

Women's Connection Shabbat
March 31, 2023
"Shabbat Hagadol"

Welcome to Shabbat Hagadol, the Great Sabbath – the Shabbat that precedes Pesach. In many Jewish communities, it is traditional at this time to recite portions of the Haggadah along with hymns presenting laws of Passover, to whet the congregation's appetite and help it prepare for the seder night. Women's Connection honors this tradition – and brings it up-to-date – with the theme of our service, "A Women's Seder." Most of our readings are drawn from women's Haggadot, retelling the story of Pesach from a women's perspective. You will find these readings in this handout along with a few others that we couldn't include in the service tonight because of time. The supplemental readings are marked with an asterisk *. (Sources for additional readings are at the end.)

Candle-lighting and Welcome

Tikkun

Corie Feiner

(Corie Feiner is Marjorie Blackman's niece and a past poet laureate of Buck's County. She wrote this poem many years ago for a Women's Seder at the Village Temple.)

Tonight, let us illuminate
 our hearts. Tonight, let us say together,
 within every one of us
 is all humanity.

Let us smile, rest, talk, laugh,
 Listen, sing.
 Say, Everything matters.
 Search through our pockets
 when asked for dimes,
 split our sandwich
 when someone says, "I am hungry."
 Give one child warm soup.
 Choose carefully
 the products we buy.
 Light a candle. Pray.
 Join others on the street
 and tell a stranger,
 "I, too, am scared," or
 "I have hope."
 Look around this seder table.
 We are the light of Miriam and Meir,
 of Esther and Goldman,
 Lazarus and Wald.
 We are the light of

Pappenheim and Szold.
 The world can be transformed
 With the power of exodus.
 The world can be transformed
 with the light of us.

***Sarah, Miriam & Esther at the Seder**

Joi Brickman Garvin

Leader: *Where are the daughters of Sarah?*

Reader: 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: All Jewish women, everywhere--we are Sarah's daughters.

Leader: *Are Miriam's daughters here?*

Reader: 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.

All: 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.

Leader: *The daughters of Ruth: Where are they?*

Reader: 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."

All: Every woman who chooses to follow other women, out of loyalty or out of love – we are Ruth's daughters.

Leader: *Esther's daughters: Are they with us?*

Reader: Esther was a Persian Jew who found herself suddenly in a position of power when she was chosen to become the wife of King Ahashuerus. She could have enjoyed her status as a beauty queen and lived a life of leisure in the palace. But when the Jews were endangered by Haman, she risked her life to save her people. Esther's bravery enabled the Persian Jewish community to survive and thrive for thousands of years.

All: Every woman who has rebelled against the stereotype of women as sex symbols or Jewish princesses, every woman who has taken a stand for her political beliefs – we are Esther's daughters.

Leader: *Are Doña Gracia Nasi's daughters here?*

Reader: Doña Gracia Nasi was born into a marrano family shortly after the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal. Widowed as a young woman, she fled the Spanish Inquisition. As she moved from Portugal to

Antwerp to Venice to Constantinople, she also helped other Jews escape through an “underground railroad.”

All: Every woman who has succeeded on her own or who has had to deny some part of herself to survive, every woman whose bravery helped others survive – we are Doña Gracia’s daughters.

Leader: *Where are Emma Goldman’s daughters?*

Reader: Born in Russia in 1869, Emma Goldman was an anarchist leader as well as an early advocate for birth control, unionization, free speech, anti-conscription, and the eight-hour workday. She was imprisoned and deported from the United States for her activism. Even among her political allies, she was considered radical, bravely voicing her support for right of woman and homosexuals.

All: Every woman who stands behind her principles and voices her beliefs despite the risks, every woman who works for social change – we are Emma’s daughters.

Leader: *The daughters of Hannah Senesh: Are they here?*

Reader: Hannah Senesh went to Palestine as one of the aerialist Zionist pioneers. During the Holocaust, she returned to Nazi Europe to rescue fellow Jews. Captured and tortured, she died at the age of twenty-three. Hannah Senesh, a true hero, left us her powerful poems.

All: Every Jewish woman fighter, Zionist, or poet – we are Hannah’s daughters.

The Four Questions

***The Four Girls Within Us**

Ruth Berger Goldston

Four girls dwell within us.

WISE GIRLS

At times, we are wise girls, strong and confident in what we know and in who we are, curious and eager to learn more, seeing clearly through tangled and complex dilemmas and able to make wise and appropriate decisions for ourselves and on behalf of others. Yet, as wise girls, we risk growing complacent in our knowledge, smug in the “superior” wisdom of the status quo, and so caught up in the pursuit of learning and producing that we neglect others around us and our own well-being.

WICKED GIRLS

At other times, we are wicked girls: angry, rebellious, critical, and negative. We set ourselves apart from our community, feeling, perhaps, that we don’t belong and not understanding that it is we, not others, who place ourselves on the outside. Yet it is as wicked girls that we are able to see our world from another perspective, to see that sometimes “the Emperor wears no clothes,” and to speak up and criticize what is wrong and what is unjust.

SIMPLE GIRLS

At times, we are simple girls, relaxed and playful, enjoying life without questioning, analyzing, or examining deeply, loving others with passion that cannot be expressed in words, and being loved in return without any logic or reason. Yet, as simple girls, we risk missing the color and texture of our

complex universe, and we may forfeit the opportunity to contribute to tikkun olam, the repair and healing of the world.

GIRLS WHO DON'T KNOW HOW TO ASK

At other times, we are girls who don't know how to ask, we don't understand, we find that we cannot speak the language of the people in our company, we are struck dumb by a profound or strange new experience, or we are fearful because nothing like this has ever happened to us before. If we can remain silent, and tolerate our fear and our inability to speak for a while, we may discover worlds of riches we couldn't possibly have imagined. But if our fear paralyzes us, if we lose confidence and withdraw from the world, or if it is fear of others that silences us, we truly need to be brought out from our slavery "by a strong and mighty arm."

Each girl within us needs the other girls. The wise girl needs the forcefulness of the wicked, the playfulness of the simple, and the sense of wonder of the speechless one. The wicked needs the erudition of the wise, the self-acceptance of the simple, and the contemplative spirit of the speechless. The simple needs the diligence of the wise, the clear vision of the wicked, and the confusion of the speechless. And the one who is struck dumb needs the words of the wise, the shout of the wicked, and the song of the simple.

At different times, each of our girls appears: we are, in turn, interested and curious, frustrated and angry, calm and contented, sad and fearful. It is easy to praise the wise, scold the wicked, smile with the simple, and rescue the speechless. It is less easy to challenge the wise, to love and appreciate the wicked, to prod the simple, and to allow the dumb-struck to struggle with confusion. Another part of ourselves, the parent, must judge how each of our children is to be treated in turn, knowing when to attend and when to ignore, how best to encourage each girl's "special gifts" and discourage destructive tendencies.

All of these exist within us, sometimes in harmony and other times in cacophony. They also exist outside us, in our parents, siblings, children, friends and colleagues—the people in the world who are a multifaceted mirror through which we see ourselves. Passover is a time of liberation from slavery. May we all come to know and accept our own four girls, so that we can become whole and free.

Retelling the Story

Women of the Exodus

Rabbi Yael Levy

Miriam's cup, filled with water, is a symbol of Miriam's Well, the source of water that nourished the Israelites as they wandered in the desert, and draws attention to the women of the Exodus story.

As the Passover story begins we read that *a new king arose over Egypt—a king who did not know Joseph* (Exodus 1:8) A new king arose who did not know empathy, who was not interested in seeking understanding. A new King arose who demonized others and ruled through intimidation, oppression and fear.

The book of Exodus tells us that, as this new king took power, there also arose strong courageous women who would not be intimidated by his threats and brutality.

The midwives, Shifra and Puah were instructed by the Pharaoh to kill all the male children born to Hebrew women. Risking their lives, the midwives defied these orders and made sure the children lived.

The daughter of Pharaoh, refusing to let hatred or fear determine her actions, saved the life of a young Hebrew boy and raised him to adulthood.

Miriam not letting herself be intimidated into submission by oppressive laws, stood on the shores of the sea and made sure that her younger brother would be safe from harm.

Let us raise our cups and honor women whose strength, courage, and love changed us and the world.

Ready

Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt

“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.

The Ten Plagues

The Modern Plagues

On 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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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

Today we affirm to work together to bring people of all faiths together in better understanding, and to bring an end to intolerance of all kinds.

The Seder Plate

***Charoset**

Marge Piercy

Sweet and sticky
I always make too much
at Pesach so I have
an excuse to eat you
all week.

Moist and red

the female treat
 nothing at all like clay
 for bricks, nothing
 like mortar.

No, you are sweet as
 a mouth kissing,
 you are fragrant
 with cinnamon
 Spicy as Havdalah boxes.

Don't go on too long,
 you whisper sweetly.
 Heed the children
 Growing restive, their
 bellies growling.

You speak of pleasure
 in the midst of remembered pain
 You offer the first taste
 of the meal, promising joy
 like a picnic on a stone

where long ago an ancestor
 was buried, too long
 ago to week. We nod
 and remembering is enough
 to offer, like honey.

If much of what we must
 recall is bitter, you
 are the reminder that
 joy too lights its candles
 tonight in the mind.

Miriam

Miriam's Cup

Marge Piercy

The cup of Elijah holds wine;
 the cup of Miriam holds water.
 Wine is more precious
 until you have no water.

Water that flows in our veins,
 water that is the stuff of life
 for we are made of breath
 and water, vision

and fact. Elijah is
 the extraordinary; Miriam
 brings the daily wonders:
 The joy of a fresh morning

like a newly prepared table,
 a white linen cloth on which
 nothing has yet spilled.
 The descent into the heavy

waters of sleep healing us.
 The scent of baking bread,
 roasting chicken, fresh herbs,
 the faces of friends across

the table: what sustains us
 every morning, every evening,
 the common daily miracles
 like the taste of cool water.

Miriam's Well

Barbera Holender

Due to the merits of Miriam, a mysterious well, created on the eve of the first Sabbath, accompanied the children of Israel in the desert.

It followed her everywhere
 like a lover, easing us to rest,
 springing from hidden places
 in our wanderings.

Always, we were thirsty. Angered
 by our wailing, she'd stamp her feet.
 Even from the pools of her heelprints
 we drank.

Once in anguish
 she beat the rocks with her bare hands
 again and again, weeping.
 Water gushed, cleansing her blood,

soaking her hair, her robe.
 She cupped her hands, rinsed her mouth,
 spat; she splashed, she played.
 Laughing, we filled our bellies.

She was the one we followed,
 who knew each of us by name.
 Healing rose from her touch as drink
 from the deep, as song from her throat.

She was the well. In our hearts
 we called her not Miriam, bitter sea,
 but Mayim, water.

Elijah's Cup and the Redemption

Merger Poem

Judy Chicago

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 no person will be subject to another's will.
 And then all will be rich and free and varied.
 And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many.
 And then all will share equally in the earth's abundance.
 And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old.
 And then all will nourish the young.
 And then all will cherish life's creatures.
 And then all will live in harmony with each other and the earth.
 And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

Sources for Additional Readings

<https://ritualwell.org>

<https://www.haggadot.com>

The Women's Seder Sourcebook, Edited by Anisfield, Mohr, and Spector, Jewish Lights Publishing.
<http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-232-6>