



Rethinking Schools Appropriates Judaism to Undermine Jewish Identity

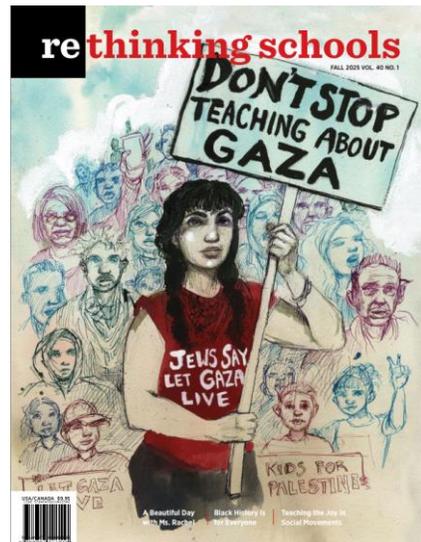
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It was time for Yachatz -- the part of the Passover seder where we break the middle matzah as a reminder that not everyone is free, that freedom is not yet whole. We spoke aloud about the people of Palestine, who are not yet free, and how this communal act could be both a reminder and a call to stand up and fight.¹

This quote in the Fall 2025 issue of Rethinking Schools magazine entitled, *Don't Stop Teaching about Gaza*, is one of many examples of how the social justice organization appropriates Judaism to demonize the Jewish state and Jews. In their first magazine, *Teaching Palestine*, devoted to delegitimizing Israel published in February 2025, Rethinking Schools employed the usual colonial settler, apartheid charges against Israel. The latest magazine takes a different approach by highlighting authors claiming Jewish identity, and therefore authority in defining Jewish identity, allowing Rethinking Schools to reject charges of antisemitism. The magazine cover makes this clear: a young woman stands among activists, holding a sign that reads "Don't Stop Teaching About Gaza" wearing

a shirt that says, "Jews Say Let Gaza Live." In appropriating Jewish identity, Rethinking Schools can feed the lie that antizionism is not the latest hate movement against Jews but, rather, a noble social justice cause.



In “Families Talk About Palestine: A Liberatory Approach to Learning,” author Hannah Halpern relates how she led a three-session educational series for

Jewish children, which culminated in a “Family Freedom Seder.” The Seder is the ritual service held the first two nights of Passover in the diaspora (in Israel, one Seder is observed). Halpern’s sessions included using inaccurate maps that purport to show Palestinian loss of land and encourage children to become activists. Halpern describes an activity in which Jewish children are asked to find peers who like art, play an instrument, and have attended a protest—implicitly presenting protesting as a typical childhood activity.ⁱⁱ Following this activity, the students had a “heartfelt discussion of activism and ways [they] can show up and take action for what’s right” and that “it was time to engage in activism of [their] own.”ⁱⁱⁱ



Beyond pushing children to become activists, the activity co-opts the meaning of the Seder. The Seder commemorates the Exodus of the formerly enslaved Israelites from Egypt to the Land of Israel and celebrates this key event in the formation of the Jewish people. The Seder, in retelling the story of the Israelites’ return to the Land of Israel, is the ultimate Zionist story and is so central to Jewish identity that over 60% of American Jews attend one annually.^{iv} Rethinking Schools, however, takes a ritual central to Judaism and uses it to promote “Palestinian liberation.”

In another article, “How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles to Take a Stand on Palestine,” Jewish teacher and United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) member, Shannon Paaske describes her nominal connection to her Jewish identity and then her activism on behalf of Palestine in the teachers’ union. Paaske admits she does not have much connection to her heritage saying, “my Jewish identity was something that had felt ambiguous for most of my early life.”^v Describing why she turned down her grandmother’s offer to pay for a trip to Israel, she writes, “the choice did not hold any attraction. I knew there was violence there, I did not look forward to the desert climate, and exploring my roots was not a priority at the time. Israel remained a vaguely exotic place in my mind, thought of during Passover seder, if at all.”^{vi} Interestingly, even Paaske who admits to not being connected to her Jewish heritage, still identifies the Passover Seder as formative to Jewish identity.

After the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack on Israel, Paaske was perplexed by those who checked in with her to see how she was doing. Paaske writes, “I found it ridiculous when friends and family members ‘checked in’ with me after October 7. What was happening in the Middle East was something I had ‘checked out’ of my whole life.”^{vii} When a fellow teacher asked her about proposing a ceasefire motion at one of the union’s meetings, Paaske initially refused. She says, “I thought our union had more pressing issues to take on, and we couldn’t afford to divide people over something that didn’t directly affect us.”^{viii} However, she was inspired to change her stance after seeing that “Israel’s merciless bombing campaign was destroying hospitals, schools, and thousands of lives. I kept hearing about hidden Hamas tunnels, and Hamas using innocent civilians as human shields as the reason for the nonsensical brutality, but news outlets like



Democracy Now! helped me see that there was another side to the story.”^{ix} Paaske shockingly dismisses and even justifies Hamas’ tunnels and use of human shields while sharing her information source is a biased media outlet. Yet, for all the distancing Paaske does from her Jewish heritage, she recounts how she tokenized herself to support the antizionist movement.

In describing her efforts to advance anti-Israel resolutions, Paaske portrays herself and her allies as a diverse coalition fighting against powerful Jewish organizations. She stresses the ethnicity of her fellow activists, specifically naming the other like-minded Jewish union members for the purpose of emphasizing an anti-Zionist Jewish identity. In the debate over what resources the union would share defining antisemitism, Paaske advocates for using PARCEO’s “Combating Antisemitism through a Lens of Collective Liberation.”^x PARCEO, which was founded by members of [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), defines antisemitism as purely a white supremacist phenomenon ignoring antisemitism from other sources while denying Zionism as being integral to Jewish identity thus undermining efforts to confront anti-Jewish hatred honestly.

Rethinking Schools takes its appropriation of Jewish identity and experience one step further through its use of Holocaust inversion. Employing the moral imperative from the Holocaust, “never again,” Rethinking Schools’ editors appropriate the phrase to falsely accuse the Jewish state of genocide.^{xi} Holocaust inversion not only accuses the Jewish people of committing the worst crime committed against them but also universalizes the Holocaust’s “lessons,” removing the particularities of antisemitism including its nature to morph and change over time.

In an article entitled, “What’s Missing in Holocaust Education?” authors Marcy Winograd and Rick Chertoff argue that Holocaust education is deeply flawed for not focusing enough on Palestinians. Winograd and Chertoff state: “In a comparative curriculum, students could learn of the cycle of abuse – Germany exterminating Jews, Zionist militias slaughtering Palestinians – and the inherent danger in a state defined by ethnic superiority.”^{xii} In their historical narrative, Zionists, i.e. Jews, are the next iteration of the Nazis, and Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, is a fascist ethnostate. They argue that Holocaust education should emphasize “never again for anyone,” by which they mean that Holocaust education should condemn Israel for committing “genocide” against the Palestinians.^{xiii} Winograd and Chertoff fail to acknowledge that, although Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, enjoy equal rights. They also show little concern for states that explicitly ground their identity in ethnic superiority and systematically violate the rights of their minority populations. Moreover, falsely equating the planned annihilation of more than six million Jews during the Holocaust with the deaths of Palestinians as result of Hamas’ October 7 massacre serves as a modern-day blood libel.





Since the October 7 attack, radical activists have increasingly appropriated elements of Judaism to attack Israel and Jews while shielding themselves from accusations of antisemitism. In doing so, they advance a different form of anti-Jewish bigotry called antizionism, which is the effort to delegitimize Jewish peoplehood. From appropriating rituals like the Passover Seder to inverting the Holocaust, antizionist

“educators” leave no part of Jewish experience untouched in their effort to indoctrinate American students, making *Rethinking Schools’ Don’t Stop Teaching About Gaza* wholly inappropriate for K–12 classrooms.

ⁱ Halpern, H. (Fall 2025). “Families Talk About Palestine: A Liberatory Approach to Learning.” *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 10

ⁱⁱ Halpern, H. (Fall 2025). “Families Talk About Palestine: A Liberatory Approach to Learning.” *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 13

ⁱⁱⁱ Halpern, H. (Fall 2025). “Families Talk About Palestine: A Liberatory Approach to Learning.” *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 13

^{iv} Pew Research Center (2021, May 11). *Jewish Practices and Customs*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-practices-and-customs/>

^v Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 18

^{vi} Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 18

^{vii} Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 18-19

^{viii} Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 19

^{ix} Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 19

^x Paaske, S. (Fall 2025). How Rank-and-File Organizing Pushed United Teachers Los Angeles. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 22

^{xi} Dathan, M (2025, September 8). *Israel is not Committing Genocide in Gaza, government concludes*. The Times. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/israel-war-gaza-not-genocide-david-lammy-22wdsmt90>

^{xii} Winograd M. & Chertoff R. (Fall 2025). What’s Missing in Holocaust Education. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 29

^{xiii} Winograd M. & Chertoff R. (Fall 2025). What’s Missing in Holocaust Education. *Rethinking Schools*, 40(1), 29