictions about where they could live and go to school, and when they could marry. They were forced to pay extra taxes for simple things like meat and candles. From a young age, Isaac knew how it felt to be treated differently just because of his religion. From this grew a deep passion for fairness and religious freedom, which he carried with him his whole life.

Despite many personal and societal obstacles, young Isaac made his way to Prague where he fulfilled his dream of becoming a rabbi. He quickly learned it was hard to be a rabbi with new ideas in a place with old rules. Isaac heard about a faraway land of freedom and taught himself all he could about America. Later in life, he would proclaim he was American long before he got there.

In 1846, when Isaac arrived in New York, there were only a few trained rabbis in the whole country and there were no national Jewish organizations. Isaac was surprised to see that many Jews were not embracing the freedoms given to Americans. Even though they were in a new country, they were living separately as though they were still part of the old world. Isaac believed Judaism could thrive in America and have an equal place among other religions, but not without some changes.

The story follows how Isaac set about making his dream come true for a new American Judaism where Jews were fully engaged in American society without sacrificing their religious identity or the key pillars of their beliefs. He established a newspaper to share his new ideas, still in print today: *The American Israelite*. His congregation built Plum Street Temple on a prominent street corner across from Cincinnati City Hall and two churches, symbolizing that Judaism, like other religions, stands tall amidst American possibility. He dreamed beyond the Cincinnati community, too. He built support for a school to train new rabbis, Hebrew Union College; he founded the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now known as the Union for Reform Judaism). These institutions and resources formed the roots of a new American Judaism and they continue today as a strong foundation for Reform Judaism.

* Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (Ed. & Intro. by David Philipson). Cincinnati, OH: Leo Wise & Company, 1901, p. 25.



Be a detective. What clues can we discover from the book cover?

- ◆ Take a look at the front cover. Who do you think the man is? What is he doing?
- ◆ Describe what you see on the back cover. Can you guess what the book might be about?
- ◆ Take a look at the illustration on the front flap. What is the boy doing? Who do you think he is?
- ◆ Look for clues about when this story takes place? Do you see any cars? What are people wearing?
- ◆ The book title says “Dream by Dream.” Dreams can be thoughts and pictures that come into our minds when we sleep. Do you remember your dream from last night? Dreams can also mean a hope or goal we may have about something in the future, like “I dream of becoming a firefighter” or “I dream of getting a new bike.” Do you think this book will be about the kind of dreams we have when we are sleeping, or the kind when we are hoping for something in the future?
- ◆ **Older Students:** Read the front flap blurb. What new information did you learn? Would you change your guess about what the book will be about? Can you predict why Isaac may have wanted to bring changes to his life? To the life of others?

Let’s review some words that are important to the story:

Bohemia

When Isaac was young, Bohemia was a place in Europe ruled by the Austrian Empire. Jews were not treated as equal citizens, which was common in many places in Europe at that time (the 1800s). Today, this area is part of the Czech Republic.

Hebrew

In Prague, Isaac attended the Hebrew School, where young boys learned Jewish studies. Hebrew can be used to refer to a person of Jewish descent. Hebrew also refers to a language. It is the modern official language of Israel, as well as the ancient language used in the Old Testament.

Immigrant

Isaac was one of many Jewish immigrants in the 19th century who left their home country for America. An immigrant is a person who has come from another country to live in a new country. The United States is sometimes called a “nation of immigrants” because, except for those of Native American ancestry, we all can trace our heritage back to somewhere else – whether our ancestors came on the Mayflower or a slave ship, into Ellis Island or an airport.

Rabbi

When Isaac came to America, there were only a few ordained rabbis trained to lead congregations. Rabbi refers to a Jewish professional who has been trained and ordained for religious leadership. The official leader of a Jewish congregation, or synagogue, is called Rabbi, like Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise.

Synagogue

Isaac’s congregation built a majestic synagogue, Plum Street Temple, on a busy Cincinnati street corner across from City Hall and two churches. Synagogue is the name used for a Jewish place of worship, study, and community. Some people use the word “temple,” and some people use the Yiddish word “shul” (pronounced shool) to refer to their synagogue.



Emergence of American Judaism

*[L]iterature made me a naturalized American in the interior of Bohemia.
It inspired in me the resolution to go to America. ~ Isaac Mayer Wise **

Enduring Understanding

Jews were inspired to immigrate to America by the promise of freedom and opportunity.

Suggested Questions

- ◆ We learned that when Isaac was a young boy in Bohemia, his family did not have freedom to travel or live where they wanted just because they were Jewish. What are some things that would change if we were not free to leave our neighborhoods whenever we chose?
- ◆ The book tells us that when Isaac was young “life was not easy for Jews” who “faced hatred and harsh treatment.” Isaac knew how it felt to be treated unfairly just because of his religious beliefs. Can you think of a time when someone treated you unfairly because they thought you were different in some way? What did it feel like? What would you change?
- ◆ Isaac thought his new ideas about Jewish life would fit better in America. What did he think would be better for Jews in America?
- ◆ **Older Students:** Later in life, Isaac would look back and say he was American long before he got there. What do you think he meant by that? What does it mean to be American? What is meant by “freedom of religion”?

Related Activities

Isaac’s congregation built Plum Street Temple on a strong foundation of bricks, just like America was built on a strong foundation of freedom. In the Author’s Note, we learn that Isaac placed a Bible wrapped in an American flag under the cornerstone of Plum Street Temple. He did this as a symbol of the importance of religious freedom in America.

- ◆ Classroom Symbol – Pick a value you hold high in your classroom. For example, respect for others. Have students draw a symbol for that value and collect them in a shoebox “capsule.”
- ◆ **Older Students:** Religious Freedom/Freedom Symbol – Imagine you have been commissioned to create a modern day symbol of religious freedom or freedom, generally, for an upcoming event. What are the important things to include? How would you show those values? Write a poem to be read or song to be performed, create an object or sculpture to be included, or design a t-shirt to be worn at the event.

* Max Benjamin May, Isaac Mayer Wise: *The Founder of American Judaism: A Biography*. New York: The Knickerbacker Press (G.P. Putnam’s Sons), 1916, p.41



Jewish Immigrant Experience

Thus half sleeping, half waking, always dreaming, I crossed the ocean. ~ Isaac Mayer Wise *

Enduring Understanding

Immigrating to and becoming part of a different country involves both hardship and opportunity.

Suggested Questions

- ◆ Isaac traveled across the ocean to America with his wife and baby daughter. They sailed for two months through good weather and bad. What is something that happened to you two months ago? Imagine you were on a boat for that whole time. What are some things you would miss?
- ◆ When Isaac arrived in America, he spoke little English, he had little money, no job and no place to live. Think of a time you started a new school, or a new sport, or went to a new camp where you didn't know anyone. Was it hard? Disappointing? Surprising? Exciting?
- ◆ Isaac came to America in 1846, but immigrants still come to America today. Do you know anyone born in a different country? How do you think Isaac's experience was like that of immigrants arriving in America today? How was it different?
- ◆ **Older Students:** Once in America, Isaac started giving his sermons in English. Why do you think he felt that was important? We learned Isaac saw that Jews in Albany weren't mingling with their non-Jewish neighbors. The book tells us Isaac "thought people should get to know their neighbors, learn about different cultures and religions in their city, and pay attention to what was happening outside the Jewish community." What are some reasons it would be important for immigrants to mingle with the bigger community?

Related Activities

The United States is sometimes called a "nation of immigrants" because, unless we are of Native American ancestry, we all can trace our heritage back to somewhere else—whether our ancestors came this year or many years ago, on the Mayflower or a slave ship, into Ellis Island or an airport.

- ◆ Mapping – Ask students (or their parents) to identify from where their families immigrated. Indicate locations on a large world map using thumbtacks or stickers. For a powerful visual, consider linking with yarn or markers the emigration points to the American destinations. **Older Student Add-On:** Calculate in kilometers/miles the distances each family traveled.
- ◆ Game – Leaving one's country usually means leaving behind belongings and even family. Imagine you are moving to a new home and you can bring only three things with you. Ask students to share one object from their list. **Older Student Add-On:** Students repeat the object(s) stated before them, then add one from their own list, and so on.

* Isaac Mayer Wise, *The World of My Books* (Translated and Introduction by Albert H. Friedlander). Cincinnati, OH: American Jewish Archives, 1954, p.8.



Standing Up for One's Beliefs

*I do not wish to be rich nor honored, nor recognized, nor beloved.
I will do my duty. I will remain true to my convictions. ~ Isaac Mayer Wise **

Enduring Understanding

We can help change our communities for the better by standing up for what we believe in.

Suggested Questions

- ◆ In Isaac's time, only boys studied about Judaism. He thought it was unfair that girls weren't free to study the same way. Think of a time you felt you were left out. How did it feel? Did anyone try to help you? Think of a time a classmate was picked on or left out? Did you help? How did it make you feel?
- ◆ In the story, a boy hit Isaac because he was Jewish. Isaac hit back. His father scolded him saying Isaac would need to use his words, not his fists. What are some ways Isaac used words to fight for what he believed in? Is there a time you used your words to convince someone to change their mind? Did it work? Would you do anything differently?
- ◆ How do you treat a friend you don't agree with? A stranger? What are some reasons it might be different? Think of a time you felt you lost an argument or disagreement. Looking back, can you find anything good about that situation?
- ◆ **Older Students:** From the time he was a young boy, Isaac was motivated by his belief that people should be treated fairly. Did he change his dreams about how to make that happen? When might it be a good idea to change our dreams? Do you think Isaac did a good job of getting other people to join him in making his dreams and new ideas come true?

Related Activities

Isaac believed it was important to help others and to treat people fairly no matter what their religion was. These values were so important to Isaac that he spent his whole life fighting to defend them.

- ◆ Values - Brainstorm a list of class values, or refer to an existing list. Which is most important to you? Why might it be important to stand up for all class values, even if one is not important to you?
- ◆ Power of Words - Isaac started a newspaper to share his new ideas. Look for other examples of how reading and words played a role in Isaac's life. Has reading something changed your opinion of someone or something? Start a class "suggestion box" (**older students:** a newsletter) for new ideas, big and small.
- ◆ **Older Students:** Is there a school rule you would like to change? Design hypothetical social media posts to help inform naysayers. Discuss what social media posts and tactics seem most convincing and effective. Why?

* Isaac Mayer Wise, *Reminiscences* (Edited and Introduction by David Philipson). Cincinnati, OH: Leo Wise and Company, 190, p.265.



Appreciating a Community of Different Cultures and Religions

The world is our country and humanity is our politics. ~ Isaac Mayer Wise *

Enduring Understanding

Learning about and being with people of different cultures and religions helps us to grow and respect others' differences.

Suggested Questions

- ◆ New and different things sometimes make us feel uncomfortable. Usually, after some time, we grow to feel more comfortable. Think of a time someone new moved into your neighborhood or joined your classroom. How did you feel the first day you met compared to now? What changed?
- ◆ Do you know people who celebrate a religious holiday different from you? Have you celebrated with them? What's a new holiday you would like to learn about?
- ◆ A way to show respect for others is to make them feel welcome. How might we make new students feel welcome? Would it change if they don't speak English?
- ◆ What does it mean to "put yourself in someone else's shoes"? Why would we want to do that? **Older Student Add-On:** Is it possible to fully understand a different culture? Is it good enough to "respect" others' differences?
- ◆ **Older Students:** Isaac met with leaders of other religions and political leaders, including four U.S. Presidents. Why would it be important for Isaac to meet with non-Jewish leaders if his dream was for a new kind of Judaism?

Related Activities

- ◆ Time Travel – Isaac was born in 1819. How many years ago was that? He could be your great-great-great-great grandfather! Imagine Isaac travels in a time machine to meet us. What will be different for him when he gets here? As part of the Welcoming Committee, how could we make him feel welcome in today's world? Design an invitation, make a banner, plan an activity.
- ◆ Someone Else's Shoes – What are some ways we can put ourselves in someone else's shoes? Draw an outline of a shoe (or teachers provide a simple clip art sketch). List inside the shoe something important you'd like others to know about you or your beliefs. How could we use this new information to cooperate better? **Older Student Add-On:** String drawings together with shoelaces and create a class banner, or write a class poem using words from the drawings.
- ◆ **Older Students:** Isaac's congregation had 200 members. But Plum Street Temple was built to seat over 1000 people. Imagine those extra seats as invitations. Other than his congregants, who and what might Isaac have wanted to invite and welcome into Plum Street Temple back then? In the future?

* Jacob Rader Marcus, 1896-1995. *The Americanization of Isaac Mayer Wise*. Rev. Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1969, p.8.



I never refused to accept a challenge.

~ Isaac Mayer Wise *

Learning from Books vs. Videos

List the key things you learned from the book.

Now watch this [10-minute video](https://www.americanjewisharchives.org/snapshots/the-life-work-and-lasting-impact-of-r-isaac-mayer-wise-video/) produced by The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, illuminating the life, work and lasting impact of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise. Click the link above or type this into your browser and scroll to the bottom of the article for the video link: <https://www.americanjewisharchives.org/snapshots/the-life-work-and-lasting-impact-of-r-isaac-mayer-wise-video/>.

- ◆ After watching the video, what new things can be added to your list?
- ◆ Consider the intended audience for the picture book and for the video. Which, if any, of the new things you learned from the video do think should have been included in the book? Can you think of any reasons why that information was not included in the book?
- ◆ Do you prefer learning from videos and movies or from books? Why?

Biography Activity

Dream by Dream is a picture book biography about Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise. A biography tells the story about the life history of someone, written by another person. When someone writes about their own life, it is known as an autobiography or memoir. Isaac wrote about his life in his memoirs and in newspaper stories. He also was the author of Jewish history and religion books, novels and plays in English and in German.

In one of his memoirs, Isaac said, “It is much easier to write a long book than a short one.”** Why might that be true? How short of a “book” can you write?

- ◆ Can you write a six-word biography about Isaac?
- ◆ How about a six-word autobiography about yourself?

Learn more about writing six-word stories. Read 6-word memoirs written by others and post your own. <https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/teens/>

* Isaac M. Wise Temple. *Fascinating Facts and History about Plum Street Temple and Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise*, Cincinnati, OH (undated), p.16.

** Isaac M. Wise, *The World of My Books* (Translated and Introduction by Albert H. Friedlander). Cincinnati, OH: American Jewish Archives, 1954, p.27.



More About Isaac's Journey

Read the following additional information about Isaac's time in Bohemia, Prague, and his arrival in America. List five things you learned that were not in the book.

Which, if any, from your list do you think should have been included in the picture book? Why?

From Bohemia - Isaac was born into a Jewish community that valued learning. Only boys received formal education, but it was limited to the study of Jewish teachings. The most promising students moved on to higher learning *Yeshivahs* for advanced Jewish study. The highest level of academic achievement was a trained rabbi.

During Isaac's youth in Bohemia, Jews were not treated as equal citizens. The government imposed a quota on Jewish marriages. New marriage licenses were allowed only after a vacancy was created by death of another Jew. In addition, Jews were required to pay special taxes and lived in ghetto neighborhoods, apart from the Christian community. They had to pay entry tolls to some places, and the law limited the number of Jewish families allowed in some areas of town.

Along the Way - Isaac was on his own at age twelve. When he started his near 100-mile trek to Prague after his grandfather died, Isaac had only 27 Kreutzer in his pocket, equal to about 13 cents (\$4.25 in today's dollars). Jews in Bohemia had a practice of "Day Board," where those with resources helped students in need. When Isaac first arrived in Prague, he was assigned a different home each day of the week. Isaac never forgot this practice and the generosity of those who helped him after he landed in New York. Later, Isaac became known for his generosity, offering money, food, or lodging to people in need, and sometimes paying from his own pocket for students to attend Hebrew Union College.

To America - In Europe, Isaac and his wife walked many miles with their infant daughter to the ship named "Marie" that would take them to America. They sailed for 63 days in poor conditions. There was little to eat and many fellow passengers got sick. With no doctor on board, Isaac tended to his ailing wife and those who contracted smallpox.

In 1846, when Isaac arrived in America, Jewish life was centered on independent synagogues led by "freelance" German clergy who were not as familiar with the new world. Even though Jews had full privileges of American citizenship, most Jewish immigrants lived in isolated neighborhoods like the old world. If Judaism was going to thrive in America, Isaac believed Jews would need to integrate into modern society while at the same time protect the essential pillars of their religion.

When Isaac first arrived in America, there were no national Jewish organizations. He played a key role in creating, supporting, and staffing the central institutions that continue today. He established *The American Israelite*, a weekly Jewish newspaper still in print. He founded Hebrew Union College and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (the principal organization of Reform rabbis in North America). He also started the Union of American Hebrew Congregations with 27 member congregations, now known as the Union for Reform Judaism, which today has over 800 member congregations and is the umbrella body of the Reform Movement in North America.



More About Hebrew Union College

One of Isaac’s biggest dreams was to open a college to train new rabbis equipped to be Jewish leaders in the spirit of America. He founded the first permanent institution of higher Jewish learning in America - Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. What are some ways HUC has changed since opening its doors in 1875?

Read the information below and then complete this chart.

Then	Now
<i>Example:</i> First institution of higher Jewish learning in America	Nation’s oldest Jewish seminary

Hebrew Union College (HUC) was the first institution of higher Jewish learning in North America and today is the nation’s oldest Jewish seminary. Isaac became its first president, a position he held until his death.

In his memoirs, Isaac describes with humor the early days of the college:

[F]ourteen noisy boys, most of whom had come only to kill time and at the command of their parents. Four of them wanted to study; ten wanted to make noise...how ridiculous was this little hole-in-the-wall of a school in its not-too-bright cellar, carrying the pompous name of college. Fortunately we did not have to be ashamed in front of visitors, for none came.*

Isaac believed women and girls should have equal access to the richness Judaism offered. He not only opened doors for young girls to study alongside boys and for women to be active in synagogue life, he also opened the doors of

HUC to women, including a female in the very first class. However, it wasn’t until many years after Isaac died, that HUC ordained America’s first female rabbi, Sally Priesand, in 1972.

During Isaac’s tenure as HUC president, he awarded the title of Rabbi on 61 students. Since then, HUC has ordained many more rabbis and has grown to include campuses in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, New York, and Jerusalem.

HUC is open to people of all faiths and continues Isaac’s fight for fairness and equality. The College promotes understanding between people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Today, HUC is home to the American Jewish Archives, a museum collection, archaeological artifacts, and an extensive Jewish library which houses hundreds of thousands of volumes from the 10th Century to today, including a Rare Book Room. A far cry from Isaac’s description of HUC’s first library—a few tattered books housed in a small trunk to keep mice out!

* Isaac M. Wise., *The World of My Books* (Translated and Introduction by Albert H. Friedlander). Cincinnati, OH: American Jewish Archives, 1954, p.35.



More About Plum Street Temple

Read the following information about Plum Street Temple. If you were invited to add one new stencil or stained glass window to Plum Street Temple to represent a dream for yourself, your classroom, or your community, what would it look like?

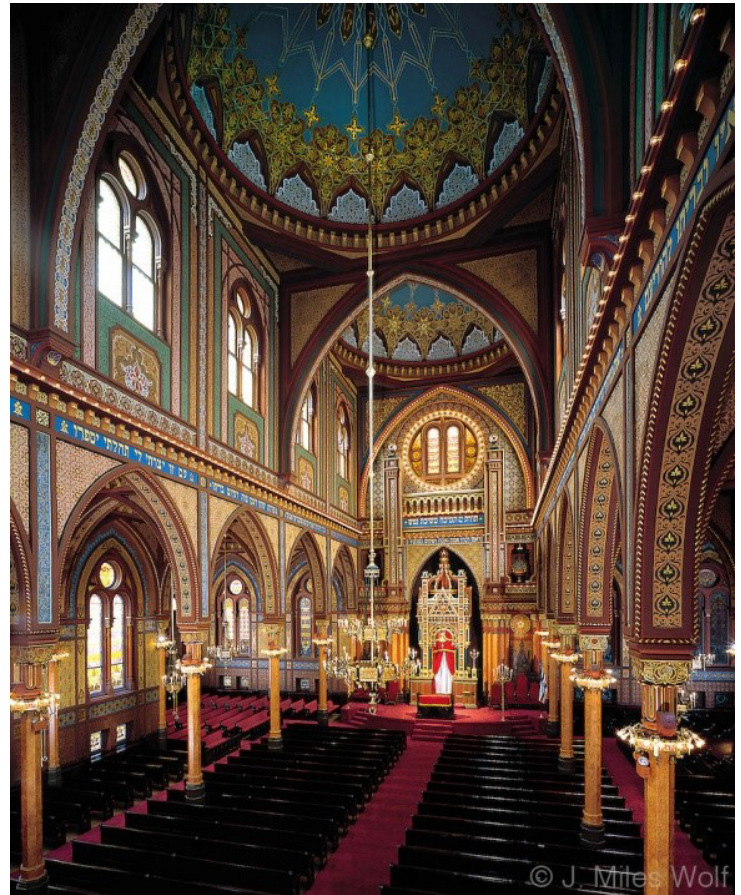
Isaac's congregation hired prominent architect James Keys Wilson to design Plum Street Temple (PST) to look like European synagogues, many of which later were destroyed in World War II.

Plum Street Temple was built on a prominent corner, across from Cincinnati's City Hall, and near a diversity of churches, standing as a "striking monument of civic and religious liberty."*

On May 12, 1865, the PST cornerstone was laid over a buried box containing a Bible wrapped in an American flag, copies of daily newspapers and the United States Constitution, a list of executive officers of the United States and Ohio, and coins and currency of the day. Just over a year later, 300 Jews and Christians together walked the streets of Cincinnati carrying the *Torah* scrolls from the old place of worship to the new. The PST doors were opened, revealing walls covered in 135 detailed, hand-painted stencils, stained glass windows, a majestic pipe organ, 13 domes and 300 lights.

Through the years, the congregation has carefully maintained PST's authentic beauty, including converting to electric the once-gaslit chandeliers and candelabra. In 1975, PST was designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of Interior. In 1995, the congregation raised funds for an extensive restoration of PST and the original organ was restored in 2005.

When Isaac arrived in Cincinnati in 1854, his congregation worshipped in a small building on



a narrow street. By the time Isaac died 46 years later, the congregation had more than doubled in size and had adopted all the leading reforms.

Today, that same congregation has grown to include one of largest temple libraries in North America and its membership of over 1000 families continues to worship in the majestic Plum Street Temple.

* Excerpted from *The Israelite*, Oct. 15, 1869 (as reported in *The Jews of Cincinnati* by Jonathan D. Sarna and Nancy H. Klein. Cincinnati, OH: Center for the Study of the American Jewish Experience, HUC-JIR, 1989, p.55).



Discussion: Uncomfortable Historical Realities

In *Dream by Dream*, we see Isaac's lifetime dedication to Judaism and to America, and his strong belief that one could be fully Jewish and American at the same time. Some modern commentators have criticized Isaac for being too narrowly focused on this goal, most notably for his stated preference for peace and unity of the country over abolition during the Civil War.

Isaac proclaimed himself a servant of peace, not war. Let's look at his own words:

Or should we choose sides with one of the parties? We cannot, not only because we abhor the idea of war, but also we have dear friends and near relations, beloved brethren and kinsmen in either section of the country, that our heart bleeds on thinking of their distress, of the misery that might befall them. Therefore, silence must henceforth be our policy....In writing these lines we feel as sorrowful and disheartened as we only once before felt—on leaving our native country. The land of our choice and adoption thus in a destructive commotion is much more than common misery to us.*

- ◆ What reasons does Isaac give for staying silent during the Civil War?
- ◆ What do you think he hoped his silence would accomplish?
- ◆ Have you ever chosen to stay neutral or silent in a disagreement on an important issue? Looking back, would you change your reaction? Why or why not?

Now let's read some words from an historian about Isaac and the times:

[L]ike so many of his fellow-citizens in the border-states...he was opposed to the ideas of both the extreme abolitionists and of the extreme secessionists....As a rabbi, he said, he had no right to use his religious office for political purposes. After the war ended, Wise was willing to admit that abolition of slavery had been a desirable and progressive step.**

- ◆ Did you learn any new reasons for Isaac's position of silence?
- ◆ Is Isaac's focus on peace and unity the same as saying he was pro-slavery?
- ◆ The commentator says a focus on peace and unity was typical of those in "border-states." Isaac lived in Ohio, just across the river from the southern state of Kentucky. Why might someone in a border-state feel differently than someone squarely in the north or south?

As we learned, Isaac played a central role in creating institutions that form the foundation of Reform Judaism today. During a time when the country was still divided between north and south, he included the word "union" in The **Union** of American Hebrew Congregations (now called the Union for Reform Judaism), and the Hebrew **Union** College, the seminary to train new rabbis.

- ◆ What do you think of when you hear the word "union"?
- ◆ Why do you think Isaac used the word "union" in the names of these Jewish institutions?
- ◆ When we study leaders from the past, should we view their actions by today's standards or in the context of the standards of their time? Or some combination of both?

* Bertram W. Korn, "Isaac Mayer Wise on the Civil War," Hebrew Union College Annual, v.20 (1947), p.636, (quoting Isaac Mayer Wise, "Silence, our Policy," published in The Israelite, April 19, 1861).

** Korn, pp.637-38.



We will see each other again in the libraries...

~ Isaac Mayer Wise *

A lot is written about Isaac Mayer Wise, including books he authored about his own philosophy and experiences. Some of those books are listed below. In addition, an extensive catalogue of works by and about him is available through the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: <http://americanjewisharchives.org/>.

James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise: His Life, Work and Thought*. New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965.

Max Benjamin May, *Isaac Mayer Wise: The Founder of American Judaism; a Biography*. New York: The Knickerbacher Press (G.P. Putnam's Sons), 1916.

Sefton D. Temkin, *Creating American Reform Judaism: The Life and Times of Isaac Mayer Wise*. Oxford, UK: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998.

Steven Weisman, *The Chosen Wars: How Judaism Became an American Religion*. Simon & Schuster, 2018.

Isaac M. Wise, *Reminiscences* (Edited and Introduction by David Philipson). Cincinnati, OH: Leo Wise and Company, 1901.

Isaac M. Wise, *The World of My Books* (Translated and Introduction by Albert H. Friedlander). Cincinnati, OH: American Jewish Archives, 1954.

* Isaac M. Wise, *The World of My Books* (Translated and Introduction by Albert H. Friedlander). Cincinnati, OH: American Jewish Archives, 1954, p.11.

What's your dream?



geRi KoLesar

children's book author
gerikolesar.com