The Four Cups of Redemption: Women's Pathways to the Exodus



Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom-Toronto Circle Muslim-Jewish Women's Seder

Passover 5777/2017

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Reflections From Our Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom Chairs

Sabreena Ghaffar-Siddiqui

I wanted to challenge my own presumptions and apprehensions about the relationship between Jews and Muslims.

Growing up I did not have a sister, my mother was like my sister, but after losing her to cancer when I was 24 I was left always feeling alone and vulnerable. It felt like I had lost my backbone in life. Sisterhood to me has always represented strength, support, a safe space to be who you are, to feel appreciated and honoured and loved. As well as a relationship full of laughter, shared interests and companionship. I spent 10 years after my mother's death looking for a sister in every friend I'd make. I was often left feeling disappointed.

When I received hate mail after my article Cynthia wrote me a very touching and supportive message, totally unexpected. I had honestly forgotten that feeling of support. That was the moment I first felt the connection of "sisterhood" beyond man-made borders of faith and culture. I realized that there is a humanity based sisterhood between all women, if only we open ourselves to it.

Cynthia Levine-Rasky

I turned to the Sisterhood in my quest to give support and to receive support across a religious difference that, in my mind, is never so significant that it can inhibit something that is so ordinary yet so radical: friendship.

I co-founded this group after the US election of November 8, 2016. Like so many others, I anticipated the negative outcomes of the election of a political leader known for his bigoted and offensive views of anyone unlike himself: a rich white Christian businessman. In less than two months, many of these outcomes have been realized. Horrifically, six Muslim men were the victims of a mass murder as they prayed in a Quebec City mosque. Cemeteries have been desecrated, children have been intimidated, places of worship and community centers have been damaged. My son and I have witnessed the growing protests of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim extremists in Toronto. In my heart and mind, I know that there is a stronger force than theirs. In our solidarity, Jewish and Muslim women can show the world what we can be together, and what we can do together.

I take the word 'sisterhood' literally. By that I mean that Jewish and Muslim women ARE sisters, and not metaphorically, or whimsically, or in the abstract. Literally. It is as simple as that.

The Seder Plate

The Seder plate is the focal point of the Seder. A special plate or a regular large platter may be used assembled with the following items:

A shankbone, commemorating the paschal (lamb) sacrifice made the night the ancient Hebrews fled Egypt; some people say it symbolizes the outstretched arm of G-d	Z'roa	זְרוֹעַ
A sweet mixture of fruits and/or nuts used to represent the bricks and mortar made by the slaves	Charoset	ŋ¢iŋ
A bitter herb or vegetable, often horseradish, representing the bitterness of slavery	Maror	מָרוֹר
A vegetable, often parsley or potato, that grows in the ground to represent the renewal of Spring,	Karpas	פַרְפַּס
A roasted egg, reminding us of the festival offering brought to the Holy Temple on Passover	Beitza	בֵּיצָה
Another type of bitter vegetable, often lettuce	Chazeret	ָחָזֶרָת
A modern addition to the Seder plate, representing the inclusiveness in Judaism, specifically the LGBT community and women	Tapooz	תַפּוּז

Other items on the Seder Table:

- Three pieces of Matzah
- Grape Juice

- Salt Water, representing the tears and sweat of enslavement
- Elijah's Cup (filled with grape juice) and Miriam's Cup (filled with water)

Chapter 1: Birth (Leida)

A new king arose... And he said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground'. So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. *Exodus 1:8-11*

In reward for the righteous women who lived in that generation (of the Exodus), the Israelites were delivered from Bondage. Sotah 11:b

A sister volunteers to read:

It came to pass that *Shifra* and *Puah*, the Hebrew midwives, were instructed by the King to kill all newborn Hebrew sons. The midwives disobeyed his command and the Hebrews grew strong in number. (Exodus 1:15-18;21).

Moses, who would lead his people to freedom, was born of this literal act of midwifery. With the help of the king's daughter, *Shifra* and *Puah* then concealed his identity and arranged his adoption by the monarchy. This enabled Moses to not only survive but to take up his destiny as a messenger of G-d.

The *Torah* (Five Books of Moses) describes a fourfold path to redemption. G-d promises to bring the Hebrews out from the under the burdens of their captors, deliver them from bondage and free them with an outstretched hand and extraordinary judgments (Exodus 6:6).

In the face of cruelty and death, the midwives preserved life, assuring Hebrew infants and their subsequent generations certain vitality and an eventual passage to freedom. The rabbis taught that *Shifra* and *Puah* were actually *Yocheved* and *Miriam*, the mother and sister of Moses (Sotah 11a). Therefore, the redemption of the Hebrews was at its core a women's movement that delivered the Hebrews through the affirmation of human dignity and the practice of resistance.

As we kindle the Passover lights, we honour the women of our lives, whom by their choices and experiences of being women, have given us the permission to live freely and purposefully as women:

Blessing Over Holiday Candles

ָּבָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יִיֲ אֱלֹהֱינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוְנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר `שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who sanctifies us with your commandments and commands us kindle the festival light.

Kiddush: The First Cup

From the work of the midwives to our work here today, we unite through the bond of sisterhood.

Together, we raise our cup and say:

This cup is our defiance. It is our lightness and our joy pushing up against the dark. As women, we rise. As a sisterhood, we rise. As sisters raising each other and the world, we rise.

ָבָּרוּך אַתָּה יֵיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶך הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Hand Washing

As we embark on next stage of our Passover journey, we invite all guests to wash their hands and silently contemplate the following:

1) What does being a woman mean to me?

2) Who are the women who have touched my life and inspired my belief in sisterhood?

3) What can I offer the women around this table as a sister in our work together?

Dipping the Vegetables

We dip a vegetable in salt water and recite:

ָבָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-adamah.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Breaking of the Middle Matzah

We call upon the *seder* host to break the middle matzah.

The sister hosting the *seder* holds up the *matzah* and reads:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who sit at this table learn from the modesty of the matzah crumb. To welcome the stranger. To be humble toward guests. To work toward a world where friends are plenty and strangers are few.

Another sister continues:

As a sisterhood, we support our sisters in sharing what ails our world and also what ails us, as Muslims and Jews and also as women.

With the love and support of our sisterhood, you are invited to share any brokenness you are experiencing in your life out loud. With kindness and non-judgment, we promise to hold you through it. (Pause for reflection)

Just as the Hebrews moved from slavery to redemption, so may we, too, seek refuge in the bonds of friendship, sisterhood and our abundant religious and cultural heritages. In this moment, I invite you to share any moment that has made you feel whole, as a woman, as a sister, as a Muslim or a Jew. With kindness and gladness, we promise to hold you through it. (Pause for reflection)

Through the wholeness and the broken pieces, we commit, as a Sisterhood, to drawing compassion and courage from one another. As we strengthen each other, so too, may we strengthen ourselves and uplift all the world with our loving example.

Chapter 2: Deliverance (Geulah)

We come to the part of our narrative in which we recall four tellings of the bondage that the Hebrews faced. The first offers the traditional four questions, while the second teaches the story to different learners around the table and traces the Exodus story from the beginning of creation in order to deepen an understanding of G-d's covenant with the Jewish People. The third telling cites verses from the Book of Deuteronomy, in particular, the description of the 10 Plagues, which G-d brought forth against the Hebrews' captors. The forth telling communicates the meaning of Passover symbols and its redemption for modern people, who are implored to go forth from the Narrow Place of slavery, in mind, body and spirit, just as their ancestors did so they may come to know and praise G-d's glory.

First Telling: Asking The Four Questions

As questioning is at the heart of the *seder*, we begin with the traditional questions our ancestors inquired, first in Hebrew and then in English. Traditionally, this passage is recited by the youngest child present at the Seder; however, all sisters who can sing along are invited to join in:

מַה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל־הַלֵּילוֹת?

Ma nishtanah ha-lailah ha-zeh mikol ha-leilot?

ָשֶׁבְּכָל־הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חָמֵץ וּמַצָּה. הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כֻּלּוֹ מַצָּה.

Sheb'khol ha-leilot anu okhlin hametz umatzah. Ha-lailah hazeh, kuloh matzah.

ָשֶׁבְּכָל־הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׁאָר יְרָקוֹת. הַלַּיְלָה הַזָּה מָרוֹר.

Sheb'khol ha-leilot anu okhlin sh'ar y'rakot. Ha-lailah hazeh, maror.

ָשֶׁבְּכָל־הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מַטְבִּילִין אֲפִילוּ פַּעַם אֶחָת. הַלַּיְלָה הַזָּה שְׁתֵּי פְעַמִים.

Sheb'khol haleilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa'am echat. Ha-lailah hazeh, sh'tei f'amim.

שֶׁבְּכָל־הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין. הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כֵּלָנוּ מְסֻבִּין.

Sheb'khol ha-leilot anu okhlin bein yoshvin uvein m'subin. Ha-lailah hazeh, kulanu m'subin.

A sister reads the following in English:

Why is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights we may eat either bread or matzah. But on this night only matzah. On all other nights we may eat all kinds of herbs. But on this night, we eat bitter herbs. On all other nights we do not dip our food even once. But on this night, we dip twice. On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining. But on this night, we all recline.

Second Telling: Reclaiming Passover Texts

Another sister continues:

To leave our story at the traditional *haggadot* (tellings) would be not only be historically inaccurate but theologically incomplete.

Consider the first *haggadah* listed in the *Mishnah* (the first written redaction of Jewish Law) as a tree in a densely cultivated forest. Although this is but one account of the *seder* and *haggadah*, there are other Jewish sources, including parts of the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* (a written compilation of Jewish Law modelled after the order of the *Mishnah*) in which the concept and ritual of *seder* and *haggadah* do not even exist yet!

This makes finding the right "tree" or source of tradition rather difficult and almost impossible. This is because these documents record Passover as observed during the Temple and Second Temple, meaning that we not only have very different time periods but also, contradictory concepts of how to observe the holiday even within the same texts.

What does this ambiguity mean for Jews who are currently observing Passover, let alone guests that are trying to grasp its basic meaning or teaching?

It means that ritual innovation, creative storytelling and manifold celebrations of Passover have a traditional basis. To quote Rabbi Ben Bag Bag, whose legal rulings appear in the *Mishnah* (the first written text the Passover meal we are about to enjoy is recorded in), we can turn our tradition again and again and truly find anything within it. Furthermore, to quote an anonymous feminist Jewish theologian, this implores us to, from time to time, turn our text on its head and even upside down when necessary.

Which questions does this interpretation stir in you?

How does this reading inform your understanding of Passover and Jewish tradition?

Third Telling: Revealing the Exodus' Women

To allow for multiple possibilities of understanding the Passover story, we turn to the biblical and aggadic (legends or tales from rabbinic literature) sources on *Yocheved* (Moses's mother), *Miriam* (Moses's sister), *Bithia* (King's daughter) and the Hebrew women who gave birth in orchards during the time of slavery.

As you read these verses, consider the following:

How do these verses depict the woman or women's experience of slavery or freedom?
How does this add to, challenge or change your ideas on women's roles in the Exodus?
If you could write the text from the woman or women's perspective, what would she or they say about their part in the deliverance of their people?

Yocheved and Miriam

According to Exodus *Rabbah*, Yocheved was called *Shifra* because she increased the fertility of the Hebrews. Miriam was called *Puah* as she was felt to lift up the Hebrews to G-d.

BT Sotah 11b infers that the midwives were Hebrew and related to prominent Jewish tribes and dynasties, however, a less prominent position in *Midrash Tadshe* states that the midwives were pious, non-Hebrew women and reads the verse above as "midwives of the Hebrews."

Miriam rejoiced in her people's freedom by dancing at the Sea of Reeds. After the Exodus, Miriam was believed to have been followed by a well during the Israelites' time in the desert. Some Sephardic women believed that Miriam could heal people from affliction through this water. - Orach Chayyim 299:10

Bithia

Bithia did not give birth to Moses but raised him in the King's house. This act provides biblical evidence that even if a person fosters a child, they are still listed as a child's birth parent. - Exodus 1:7-10

Women in the Orchards

Hebrew women would secretly defy the King's decree and give birth to their children in the empire's apple orchards. - Sotah 11b

Fourth Telling: Removing The Plagues & Singing G-d's Praise

Come up with a list of plagues that affect Jewish and Muslim women in today's world. Discuss how these ills affect women's lives and, if you can, list one remedy for each plague you come up with. What are ways you hope our Sisterhood will remedy these ills?

ţa	Dam	Blood
<u>אַפַרְדַעַ</u>	Tz'fardeyah	Frogs
כּנִּים	Kinim	Lice
עָרוֹב	Arov	Wild Beasts
ţĊ	Dever	Pesitlance
ָ שְׁחִין	Sh'chin	Boils
ĘŢ	Barad	Hail
אַרְבָּה	Arbeh	Locusts
חׂשֶׁרְ	Choshech	Darkness
פּוֹת בּּכוֹרוֹת	Makat Bechorot	Death of the Firstborn

The Ten Plagues

Dayenu (It Would Have Been Enough)

All sisters who know this song are welcome to sing along:

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת, דַּיֵּנוּ.

.אָלּוּ הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, דַּיֵּנוּ

Ilu natan lanu et haShabbat, dayenu.

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, דַּיֵּנוּ.

Ilu natan lanu et haTorah, dayenu.

llu hotzianu mi-Mitzrayim, dayenu

אִלּוּ קַרַע לָנוּ אֶת הַיָּם, דַּיֵּנוּ.

Ilu kara lanu et hayam, dayenu

If G-d had brought us out from Egypt, it would have been enough. If G-d had split the sea, it would have been enough. If G-d had given us the Sabbath, it would have been enough. If G-d had given up the Torah, it would have been enough.

Kiddush: The Second Cup

A sister reads:

Before we move from degradation to praise, we must come back to our questions.

For it our questioning that will give us the wherewithal and the "chutzpah" to set us all free.

As sisters, as women, we acknowledge the Exodus narrative as a Jewish experience and also acknowledge the diversity of Muslim voices and experiences around our seder table.

With our recognition that Muslim and Jewish liberation is bound up with each other, we commit ourselves to the shared work of sisterhood.

What is a sister if not a friend to lean on? A soul to speak to? Two lives bound by the common thread of being women?

Together, we raise our cup and say:

This cup is our defiance. It is our lightness and our joy pushing up against the dark. As women, we rise. As a sisterhood, we rise. As sisters raising each other and the world, we rise.

ָבָּרוּך אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפָן.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Hand Washing

We take a moment before our meal begins to prepare for our delicious feast ahead. We invite you to wash your hands, to stretch and prepare for the serving of our meal.

Motzi Matzah: The Blessing over the Matzah בָּרוּך אַתָּה יֵי אֱלֹהֶינוּ מֶֶלֶך הָעוֹלָם הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן־הָאֶָרֶץ.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who brings forth bread from the earth.

ָבָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוְּנוּ עַל־אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al akhilat matzah

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who sanctifies us with your commandments and commands us to eat matzah.

Maror: Bitter Herbs

ָבָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוְנוּ עַל־אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al akhilat maror.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who sanctifies us with your commandments and commands us to eat bitter herbs.

Chapter 3: A New Song (Shira Hadasha) Miriam's Song by Debbie Friedman

All sisters who know this song are welcome to sing along:

> 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

> When 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!

Shulchan Orech: Eating the Festive Meal

Tzafun: Looking for the Afikomen

Birkat HaMazon: Grace After the Meal

בריך רחמנא מלכא דעלמא מריה דהאי פיתא.

Brich rachamana malka d'alma ma'arey d'hai pita

Blessed is the merciful One, ruler of the world, creator of this bread.

Kiddush: The Third Cup

Together, we raise our cup and say:

This cup is our defiance. It is our lightness and our joy pushing up against the dark. As women, we rise. As a sisterhood, we rise. As sisters raising each other and the world, we rise.

ַבּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפָן.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Chapter 4: Hallel (Praise)

And at the moment when the narrowness felt too much to bear... Alas! There was the sea. The Israelites crossed to freedom there.

Having greeted our questions and completed our tellings, we can now give way to joy. We come back as we started, to sisterhood and the strength of all women.

All sisters read together:

To the Jewish sisters in our story, who braved hardship and empire, who risked their lives to liberate our people, we say: *Hallelujah!*

To the Muslim sisters who sit with us today, who entrusted us with their stories and enrich the world with their lives, we say: *Hallelujah!*

To the sisters who are no longer with us or who are out there beyond our reach, who are spinning their own stories and creating their own ways, we say: *Hallelujah!*

And to each of our sisters gathered around the table, who, through birth, deliverance, song and praise, lead all of us and all of women, from slavery to freedom: we say: *Hallelujah!*

As our final act in freedom's long road, we raise our glasses, sip from the fourth cup and mark a ceremonial end to Shabbat.

Again, we raise our cup and together we say:

This cup is our defiance. It is our lightness and our joy pushing up against the dark. As women, we rise. As a sisterhood, we rise. As sisters raising each other and the world, we rise.

Hallel: Psalms of Praise

Psalm 117

ַהַלְלוּ אֶת יֵיָ, כָּל גּוֹיִם, שַׁבְּחוּהוּ כָּל-הָאֻמִּים. כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חַסְדּוֹ, וָאֱמֶת יֵי לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ.

Hal'lu et Adonai kol goyim, shabb'chuhu kol haummim. Ki gavar aleinu chasdo ve'emet Adonai l'olam, hal'luyah.

Praise G-d, all nations, praise G-d, all people. For G-d's lovingkindness is great upon us and the truth of G-d endures for ever. Hallelujah.

Havdalah: A Moment of Transition & Potential

Od yavo shalom aleinu Od yavo shalom aleinu Od yavo shalom aleinu Ve al kulam (x2) עוד יבוא שלום עלינו עוד יבוא שלום עלינו עוד יבוא שלום עלינו ועל כולם!

Salaam , aleinu ve al kol ha olam, Salaam, Salaam (x2) סלאאם, עלינו ועל כל העולם סלאאם סלאאם

Peace will come upon us and on everyone.

Salaam , On us and on everyone Salaam, Salaam

Birkat Havdalah: Havdalah Blessing

Kiddush: The Fourth Cup

Raise the cup of grape juice, and recite the blessing:

ַבָּרוּך אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶך הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Hold up the spice box, and recite the blessing:

ַבָּרוּך אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֱינוּ מֶֶלֶך הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי בְשָׂמִים.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam borei minei v'samim.

We praise You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, Creator of all spices.

Hold the Havdalah candle, and recite the blessing:

ָבָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֱינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, borei m'orei ha-eish.

We praise You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, Creator of fire.

ַבּּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֱינוּ מֶֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמַּבְדִיל בֵּין קְׂדָשׁ לְחוֹל.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech haolam, hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol.

We praise You, G-d, Ruler of Everything, the One who distinguishes the sacred from the everyday.

The candle is extinguished in the grape juice to signify the conclusion of this sacred time together

ַלְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָלַיִם.

L'shanah haba'ah birushalayim.

Next Year In Jerusalem!
