Women's Seder

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HOSTED VIRTUALLY BY

MINNEAPOLIS Jewish Federation

WOMEN REPAIR THE WORLD
INTRODUCTION TO THE SEDER

In every generation each person is commanded to relate to the Exodus as if she herself left Egypt. On the surface this seems like a tall order, how can we possibly understand what it felt like to be enslaved, to witness miracles, to cross to freedom? Instead we must explore our own mitzrayim or narrow places. As we retell the Exodus story we look inward to ourselves. In reading the story of our ancestors we are inspired to examine ourselves and in doing so imagine our own story.

In what narrow places do you find yourself?
What can you do to free yourself?

As we begin the seder we ask each of you to set an intention for the evening. What is one thing you want to walk away with tonight?

Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim.
—Nora Ephron

KADESH (sanctification)

Tonight we celebrate the stories of our foremothers and begin contemplating our own story. Each of the four glasses of wine is dedicated to the story of powerful women from the Exodus story. Each glass is accompanied by a midrash, an interpretation of a biblical story that help us better understand that story and often reveal a deeper truth. These midrash exemplify qualities we prize in our foremothers and ourselves. We use these midrash to help us imagine the story we want to write for ourselves.

What story do you want your midrash to tell?
What accomplishments do you want included in your story?
What can you do to make sure those pieces of you are included in your story?
THE FIRST GLASS OF WINE

We dedicate the first glass to the story of Shifra and Puah.

Pharaoh sent for the midwives named Shifra and Puah, and commanded them to kill every baby boy that was born. The midwives feared G-d and did not obey. When challenged by Pharaoh, they told him that the Jewish women were skilled in the art of giving birth, and would give birth before the midwives had a chance to get to them. The commentator Rashi explains that the names of the midwives mentioned were the professional names of Yocheved and Miriam. The name “Shifra,” he says, translates as “improvement,” a reference to the way that Yocheved would “improve” the newborns by cleaning them and straightening their limbs. “Puah” means “coo-ing,” a reference to how Miriam would “coo” to the babies and soothe them.

What qualities to Shifra and Puah exhibit?  
What do you admire about them?  
What can we learn from them?

Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.

— Golda Meir

Blessed are You, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

We drink the first glass.

KARPAS (dipping the greens)

Dip the karpas in the saltwater.

The saltwater on the table tonight represents our tears. Tears are conduits for a spectrum of emotions, sadness, joy, anger, frustration. As we dip the karpas in the saltwater we allow ourselves to feel all of our emotions. In this moment we acknowledge the different emotions inside ourselves and give ourselves permission to feel each and every one of them without judgement.

Blessed are You, Ado-nai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the earth.

I think women are amazing for being able to show what they feel. I admire women who do. I think it’s a mistake when women cover their emotions to look tough. I say let’s own who we are and use it as a strength.

— Gal Gadot
YACHATZ (breaking the middle matzah and hiding the afikomen)

Tradition dictates that now we break the middle matzah. We wrap the larger piece in a napkin and hide it to be found later in the seder.

Tonight at this seder, in lieu of hiding the matzah, we ask you to consider the parts of yourselves that you keep hidden.

What aspects of yourself to keep hidden from the world?
Why do you keep these parts hidden?
Shame? Fear? Intimidation? Doubt?

As we progress through this seder we ask that you identify those hidden parts of yourself and challenge you to share them with your table.

Why do women have to pretend to be something that they’re not? Why do we have to pretend to be stupid when we’re not stupid? Why do we have to pretend to be helpless when we’re not helpless? Why do we have to pretend to be sorry when we have nothing to be sorry about? Why do we have to pretend we’re not hungry when we’re hungry?

— Miriam “Midge” Maisel

MAGGID (telling the story)

Defined by no man, you are your own story,
blazing through the world, turning history into herstory.
And when they dare to tell you about
all the things you cannot be,
you smile and tell them,
“I am both war and woman and you cannot stop me.”

—Nikita Gill

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

What do I want my story to be?

1. Who am I?
2. What are my qualities?
3. Which do I share with the world? Which do I hide from the world?
4. What is holding me back right?

Step out of the history that is holding you back. Step into the new story you are willing to create.

—Oprah Winfrey
THE FOUR CHILDREN

The four children remind us of the importance of learning our past and using those stories and lessons to drive us forward. In a traditional seder we respond to each child’s question. Reminding us every person deserves a reply no matter their question. This part of the seder describes four unique children reminding us that not every person relates to the story of Exodus in the same way. We have to adapt the story for each person, thus we are able to experience the story of Exodus through our own lens and in our own way.

THE TEN PLAGUES

In one interpretation of the ten plagues, it is said that each of G-d’s plagues targeted a false god worshipped by the Egyptians. How often we find ourselves beholden to gods that are only powerful because we enable them, when in fact it is us who hold the power. Tonight, we reclaim our power and render these “gods” obsolete. Together we acknowledge 10 false gods.

1. Money
2. Societal Pressures
3. Hollywood
4. Power
5. Social Media
6. Conformity
7. Status
8. Success
9. Acceptance
10. Perfection

In what ways are these true for you?
What other “gods” do you find yourself beholden to?
How can you cast them away?

DAYEINU

Often we as women struggle with the idea of what is enough when it comes to what we think we need to give to others - our children, our partner, our friends, our family, our communities... Perhaps we need to tell ourselves more often Dayeinu. Enough. That is enough for this hour or this day. That is enough caring and giving to others and now it is time to give to and care for myself. And then we need to tell ourselves that we are enough. We need to feel our own enoughness.

Together we say, “That is enough, I am enough!”

THE SECOND GLASS OF WINE

We dedicate the second glass of wine to Batya.
Owing to Pharaoh’s decree to kill all Jewish newborn males, little Moses was placed in a basket and hidden amongst the rushes. Upon seeing the basket, the Midrash relates, Pharaoh’s daughter extended her hand toward it, despite its being far beyond her reach. A miracle occurred and “her arm was extended for many arm-lengths,” enabling her save the child.

What are you takeaways from this story of Batya?
What qualities does she embody?
What can we learn from her?

Blessed are you, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

We drink the second glass.

MOTZI (blessing before eating)

Blessed are you, Ado-nai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

MATZAH

As our people hurried to flee from Egypt they took with them half-baked bread, pulled from the ovens before it was ready. Tonight, as we examine our stories we remember the unfinished bread and recognize that our own lives are works in progress, still to be completed, still to become whole.

As you eat the matzah think of something in your life that you have not yet accomplished or remains unfinished that you want to include in your story. As we make our way through the seder think of why this is important to you and how you can achieve it.

Blessed are You, Ado-nai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who sanctifies us by commanding us concerning the eating of matzah.

Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it.

—Brene Brown

MAROR (bitter herb)

As we taste the bitter herb consider bitterness in your own life. We challenge you to name your bitterness, so that you may confront it.

What has been bitter in your life?
How has that bitterness shaped me?
Have you become bitter or better?

Each of us must confront our own fears, must come face to face with them.
How we handle our fears will determine where we go with the rest of our lives.
To experience adventure or to be limited by the fear of it.

— Judy Blume
Blessed are You, Ado-nai, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us by commanding us concerning the eating of the bitter herbs.

KORECH (Hillel’s sandwich)

We have just named our bitterness, now we name our strengths, the powers within us to overcome our bitterness. Hillel’s sandwich combines the bitter and the sweet. So too do we find our inner strength, the tools already in our possession that allow us to overcome our mitzrayim.

What are your strengths?
What tools do you already possess to fight your bitterness?

You are the one that possesses the keys to your being. You carry the passport to your own happiness.

—Diane von Furstenberg

TZAFUN (hiddenness)

Earlier in the seder we identified that part of ourselves we keep hidden because of fear of showing it to the world. Tonight as we find that part of ourselves we make a promise to bring it into the light. We give ourselves permission to share these with the world.

If you knew, 100%, that you could succeed, what would you do?

We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in.

— Sheryl Sandberg

BARECH (blessing after the meal)

THE THIRD GLASS OF WINE

We dedicate the third glass of wine to Miriam.

At the moment that Moses was born, the entire house was filled with the holy light of his divine radiance. Amram kissed Miriam on her head and said to her, “My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled!” The happiness of the moment was shattered, however, with the realization that this male child would be taken to be killed. When they took Moses to the river, the disheartened Yocheved hit Miriam on the head and said, “My daughter, where is your prophecy now?” But Miriam remained stubbornly resolute. She stood by the river to see not if, but how her prophecy would unfold. She, too, felt the pain and bitterness of her baby brother being torn away from her family. But at the same time, she was filled with her spirit of rebellion—she would not succumb to hopelessness. Miriam encompassed the dual qualities of feeling the intensity of pain, while at the same time rebelling against its overpowering hold, to discover a seed of faith and yearning deep within.
What qualities does Miriam display? What can you learn from her? How does this story relate to you?

_Blessed are You, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine._

_We drink the third glass._

**HALLEL (songs of praise)**

As we sing songs of praise, let’s thank G-d! Let’s also take a moment to thank and praise ourselves, let’s turn our gratitude inward and recognize all the wonderful, courageous, and exhausting things we do each and every day. To ourselves we say, “thank you.”

**THE FOURTH GLASS OF WINE**

We dedicate the fourth glass of wine to all the women of the Exodus story.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they left hastily. So hastily, in fact, that they were not even able to finish baking their bread. Despite their hurriedness, the women took the time to prepare well in advance something that they felt would be essential. After hundreds of years in bitter exile—after witnessing acts of utter barbarism, after weeping rivers of tears for the babies torn from their arms, after seeing their children cemented alive into brick walls to fill missing quotas—what did these women prepare while still slaves in Egypt? What was on the minds of these women who had seen affliction beyond the human breaking point? What was on the hearts of these women who bore too much anguish to fathom? What do their worn, tired, tortured and beaten bodies carry out of Egypt? Tambourines. Instruments with which to sing and praise their G-d for the miracles they knew would come to be.

_Blessed are You, our G-d, Ruler of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine._

_We drink the fourth glass._

**NIRTZAH (conclusion)**

At the beginning of our seder we set an intention for the evening. Reflect on your intention, were you able to address it? Achieve it? Before we leave tonight set one more intention with the goal that when you sit down to seder next year you can say you’ve lived your intention.

I know what I want, I have a goal, an opinion, I have a religion and love. Let me be myself and then I am satisfied. I know that I’m a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage.

— Anne Frank