

Haggadah Selections for Women's Mini Seder 2020

Brought to you by NCJW Atlanta and Congregation Or Hadash

March 26, 2020

A Different Seder

Elaine Moise and Rebecca Schwartz, *The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah*, Palo Alto, CA, 1995



At all other Seders, we hear the stories of our forefathers, but the voices of our mothers are silent.

Tonight they will be heard.

At all other Seders the heroic deeds of our sisters Miriam, Yocheved, Shifrah and Pu'ah are kept hidden.

Tonight we will celebrate their courage.

At all other Seders we denounce the Pharaoh of the past.

Tonight we will also examine the pharaohs of our own day.

At all other Seders we rejoice only in our liberation as a people.

Tonight we also celebrate our empowerment as Jewish women.

Ready?

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, *Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach*

"So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders." –Exodus 12:34

You'll need to travel light.
Take what you can carry: a book, a poem,
a battered tin cup, your child strapped
to your chest, clutching your necklace
in one hot possessive fist.

So the dough isn't ready. So your heart
isn't ready. You haven't said goodbye
to the places where you hid as a child,
to the friends who aren't interested in the journey,
to the graves you've tended.

But if you wait until you feel fully ready
you may never take the leap at all
and Infinity is calling you forth
out of this birth canal
and into the future's wide expanse.

Learn to improvise flat cakes without yeast.
Learn to ready new alphabets.
Wear God like a cloak
and stride forth with confidence.
You won't know where you're going

but you have the words of our sages,
the songs of our mothers, the inspiration
wrapped in your kneading bowl. Trust
that what you carry will sustain you
and take the first step out the door.

Ur'chatz – Washing of the Hands

Passover Haggadah, 1999, Temple Israel, Boston, Massachusetts

As we wash our hands, we look at them,
noticing the soft skin, or the bitten cuticles,
or the lines that have come from long years of living.

These are the hands that comfort, that bless
that type on a computer, that plant seeds,
that make paper airplanes, that test for fever.

We wash these hands with water,
symbol of the waters of Miriam's Well,
the waters that parted for the Israelites as they fled *Mitzrayim*,
the waters of the womb that brings forth life.

*Using a small pitcher of water and a bowl, the leader symbolically pours
water over her hands for all those present.*



Miriam's Cup

Under the Wings of Sh'chinah Women's Seder

Sisterhood of Shaare Emeth, Women of Reform Judaism (Eemunah Herzog and *The Journey Continues*)

We place Miriam's Cup on the Seder table and we remember the miracles of the Israelites' journey through the desert. For as long as Miriam was alive, a well of water was found wherever she went. What would otherwise have been uninhabitable land became a temporary home for our mothers and fathers.

Eliyahu's Cup reminds us of the redemption to come, whereas Miriam's Cup reminds us of the redemption that is with us at all times as long as we stay connected to *Sh'chinah*, the Sacred Feminine.



Miriam's cup reminds us to stand up for our nurturing values, to bring life and peace to the desolate landscape of destruction and war. As we pour the clean and life-giving water into Miriam's Cup, we visualize connecting to her "Well" spiritually. We will remember that no matter how difficult the many demands of our daily lives are, we can always access her nourishing waters with us.

Just as everyone has poured some water into Miriam's Cup, so too, the presence of each person at the table will add something unique to the Seder. On another level, when Miriam's Cup is filled with water from each person's glass, we are enacting our hope of refilling the magical healing Well of Miriam through inclusiveness and collectivity.

Raise the goblet and recite:

Zot Kos Miryam, kos mayim chayim. Zeicher I'tzi-at Mitzrayim.

This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters. Let us remember the Exodus from *Mitzrayim*.

Miriam's Song" by Debbie Friedman

Chorus:

And the women dancing with their timbrels
Followed Miriam as she sang her song.
Sing a Song to the One we have exalted
Miriam and the women danced,
and danced the whole night long.

Miriam was a weaver of unique variety.
The tapestry she wove was one which sang our history.
With every strand and every thread she crafted her delight;
A woman touched with spirit, she dances toward the light. (Chorus)

When Miriam stood upon the shore and gazed across the sea
The wonder of this miracle she soon came to believe.
Whoever thought the sea would part with an outstretched hand
And we would pass to freedom and march to the Promised Land? (Chorus)

So Miriam the prophet took the timbrel in her hand
And all the women followed her just as she had planned.
Miriam raised her voice in song, she sang with all her might.
We've just lived through a miracle, we're going to dance tonight.



Yachatz – Breaking of the Middle Matzah

The Journey Continues - Ma'yan Passover Haggadah, Edited by Tamara Cohen, Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell,
Debbie Friedman, Ronnie M. Horn, 1998



As we break the middle matzah, we hide one portion. This hidden piece of matzah, called the afikoman, must be found and shared at the end of the meal in order to complete the Seder. The following is a kavana, an intention, reflecting one possible meaning for this symbolic act. We follow the kavana by the Mi Shebeirach, based on the traditional prayer for healing.

Some do not get the chance to rise and spread out like golden loaves of challah, filled with sweet raisins and crowned with shiny braids.

Rushed, neglected, not kneaded by caring hands, we grow up afraid that any touch might cause a break. There are some ingredients we never receive.

Tonight, let us bless our cracked surfaces and sharp edges, unafraid to see our brittleness and brave enough to see our beauty.

Reaching for wholeness, let us piece together the parts of ourselves we have found, and honour all that is still hidden.

Prayer for Healing

Mi shebeirach avoteinu, M'kor Habracha l'imoteinu
May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing
And let us say: Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu, M'kor Habracha l'avoteinu
Bless those in need of healing with refua sh'leima,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit
And let us say: Amen.

The Four Questions We Ask as Sisters of NCJW

Why is this night different from all other nights?

Tonight, we gather as women and shed our light on the story of the Exodus.

Why is this night both bitter and sweet?

The struggle for women's dignity, equality and security is bitter; the results of our advocacy and service are sweet.

Why on this night do we drink the wine of our history?

We rejoice in the re-experiencing of the liberation in our own day.

Why on this night do we recline?

We recline on this night for the unhurried telling of the legacy of Miriam.

Four Additional Questions

Why do we celebrate a Women's Seder?

We hold this Sisterhood Seder to celebrate the role which women played in the Exodus from Egypt, and our continuous role in preserving and perpetuating Jewish heritage.

Why can we now feel joyous at this occasion?

Because we as women have prepared our own rituals and are reading about women who have contributed to these rituals.

Why at this Seder do we dip twice?

We dip twice to remember the slavery our foremothers faced, both as Jews and as women.

Why do we reflect and recline?

Because we acknowledge, with pride, the accomplishments of our Jewish sisters throughout history who have touched the world with their healing powers, facilitated communications between adversaries, nurtured their families, cared for the disabled, and, through teaching, ensured that the Exodus story would be passed down from generation to generation.

Daughters of Sarah

Where are the daughters of Sarah?

Sarah, the matriarch, is the mother of all Jewish women, for the line of the covenant is traced through her flesh. A woman of wisdom and beauty, she was a priestess in her own right. Perhaps more than anything else, Sarah is remembered for her laughter. In this way, she teaches us to take note of all the joys of life.

All Jewish women, everywhere – we are Sarah's daughters.

Are Miriam's daughters here?

Miriam led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and danced at the shores of the sea. Sister of Moses and Aaron, she was a prophetess, a leader, and a great musician. Miriam inspires us to celebrate our victories, despite the bitter oppression we have endured.

Every Jewish woman who raises her voice or instrument in song and music, or who moves her body in dance and celebration – we are Miriam's daughters.

The daughters of Ruth: Where are they?

Ruth, a Moabite who married into an Israelite family, followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to the Land of Israel after the death of her husband. Hers was a free choice to follow a woman she loved. Ruth told Naomi, "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (Ruth 1:16)

Every woman who makes the difficult choice to cast her lot with the Jewish people, and every woman who chooses to follow other women, out of loyalty or out of love – we are Ruth's daughters.

The Modern Plagues

At Pesach, we examine plagues, not only those of Egypt, but those which afflict our own generation.

Discrimination. In many places in the world, even in our own country, people face discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, or age.

All: Today, we affirm that all people should have the right to equal treatment under the law.

Poisoning of our Earth. We have polluted our environment instead of protecting it.

All: Today, we affirm that the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat – the good earth around us – all these should be humanity's heritage.

Ravages of War. In too many places, the death and destruction of war never ceases.

All: Today, we affirm that the people of the world should be able to live together peacefully both within a nation and across borders.

Economic Justice. Too often our nation's policies have denied the poor dignity and opportunity, and have left them out in the streets, homeless.

All: Today, we affirm that even the poorest among us deserve both dignity and the fulfillment of basic human needs, including shelter.

Chemical Dependency. For some people, alcohol or drugs have been abused to the point where people's humanity is under thrall to these chemicals.

All: Today we affirm at this Seder that wine must never be more than a symbol of joy and sanctification, it must never become a Pharaoh of our own creation.

World Hunger. This year, hundreds of thousands are dying from starvation as famine spreads through many areas in the Third World.

Today, we affirm that no one should ever have to feel the pangs of hunger.

Religious Intolerance. We are reminded that the roots of religious intolerance still run deep in this country.

All: Today we affirm that this nation was founded on the principles of freedom and equality for all religions.

Unemployment. Our society has forced degradation upon the millions of perennially unemployed.

All: Today, we affirm that being able to earn one's own livelihood is essential to human dignity.

Denial of Human Rights. Oppressive regimes seek to extinguish the light of freedom in many nations.

All: Today, we affirm that freedom shall never perish for any of God's children.

Threat of Nuclear Holocaust. We have given our children an inheritance of nightmares, the nightmare of a nuclear cloud constantly over their heads.

All: Today, we affirm that our children deserve dreams of a peaceful future.



We add to this list, the Egg, the Orange, and the Olive.

Egg (*Raise the egg.*)

The egg symbolizes not only Passover, but also spring, birth and womanhood. The round smoothness of the egg reminds us of the continuity of life, and the cyclical nature of rebirth. The egg is a quintessentially female symbol, and it holds within it the promise of new life. As we examine our lives and the many different paths we follow, let us never lose sight of the idea of the egg - filled with potential waiting for the right moment to appear. While the egg, when new, may be fragile, when placed in boiling water it becomes firmer. So, too, do we gain strength from adversity and experience.



Orange (*Raise the orange.*)

In Celebration of Jewish Women: Our Everyday Miracles, Albuquerque, Community Jewish Women's Seder, March 26, 2009

We use the orange to represent inclusion - the variety of people, perspectives and expressions symbolized by its many segments and seeds. Susannah Heschel, a respected Jewish teacher, encountered bread on a seder plate intended to symbolize solidarity with Jewish lesbians. She transformed the bread to an orange (kosher for Pesach) and extended it to include all who are marginalized in the Jewish community - particularly adding "widows." She felt the orange suggested the fruitfulness of all Jews when each and every one of us are contributing and active members of Jewish life.



And the Olive (*Raise the olive.*)

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach

The final item on our Seder plate is an olive. After the Flood, Noah's dove brought back an olive branch as a sign that the earth was again habitable. Today ancient olive groves are destroyed by violence, making a powerful symbol of peace into a casualty of war. We keep an olive on our Seder plate as an embodied prayer for peace, in the Middle East and every place where war destroys lives, hopes, and the freedoms we celebrate tonight.



Open the Door for Miriam, the Prophetess

*In Celebration of Jewish Women: Our Everyday Miracles, Albuquerque, Community Jewish Women's Seder
March 26, 2009*

Open the door.

We are mindful that doors can be open, inviting and hospitable. They can also be closed, limiting and rejecting. Let us commit ourselves to fashioning a world that is full of open doors.

Let us take a few moments to think about women who opened doors for us, who inspired us, who helped us – women we know personally or who we admire from afar.

Close the door.

The Fourth Cup: A Cup of Peace and A Cup of Challenge

*In Celebration of Jewish Women: Our Everyday Miracles, Albuquerque, Community Jewish Women's Seder
March 26, 2009; and Temple Beth Israel, Women of Reform Judaism Women's Seder, March 22, 2015*

This fourth cup of wine is dedicated to the women of the future who will have to rise to the challenge of this century. They can be proud of their predecessors who have helped pave the way. We, tonight, celebrate our past, and the potential of women to come.

This last cup can also be thought of as the Cup of Peace. This cup is dedicated to the hope of peace in our own communities, in the Middle East, and everywhere. We are obligated each year to tell this story as if we ourselves had gone forth from *Mitzrayim*. But let us not forget those who remain behind in lands of war and slavery.



Everyone raises her fourth cup of wine or juice and recites:

***Baruch At, Adonai Eloheinu, Shomeret ha-olam, borei p'ri hagafen.
You are Blessed, O God, Guardian of Time and Space, Who creates
the fruit of the vine.***

Drink the fourth cup of wine or juice.