

Ohel Sholom Temple & Congregation Beth El Sisterhoods present



Honoring the Women Who Led Us Out of Egypt



2019 Women's Seder

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Welcome

Leader: Welcome to Ohef Sholom Temple! Tonight we gather together to celebrate Passover, our holiday of freedom. We will savor delicious North African cuisine to acknowledge the culture and geography of where our people came from; enjoy four glasses of wine and/or mint tea; and tell the story of our ancestors' liberation from slavery in Egypt. We sincerely appreciate the presence of our clergy who have joined us tonight.

This women's seder seeks out female solidarity. For the first year, Ohef Sholom and Beth El's Sisterhoods planned this seder together. It is our belief that we can be strengthened by our commonalities, and can make space to understand our differences. Let us together sing the song of welcome and joy of being together, Hineh Ma Tov. Do note that instead of the usual words "shevet achim" which means "brothers and sisters", we have changed the wording to "shevet achayot" which means "sisters".

Hineh Ma Tov

Hineh ma tov uma na'im (How good & pleasant it is,)

Shevet ACHAYOT gam yachad (For sisters to sit together.)

Hineh ma tov uma na'im (How good & pleasant it is,)

Shevet ACHAYOT gam yachad (For sisters to sit together.)

Chorus

Hineh ma tov (How good it is)

Shevet ACHAYOT gam yachad (For sisters to sit together.)

Tonight we welcome you to reflect on the meaning of freedom in our lives and histories. We will consider our blessings, pledge to work harder at freeing those who still suffer, and begin to cast off that which oppresses us so we can fulfill the central imperative of the holiday: to see ourselves as if we had personally gone forth out of Egypt.

This is an interactive seder, so we will take turns reading long paragraphs or sections, beginning with the person to my left.



Opening Meditation

We come together from our separate lives, each of us bringing our concerns, our preoccupations, our hopes, and our dreams. We are not yet fully present: The traffic, the last-minute cooking, the tearful goodbye from our children, the final details still cling to us. Our bodies hold the rush of the past few hours.

It is time now to let go of these pressures and really arrive at this seder. We do this by becoming present together. Make yourself comfortable; you can close your eyes if you wish. Take a few deep breaths, and as you exhale, let go of the tensions in your body. You'll be in to quiet within.

When you're ready, repeat silently to yourself or visualize the word, "Hineni" or "Here I am". Hineni is used in the Torah to signify being present in mind, body, and spirit. It means settling into where we are and simply being "here".

Let the word become filled with your breath. Merge with it, so you experience being fully present. When a thought arises, just notice it and return to **hineni** again and again. Let yourself be held in the state of hineni.

Slowly open your eyes, and look around the room at the women around you. Now, we begin our journey together.

--Meditation by Nan Fink Gefen



Why Is This Night Different From All Other Seder Nights?

The timing of a women's seder—just before Passover - puts it a bit on the margin, supplementing, and serving as an implicit commentary on the traditional seder experience. Over the last 40 years, women's seders have reimagined a ritual that had largely sidelined women in the Bible, Haggadah, and the seder ceremony itself; traditionally, while men would do the praying, reciting, recounting, and discussing, women would do the cooking, serving, clearing, and cleaning.

A women's seder seeks to build camaraderie, and to weave to locate women in the story, not only the story of the liberation of the Israelites in Egypt but the continuing, evolving story of liberation of women everywhere.

At all other Seders, we hear the stories of our forefathers, but not the voices of our mothers.

[In Unison]

Tonight we will tell them.

At all other Seders the heroic deeds of our sisters Miriam and Yocheved - sister and mother of Moses, and Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who saved children from Pharaoh's cruelty – are not mentioned.

Tonight we will celebrate their courage.



A Women's Seder

It starts a week before.
Each drawer, each shelf,
 is stripped and scrubbed;
A rite performed each spring
 since Pharaoh forced
The chosen ones to flee
 before their bread could rise.
I wash a dish, streaked black
 from last year's news
And filled with years of
 family seders,
And think of Miriam,
The woman who began
Our journey to the promised land.
Did she lament the flat and
 tasteless bread
She served her men?
Or did she know that we
 would share her deed
Each spring as we recall
 her exodus from bondage,
That has still to be complete?
As smells of spring
 and chicken soup mix
 pleasingly,
I peel an apple, chop the nuts,
 and sip the wine,

Remembering the bricks
 that stood between
Each ghetto girl and study
 of the Torah.
The shankbone roasts
 and fills the air
Within my modern home
With smells of sacrifice
 that women made
So that there would be seders
 every year.
I fill a dish with bitter herbs,
But feel no bitterness,
Because I know that
 each small task links me
With every Hebrew woman
 who prepared
A seder meal since God proclaimed
 that Jews
Should celebrate their freedom
 every year.
Surely God never meant
For women to be passed over.

[San Diego Women's Haggadah]



Miriam's Cup Ritual for the Seder

Leader: The Miriam's Cup on your table is currently empty. Please pour some of the water from your water cup into the Miriam's Cup, as you are a descendent of Miriam and play an important role in remembering her and retelling her story.

We fill Miriam's cup with water to honor her role in ensuring the survival of the Jewish people. We fill the cup of Miriam with water, so that our daughters may continue to draw from the strength and wisdom of our heritage. We place Miriam's cup on our seder table to honor the important role of Jewish women in our tradition and history.

Like Miriam, Jewish women in all generations have been essential for the continuity of our people. As keepers of traditions in the home, women passed down songs and stories, rituals and recipes, from mother to child, from generation to generation.

Ancient Jewish legend teaches us that a miraculous well accompanied the Hebrews throughout their journey in the desert, providing them with water.

The well was given by God to Miriam, the prophetess, sister and protector of Moses, to honor her bravery and devotion to her family and people. The well miraculously followed the Israelites throughout their desert wanderings.

Both Miriam and her well were spiritual oases in the desert, sources of sustenance and healing. Her words of comfort gave the Hebrews the faith and confidence to overcome the hardships of the Exodus.

[One person at the table lifts Miriam's cup and all say in unison]

Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayyim Hayyim. Zakheir l'tzi-at Mitzrayim. This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters.

Let us remember the going out from Egypt.

[Blessing for drinking water in unison]

Barukh Atah Adonay, Eloheynu Melekh ha-Olam, she-ha-kol n'hi-ye bi-d'varo!

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, by Whose word everything is created.



Kadesh - Sanctifying the Day

As we enter a holy time, we greet the darkness by kindling lights. Traditionally we light at least two candles and recite a blessing. Our act of kindling these lights links us to the Divine, whose work of Creation began with the words, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). The candles reflect both the light of Creation and the light of God's presence in our world.

Candle lighting has traditionally fallen to women in Jewish practice. Lighting the candles helps usher light into the darkness and allows us to begin our holidays peacefully. This poem, written by Hannah Senesch, is an excellent way to help usher in that feeling:

[In Unison]

May the light of the candles we kindle together tonight bring radiance to all who live in darkness.

May this season, marking the deliverance of our people from Pharaoh, rouse us against anyone who keeps others in servitude. In gratitude for the freedom we enjoy, may we strive to bring about the liberation of all people everywhere.

Lighting these candles, we create the sacred space of the Festival of Freedom; we sanctify the coming-together of our community.

[One person at each table, please light the candles and in unison say]

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Tov.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Breath of Life, who sanctifies us with your commandment to kindle the holiday lights.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai, sovereign of all worlds, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.



Four Cups of Wine (and/or Mint Tea)

Traditionally each of the cups of wine are linked to one of the statements of redemption spoken by God in the Torah "I will bring you out." "I will deliver you." "I will redeem you." "I will gather you to me." (Exodus 6:6-7).

However two 16th century mystic rabbis identify the Four Cups with the Four Matriarchs of Israel. Each cup we enjoy tonight will represent our Four Mothers – Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah - whose virtue caused God to liberate us from slavery.

First Cup of Wine

This first cup of wine represents Sarah, who was the mother of a community of converts, believers by choice.

This cup of wine corresponds to the first statement, "I will bring you out of slavery". For women the first step to freedom was equality in the law. The struggle for this freedom began in the desert, when the daughters of Zelephachad demanded their right on inheritance. It continues today, as there are still countries in the world where women do not have the right to vote. This cup of wine is dedicated to all of those women, the daughters of Zelephachad, the Suffragettes and modern campaigners, who have fought for women's equality in the law.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

[Drink the first cup of wine]



Seder Symbols and the Blessing Over the Meal

Because tonight is a seder before Passover, the symbols of a traditional Passover seder have been re-imagined. First we will describe them, say the blessings over the food, matzah, maror, and Hillel sandwich, and then you are free to enjoy the food throughout the seder.

The Maror and Hazeret, endive with roasted pine nuts & horseradish cheddar, symbolizes the the bitterness and harshness of the slavery that the Hebrews endured in Egypt.

The Haroset, date and apricot ball, represents the bricks and mortar we made in ancient times, and the new structures we are beginning to build in our lives today.

The Lamb Shank, roasted beet, black olive & goat cheese salad, which represents the sacrifices we have made to survive. Before the tenth plague, our people slaughtered lambs and marked our doors with blood: because of this marking, the Angel of Death passed over our homes and our first-born were spared.

The Karpas, tabbouleh, symbolizes the wonderful bounty of vegetables and fruits in the springtime harvest. It also represents the period of Jewish flourishing before the period of Egyptian slavery began. This flourishing is meant both metaphorically and literally—in the Torah, we are told that the Israelites numbered 70 individuals when Jacob and his family descended into Egypt. A few generations later, due to a prodigious birth rate, they consisted of hundreds of thousands.

Salt water of our tears, both then and now, as well as the **orange**, is represented by **dark chocolate covered dried orange bites**. Oranges represent all who were not explicitly present in the Passover story. They symbolize the abundant diversity of Creation; it is better when everyone gets a chance to participate, and everyone benefits when all are included. The orange is a symbol of Judaism's ability to adapt and thrive.

The Egg, represented by a **roasted eggplant with tahina dressing and pomegranate seeds**, symbolizes creative power, our rebirth.



Hamotzi

The familiar hamotzi blessing marks the formal start of the meal. Because we are using matzah instead of bread, we add a blessing celebrating this mitzvah.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz.

We praise God, Ruler of Everything, who brings bread from the land.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al achilat matzah.

We praise God, Ruler of Everything, who made us holy through obligations, commanding us to eat matzah.

Maror

Maror represents the bitterness of bondage.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al achilat maror.

Blessed are you, Adonai, sovereign of all worlds, who sanctifies us with the commandment to eat the bitter herb.

[Taste the endive with roasted pine nuts & horseradish cheddar]

Hillel Sandwich

The sage Hillel originated the tradition of eating matzah and maror together, combining the bread of liberation with a remembrance of the bitterness of slavery.

[Combine the horseradish cheese, date and apricot ball, and the matzah and eat them together]



The Jewish people tell our story through our observance of Jewish holidays throughout the year. The holidays of Passover, Chanukah and Purim remind us just how close the Jewish people has come to utter destruction and how we now celebrate our strength and our survival with great joy, remembering God's help and our persistence, and our own determination to survive.

We also tell the story throughout our lifetime of Jewish rituals. The breaking of a glass at a Jewish wedding reminds us that even in times of life's greatest joys we remember the sadness of the destruction of the Temple. And on Passover we mix the sweet charoset with the bitter maror, mixing bitter and sweet of slavery and freedom all in one bite.

Throughout each year and throughout our lifetimes, we challenge ourselves to remember that even in times of strength, it is better to sense our vulnerability, rather than bask in our success. We all have memories of times in which bitter and sweet were mixed in our lives, all in the same bite. Judaism says, sometimes life is like that. We can celebrate and mourn all at the same time. And somehow, everything will be okay.



Maggid - The Passover Story

Traditionally, we ask why this night is different from all other nights. This variation on the Four Questions challenges us to name what is, and to dream of—and work toward—what is yet to be.

- At all other seders, our minds can be full of stressful anticipation for the night different from all other nights, whether we are surrounded by our nearest and dearest, our friends, or complete strangers. Tonight, may we enjoy a calming and empowering evening surrounded by our “sisters.”
- At all other seders, we can be concerned about food- whether we have eaten too much or too little, whether people find what we've prepared tasty, how we're going to survive the sheer quantities of matzot and our overall appearance. Tonight, may we all be free of food and body consciousness, anxieties and insecurities.
- At all other seders, we read of the heroic struggles and soul-searching of our forebears as they left Egypt. Tonight, we will consider our personal acts of heroism as we struggle to break free from the shackles that imprison our respective souls, and celebrate the many Heroines in our daily lives.

Moving forward in the telling of the Passover story, we start with the main idea: We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. Now we are free. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and God took us from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. Had God not brought our ancestors out of Egypt, then even today we and our children and our grandchildren would still be slaves. Even if we were all wise, knowledgeable scholars and Torah experts, we would still be obligated to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt.



The Four Daughters' Questions

As we tell the story, we think about it from all angles. Our tradition speaks of four different types of children who might react differently to the Passover seder. It is our job to make our story accessible to all the members of our community, so we think about how we might best reach each type of child:

The daughter in search of a usable past. *Ma hi omeret?* What does she say?

"Why didn't the Torah count women among the '600,000 men on foot, aside from children,' who came out of Egypt? And why did Moses say at Sinai, 'Go not near a woman,' addressing only men, as if preparation for Revelation was not meant for us, as well?" Because she already understands that Jewish memory is essential to our identity, teach her that history is made by those who tell the tale. If Torah did not name and number women, it is up to her to fill the empty spaces of our holy texts.

And the daughter who wants to erase her difference. *Ma hi omeret?* What does she say?

"Why must you keep pushing your women's questions into every text? And why are these women's issues so important to you?" "To you," and "not to me." Since she so easily forgets the struggles of her mothers and sisters, you must tell her the story of your own journey to the seder table and invite her to join you in thanking G-d for the blessing of being a Jewish woman.

And the daughter who does not know that she has a place at the table. *Ma hi omeret?* What does she say?

"What is this?" Because she doesn't realize that her question is, in itself, a part of the seder tradition, teach her that the Haggadah is an extended conversation about liberation, and tell her that her insights and questions are also text.

And the daughter who asks no questions?

You must say to her, "Your question, when they come, will liberate you from Egypt. This is how it is and has always been with your mothers and grandmothers. From the moment Yocheved, Miriam and the midwives questioned Pharaoh's edict until today, every question we ask helps us leave Egypt farther behind."



Exodus Story Begins

Ready

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 read 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."

--Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

In the years our ancestors lived in Egypt, our numbers grew, and soon the family of Jacob became the People of Israel. Pharaoh and the leaders of Egypt grew alarmed by this great nation growing within their borders, so they enslaved us. We were forced to perform hard labor, perhaps even building pyramids. The Egyptians feared that even as slaves, the Hebrews might grow strong and rebel. So Pharaoh decreed that Hebrew baby boys should be drowned, to prevent the Hebrews from overthrowing those who had enslaved them.

God heard the cries of the Hebrews. And God brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with great awe, miraculous signs and wonders. God brought us out not by angel or messenger, but through God's own intervention.



The Plagues

Today's plagues may be less obvious or dramatic than the ancient 10 plagues, but they are no less insidious...and responsibility for their existence lies on our shoulders.

As we recite each plague, we spill a drop of wine—a symbol of joy—from our cups. Our joy in our liberation will always be tarnished by the pain visited upon the Egyptians and those around us who suffer. They include:

Inequity Access to affordable housing, quality health care, nutritious food, good schools, and higher education is far from equal. The disparity between rich and poor is growing, and opportunities for upward mobility are limited.

Entitlement Too many people consider themselves entitled to material comfort, economic security, and other privileges of middle-class life without hard work.

Fear Fear of “the other” produces and reinforces xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Greed Profits are a higher priority than the safety of workers or the health of the environment.

Distraction In this age of constant connectedness, we are easily distracted by an unending barrage of information, much of which is meaningless. The instant gratification we receive from our cell phones, tablets, and televisions divert our attention from the physical presence and connection of our loved ones.

Distortion of Reality The media constructs and society accepts unrealistic expectations, leading to eating disorders, body dysmorphia, and an unhealthy obsession with appearance for both men and women.

Unawareness It is easy to be unaware of the consequences our consumer choices have for the environment and for workers at home and abroad. Do we know where or how our clothes are made? Where or how our food is produced? The working conditions? The impact on the environment?

Discrimination While we celebrate our liberation from bondage in Egypt, too many people still suffer from discrimination. For example, blacks in the United States are imprisoned at more than



five times the rate of whites, and Hispanics are locked up at nearly double the white rate. Women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. At 61 cents to the dollar, the disparity is even more shocking in Jewish communal organizations.

Silence Every year, 4.8 million cases of domestic violence against American women are reported. We do not talk about things that are disturbing, such as rape, sex trafficking, child abuse, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and elder abuse, even though they happen every day in our own communities. We also do not always discuss disturbing ways women are treated in the Torah. If we can't open ourselves to recognizing the misdeeds of our heroes, our teachers, how will we be able to in any way tolerate dealing with violations committed by our colleagues and friends?

Feeling Overwhelmed and Disempowered When faced with these modern "plagues," how often do we doubt or question our own ability to make a difference? How often do we feel paralyzed because we do not know what to do to bring about change?

[In Unison]

***We seek to soften our hearts and the hearts of our enemies.
We strive to dream new paths to freedom, so that the next
sea-opening is not also a drowning; so that our singing is
never again their wailing. So that our freedom leaves no one
orphaned, childless, gasping for air.***



Dayenu

The traditional song “Dayenu” is the most catchy and fun seder message that G-d is great and G-d did more than enough to take care of us. But there is another message in there for us as well. Most of us think that we are not doing enough. We are not working hard enough, earning enough, spending time with their children enough. You name it. It is on the list of not being “enough.” Part of what Passover calls us to do spiritually is to loosen the chains of bondage that we put on ourselves. Dayenu!

It is enough. YOU are enough. Whatever it is, let the anxiety go and realize that yes, dayenu, it is enough. You can even share at your Seder what anxiety you are letting go of this year. Ask others to share as well. Let us celebrate this feast of freedom by freeing ourselves.

Let us now sing at the top of our lungs, and celebrate the things you have accomplished, the love you give to others, and the very fact that you exist. That is enough.

Dayenu

Illo hotzi hotzianu Hotzianu mimitzrayim, Hotzianu mimitzrayim Dayenu

Chorus:

Daie-Daie-yenu Daie-Daie-yenu Daie-Daie-yenu Daie-Daie-yenu Dayenu-Dayenu Dayenu

Illo natan natan lanu Natan lanu et ha Torah Natan lanu et ha Torah Dayenu

[Repeat Chorus]



Second Cup of Wine

The second cup is symbolic of the matriarch Rebecca, who knew how to mother both Jacob and Esau, of opposite natures.

The second statement of redemption is "I will deliver you." Equality in law means little if it is not matched in fact. We all have the right to equal pay but the wage gap between men and women is still more than 20%. We all have the right to vote but only 20% of Knesset members are women. The second cup of wine is dedicated to those women who battle in the courts, in the family and in society for equality in fact.

[Drink the second cup of wine]

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of space and time, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Acknowledging Our Heroines

There are many women who play crucial roles in the Exodus story, yet they're usually left out of the retelling. Let us now speak their names and remember important role they played in releasing the Hebrews from bondage and leading the exodus.

Shifra and Puah: These two midwives were respected members of their community. Despite risk of punishment, they defied the Pharaoh's orders and continued to help deliver baby boys for Jewish women in Egypt.

Yocheved: Having gone into labor early, Yocheved kept her secret from the Egyptians, saving Moses' life. She then made the ultimate mother's sacrifice by sending him down the river—her only hope in saving him from otherwise certain death.

Batya: Pharaoh's daughter Batya found Moses in the reeds of the Nile and decided to raise him as her own, knowingly going against her father's decree to kill all male, Jewish babies. Without her defiance and bravery, the Passover story may never have been told.



Miriam: One of the most well known women in the Bible, Miriam was the brave young woman who ensured Moses was safe during his journey down the Nile River. She also was the one to bring Yocheved to Batya to be used as a nursemaid, ensuring that mother and son were never far apart. We don't hear much about Miriam again until the exodus from Egypt, but when we do, it is her strength and song that stick with us.

These women had a vision leading out of the darkness shrouding their world. They were women of action, prepared to defy authority to make their vision a reality bathed in the light of the day.

Retelling the heroic stories of Yocheved, Shifra, Puah, Miriam and Batya reminds our daughters that with vision and the courage to act, they can carry forward the tradition those intrepid women launched.

While there is much light in today's world, there remains in our universe disheartening darkness, inhumanity spawned by ignorance and hate. The Passover story recalls to all of us—women and men—that with vision and action we can join hands with others of like mind, kindling lights along paths leading out of the terrifying darkness.

Let us now all sing "Miriam's Song" together.



Miriam's Song

Music & Lyrics by Debbie Friedman

Chorus:

And the women dancing with their timbrels
followed Miriam as she sang her song. Sing a song to the One
whom we've exalted. Miriam and the women danced and
danced the whole night long.

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

[Repeat Chorus]

As Miriam stood upon the shores 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.

[Repeat Chorus]

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



Tzafun - Women are the Hidden Source of Power

The theme of hiddenness permeates the Passover story. Yocheved hides her infant son, Moses; Pharaoh's daughter conceals his identity; the midwives covertly save the male Israelite babies. This is why we hide and find the matzah during our Passover seder - to reveal what is hidden.

In the Passover story, women's power is manifested in quieter, more concealed ways. Women's actions drive the plot of the story, even though it seems their roles in the Torah are marginalized.

Women have always worked for change within their circumstances. When we were marginalized, we found hidden and quiet but effective ways to assert our strength. But as we are liberated into equal footing with men, we have choices. We can continue the many hidden ways that women shape our society, through one-on-one service or behind the scenes advocacy. It is often women working as teachers, therapists, social workers, nurses, and nonprofit volunteers who keep the fabric of our society together and ensure the wellbeing of the vulnerable. But we can also loudly and collectively make ourselves seen and heard. When we join and step forward as a collective to fight against injustice and for freedom, we are mighty.

In modern Israel, an organization called Women of the Wall fights for the social and legal recognition of our right, as women, to wear prayer shawls, pray, and read from the Torah, collectively and aloud, at the Western Wall, our religion's holiest site. Torahs have been ripped from their arms at the Kotel by security; whistles are blown and they are shouted at to drown out their prayers and songs; they've sued the Israeli government for infringement of civil and religious rights; and they stand up and show up to ensure women's prayer cannot be silenced. They fight so that Israel can be a pluralistic society, and women like us, around the world, can express our Judaism in our holy land.

Since the fall of 2017, American women's voices have risen together to a thunder to declare both "#Me Too" and "Time's Up" to our cultural norms which have accepted shame and silence around sexual harassment, sexual assault, abuses of power, unequal pay, and unequal representation of women. A record 127 women were elected to serve in the 119th U.S. Congress, including a Jewish woman now representing many of us in Norfolk and Virginia Beach.



Women are standing up in unison to demand better treatment, and calling for measures that will re-educate all members of our society. We can choose not to vote for abusers. We can choose not to watch predators movies and TV shows or listen to music made by sexual predators. We can spend our money at businesses whose leaders do not have a history of allegations against them. And always, always, we can demand the right to be treated fairly, humanely, and respectfully.

Our biblical matriarchs and modern day heroines model many examples of leadership. It is for us to take notice and determine how we can use our own power as an individual or as part of a collective to cast off that which oppresses us and others.

Barech - Bless the Meal

[In Unison]

We ate when we were hungry, and now we're satisfied. We thank the Source of Blessing, for all that She provides. Hunger is a yearning, in body and soul, Earth, air, fire, water, and Spirit make us whole. Giving and receiving, we open up our hands. From seedtime to harvest, we're partners with the land. We share in a vision of wholeness and release. Where every child is nourished, and we all live in peace. Amen!

--Deuteronomy 8:10

Hallel - Grace After the Meal

Hallel is the song of praise and celebration for the Israelites' deliverance. Like Miriam the prophet and all the Israelite women who sang with timbrels and danced, we also lift our voices in joy and gratitude.

"Sing ye to the Lord, for He is highly exalted."



Third Cup of Wine

This cup represents **Rachel** whose son Joseph provided the whole family of Jacob with bread in a time of great famine.

God's third declaration, "I will redeem you" is translated to focusing not just women's rights but on women's experiences. We create female experiences to fill the gap from the past. We redeem our heritage. Jewish feminists no longer reject the bible out of hand as patriarchal. Instead we write our own commentaries and midrashim to insert the voices of women. We create our own rituals, such as baby namings, and sederim such as these. Not to replicate men's rituals but to create our own. The third cup of wine is dedicate to the creative and innovative women who are creating new Jewish expressions for all of us; who choose not to reject, but to redeem.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of space and time, creator of the fruit of the vine.

[Drink the third glass of wine]



Miriam and Elijah

Three thousand years ago, a farmer arose in the Middle East who challenged the ruling elite. In his passionate advocacy for common people, Elijah created a legend, which would inspire generations to come.

Elijah declared that he would return once each generation in the guise of someone poor or oppressed, coming to people's doors to see how he would be treated. Thus would he know whether or not humanity had become ready to participate in the dawn of the Messianic age.

He is said to visit every seder, and sip from his cup of wine.

Tonight we welcome two prophets: not only Elijah, but also Miriam, sister of Moses. Elijah is a symbol of messianic redemption at the end of time; Miriam, of redemption in our present lives. Miriam's cup is filled with water, evoking her Well, which followed the Israelites in the wilderness. After the crossing of the Red Sea, Miriam sang to the Israelites a song. The words in the Torah are only the beginning: Sing to God, for God has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver, God has hurled into the sea. So the Rabbis asked: Why is the Song of Miriam only partially stated in the Torah? And in midrash is found the answer: the song is incomplete so that future generations will finish it. That is our task.

Miriam's life is a contrast to the life of Elijah, and both teach us important lessons. Elijah was a hermit, who spent part of his life alone in the desert. He was a visionary and prophet, who sternly chastised the Jewish people, and focused on the future redemption of the Messianic era – when God's justice and truth would prevail over all the world.

On the other hand, Miriam lived among her people in the desert, following the path of healing and loving kindness. She constantly comforted the Israelites throughout their long journey, encouraging them when they lost faith.

Therefore, Elijah's cup is a symbol of future universal redemption, while Miriam's cup is a symbol of hope and renewal in each of our own lives today. We must achieve balance in our own lives, not only preparing our souls for redemption, but rejuvenating our souls in the present. Thus, we need both Elijah's cup and Miriam's cup at our Seder table.



Let us all sing “Eliyahu Hanivi” and Miriam Ha’N’vi’ah,” sung in the same tune as “Eliyahu Hanivi” together as we all rise and open the door for Elijah and Miriam.

[All stand up and one person opens the door]

Eliyahu Hanivi and Miriam Ha’N’vi’ah

Eliyahu hanavi (Elijah the Prophet),

Eliyahu hatishbi (Elijah the Returning),

Eliyahu hagil’adi (Elijah the Giladi),

Bim’hera yavoh eleinu (May he soon come to us),

im mashiach ben David (With the Messiah son of David).

Miriam ha-n’vi’ah oz v’zimrah b’yadah. (Miriam the prophet, strength and song in her hand.)

Miriam tirkod itanu l’hagdil zimrat olam. (Miriam dance with us in order to increase the song of the world.)

Miriam tirkod itanu l’taken et ha-olam. (Miriam dance with us in order to repair the world.)

Bimheyrah v’yameynu hi t’vi’einu el mey ha-y’shuah. (Soon she will bring us to the waters of redemption.)

[In Unison]

You abound in blessings, God, creator of the universe, Who sustains us with living water. May we, like the children of Israel leaving Egypt, be guarded and nurtured & kept alive in the wilderness and may You give us eyes to see that the journey itself holds the promise of redemption. Amen.

[All are seated]



Fourth Cup of Wine

The last cup honors our matriarch **Leah** who came to realize that the pursuit of the impossible, Jacob's love, must give way to appreciation of what one has. When her fourth child was born, Judah, she praised God: "This time I will thank God."
--Genesis 29:35

Our final cup of wine is for the statement "And He gathered us to Him." Today we gather together as women, seeking support, sustenance and inspiration for one another. Women have gathered together throughout the ages to be with one another in good times and in bad. The final cup is dedicated to women who give of themselves to other women and create a sisterhood.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of space and time, creator of the fruit of the vine.



A New Tradition: The Mimouna

Tonight you tasted foods from northern Africa to acknowledge the geography and modern day cultural heritage of where our ancestors fled from. Jews in northern Africa have a joyous, centuries-old Passover tradition called the Mimouna that you may want to experience or even adopt, so it is incorporated into our seder tonight.



The Mimouna marks returning to eating *chametz*, and is celebrated at sundown when Passover ends. The holiday began when Jews of North African descent welcomed Muslim neighbors to their homes to herald the beginning of spring and to thank them for keeping their *chametz* during the holiday. The neighbors would bring the flour, and the Jewish hosts would prepare the treats.

Rooted in the *midrash* as a day of prosperity, it is the day the gold and jewelry of the drowned Egyptians washed up on the shore of the Sea of Reeds and enriched the Israelites. The term “mimouna” could be based in the Hebrew word *emuna* (faith) or *ma’amin* (I believe), or the Arabic word for “wealth” or “good luck.”

To celebrate the holiday, people heap tables with items symbolizing luck or fertility, many repeating the number five because it references the five-fingered hamsa amulet common in both Jewish, Muslim North African, and Middle Eastern communities from pre-modern times. Mimouna tables are laden with dishes of couscous (whose many grains symbolize prosperity), fresh vegetables (symbolic of a prosperous agricultural season), and a variety of sweet desserts featuring honey, dates and almonds, all symbols of abundance and happiness.

In Israel, the Mimouna has become a popular annual celebration featuring outdoor parties, picnics, and BBQs. Israeli law now requires employers to agree to grant an employee unpaid leave



for Mimouna if asked. There are generally no formal invitations to Mimouna, but everyone comes. Hosts maintain an open-door policy, and families wander from house to house, sipping tea, sampling another sweet or two and then walking down the street for more. In 2012 nearly two million people in Israel participated in Mimouna festivities!

A Mimouna-style dessert table is here for you to enjoy at the end of the seder.

Nirtzah - Conclusion

Tonight we have acknowledged our ancestors. We vow that we will not allow their stories, their experiences, their wisdom to fade. These are our legacy, which we will study and teach to our friends and children. The task of liberation is long, and it is sacred work we ourselves must do. As it is written in Pirke Avot, a collection of rabbinic wisdom: "It is not incumbent upon us to finish the task, but neither may we refrain from beginning it."

Consider how tonight's seder could influence the seders you will conduct and participate in this Passover. What new knowledge have you gained that you can contribute? How will you ensure the voices of our Passover heroines are heard?

During a Seder we are commanded to recline, to physically show our status as free human beings. This year while reclining at seders, think about freeing yourself from the cultural noise around food, perfection, and achievement. Instead of worrying about the calories in a piece of chocolate matzah, enjoy the once-a-year dessert. The same goes for the red wine stains on your tablecloth or sticky fingers all over the nice wine glasses. Instead of taking the perfect seder photo for your Instagram or FaceBook, celebrate the holiday in all of its sacred messiness with the people you love. Enjoy a happy Passover.

It is traditional to end a seder with L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim—Next Year in Jerusalem! The call speaks to a feeling of exile, which characterized the Jewish Diaspora for centuries.

How might we understand this today? A close look at the word Yerushalayim suggests an answer. The name can be read as deriving from Ir Shalem ("City of Wholeness") or Ir Shalom ("City of Peace"). We all can slip into exile from the state of wholeness and unity which only connection with our Source can provide. Next year, wherever we are, may we be whole and at peace.



[In Unison]

**And then all that has divided us will merge.
And then compassion will be wedded to power.
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and
unkind. And then both men and women will be gentle.
And then both women and men will be strong.
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the
earth And then everywhere will be called Eden once again!**
--Written by Judy Chicago

As we had the pleasure to gather for a seder this year, we hope to once again have the opportunity in the years to come. We pray that God brings health and healing to Israel and all the people of the world, especially those impacted by natural disasters, tragedy, and war. As we say...

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!

Thank you for celebrating this Women's Seder with the Sisterhoods of Ohel Sholom Temple and Congregation Beth El.



Adapted From the Following Resources:

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