Telling and Retelling: The Women‘s Seder & Ritual Innovation

Written by Emily E. Dunn

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Referee, Professor Richard Sarason _____

Digest

The goal of this thesis is to explore the origin and development of the Women‘s Seder, focusing in particular upon the ritual and liturgical innovations and variations that comprise this observance. It examines the history of the Women‘s Seder from its beginning over thirty years ago to its current form, examining the purpose of the Women‘s Seder and its success in its present form according to multiple criteria. The focal point of this thesis is the Women‘s Seder as a groundbreaking Jewish feminist ritual and liturgical innovation. The Women‘s Seder is examined via study of feminist *haggadot* and literature on Jewish feminism, ritual innovation, and the Women‘s Seder itself. Several liturgical passages and rituals of the Women‘s Seder are examined in detail, both those that are built upon the basis of existing Seder elements and also those that are original. The certain kind of ―telling‖ or ―re-telling‖ that takes place during the Women‘s Seder, in which participants discuss the roles of important women in the story of the Exodus, the *Tanakh*, and the modern day, is also a topic of study. Not only are Women‘s Seders examined as an American phenomenon within this thesis, but it also addresses Women‘s Seders worldwide, in such locations as Israel and the former Soviet Union. Also included in the discussion are recent offshoots of the Women‘s Seder, such as interfaith Women‘s Seders and Seders that are intentionally fashioned as ―Men‘s Seders.‖ Lastly, the thesis turns to the topic of the future of the Women‘s Seder, discussing with particular attention the effect of the Women‘s Seder on mainstream Passover observance and whether the impetus for and purpose of the Women‘s Seder remain relevant as the years pass.

Dedication

To Professor Vanessa Ochs who first helped me discover my Jewish feminism, to the women of Cherkassy, Ukraine for showing me the far-reaching power of ritual and liturgical innovation, to Scott for being my support in all things, and to the spirit of *Miriam Ha-Neviah*, which continues to inspire me in new ways with each encounter.

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I am greatly indebted to my thesis advisor, Dr. Richard Sarason for giving me guidance and direction in this endeavor and for inspiring and challenging me as my teacher during my time at HUC-JIR.

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Introduction: What Makes This Thesis Different From All Other Theses?

The Song of Questions

Mother, asks the clever daughter,
Who are our mothers?
Who are our ancestors?
What is our history?
Give us our name. Name our genealogy.

Mother, asks the wicked daughter,
If I learn my history, will I not be angry?
Will I not be bitter as Miriam
Who was deprived of her prophecy?

Mother, asks the simple daughter,
If Miriam lies buried in the sand,
Why must we dig up those bones?
Why must we remove her from the sun and stone
Where she belongs?

The one who knows not how to question,
She has no past, she has no present, she can have no future
Without knowing her mothers
Without knowing her angers
Without knowing her questions.[1]

In April of 2006, I found myself in the city of Cherkassy, Ukraine sitting in a room filled with Jewish women of all ages. This—the third Seder I had celebrated in this vibrant community that lacked everything except spirit—was Cherkassy's ~~"~~Women's Seder." Unlike the community Seder where they filled a hall with 250 people, had a band, a play, and food provided by the community, this Seder was more intimate. About

[1] E.M. Broner with Naomi Nimrod, The Women's Haggadah (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 30-31.

forty to fifty women gathered together—mothers brought daughters, daughters brought friends, grandmothers and granddaughters sat laughing quietly together. They used the same *haggadot* that we used at the community Seder but they paused to recall the special role in the Exodus played by Miriam and the Egyptian midwives, Shiphrah and Pu'ah. They put an orange on their Seder plate, although none of them knew the origin of the ritual, listening eagerly as the cantorial student with whom I was travelling explained it to the group. Ten or fifteen years previously barely anyone in that room knew how to celebrate Passover. Now, they not only celebrated Passover, but they joined together for an extra Seder in a space reserved solely for women.

This was not my first encounter with Women's Seders—far from it! During my second year of college at the University of Virginia, I took a course on Jewish Feminism given by my professor and academic advisor at UVA, Vanessa Ochs. I had heard vaguely of a Women's Seder put on by my home synagogue's Sisterhood, and I knew it was a "feminist" Seder, but I did not know exactly what that meant. Inspired by my class, a friend and I took on the challenge of creating and holding a Women's Seder. Using excerpts from the women's *haggadot* produced by the Hillel at Oberlin College and Yale University, trying our hands at writing liturgy and ritual ourselves, we created our own Seder. I found this to be a particularly powerful endeavor and a challenging process. It affected me deeply. As I read and wrote and planned, I felt more and more that I was giving voice not only to my Jewish feminism but also to women who had not had a chance to have their stories told by a Passover Seder. My interest in Passover and in Women's Seders in particular has continued from that point forward and has inspired this thesis.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the creation and development of this innovative Passover observance, considering in depth its ritual and liturgical variations. It examines the history of the Women's Seder from its inception just over 30 years ago to its continuation in the present, considering the purpose of the Women's Seder and its efficacy in its current form. The primary focus of this thesis is the Women's Seder as a—or perhaps the—quintessential Jewish feminist ritual and liturgical innovation. It examines in detail several rituals and liturgical elements of the Women's Seder, both those that have been created from scratch and those that developed as a reframing or reimagining of a tradition. Another aspect of the Women's Seder addressed is the particular type of "telling" or "re-telling" that occurs at Women's Seders during which participants expound upon the roles of important women in the story of the Exodus, the *Tanakh*, and the modern day. The thesis includes not only information regarding Women's Seders as an American phenomenon, but also explores Women's Seders as they occur in the state of Israel, the former Soviet Union, and beyond. It also includes a discussion of variations upon the Women's Seder itself that have occurred in particular in very recent years, such as interfaith Women's Seders and even consciously-crafted Men's Seders. Finally, the future of the Women's Seder is considered, as well as whether there is a continued need and desire for this particular observance as our culture continues to change.

There is an almost an endless supply of material to be studied on Passover and even on the Women's Seder. The tendency of communities to create their own cut-and-pasted-together Women's Seders means not only that there is a great deal of variance in the Women's Seder ritual as it is observed among family, friends, communities, and

women's groups, but also that there is a great deal of material to be examined and appreciated. ~~—~~Passover, more so than any other occasion in Jewish life, has inspired the greatest amount of Jewish feminist ritual innovation."[2]

[2] Vanessa Ochs, Inventing Jewish Ritual. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 48.

Chapter One: History & Purpose

"As for Jews, the men heard the revelation at Sinai, and entered the Promised Land where they are now living less than perfect lives. But Jewish women are still wandering in the desert awaiting inclusion in the covenant, awaiting their Sinai."[3]

"Just as Jews are instructed to remember slavery as if it had happened to each one of us, daughters should remember their mothers' oppression…as if it had happened to them. Because it could happen to them. Women's Exodus is not complete. Our Sinai is still to come."[4]

The first question we must ask is the question of "Why?" Why has Passover occasioned so much Jewish feminist ritual innovation? Why—among all the feminist rituals, or rituals for women—has the Women's Seder become so prominent? The answer could lie in the same notion that drives Passover and Passover Seders more than any other observance, including the high holidays, to be celebrated in some fashion by American Jews. There is something about the Seder—perhaps that it is so closely tied to food and family, perhaps because it ties us back to the most climactic episode in Jewish history, perhaps its focus on freedom over oppressive rulers—that resonates in the American soul. Certainly the Seder's central place in American Jewish life plays a role in the development of the Women's Seder. As with so many rituals, part of its power lies in the accrued collective memory and loyalty of those who, over thousands of years, have performed the Seder."[5]

[3] Letty Cottin Pogrebin Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 113.
[4] Ibid., 127.
[5] Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Tamara Mohr & Catherin Spector, eds, The Women's Passover Companion (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003), 45.

However, the reasons to have Women's Seders go much further than this simple explanation. Many people are aware of the fact that the Seder developed over time. It may have been performed the exact same way every year that one can remember, but many people have a sense of Passover's development from its roots as an agricultural feast, to remembering the historical Exodus from Egypt, to a celebration of freedom and liberation.[6] Within the confines of this thesis, there is not room for a full discussion of the development of the Passover Seder ritual, but a brief look at the history of the Passover Seder will be beneficial for fully understanding the topic at hand.

The most ancient roots of this festival observance are vague; at its core the original festival seems to have stemmed from two distinct observances. The first such observance is the paschal sacrifice of a lamb, as commanded in Exodus 12:21 and Deuteronomy 16:2 (the former describes an offering made individually in each household and the latter describes a sacrifice made in the Temple in Jerusalem), and the second is the ~~F~~Feast of Unleavened Bread," *Chag Ha-Matzot,* as described in Exodus 12:17-18, which appears to have occurred in the month, or new moon, of *Aviv*. Leviticus 23:5-6 describes these rituals as contiguous, with the paschal sacrifice occurring at the end of the 14th of the month of Aviv and the Feast of Unleavened bread beginning on the 15th. Yet Deuteronomy 16:2-3 appears to view these as one merged ritual.[7]

Dr. David Arnow therefore notes that the biblical observance of Passover ~~m~~must have evolved from the fusion of two ancient types of sacrifice: *pesach*, exemplifying

[6] Ibid.
[7] Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman and David Arnow, PhD, eds, My People's Passover Haggadah, Volume 1: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 9.

pastoral bounty, and *matzot*, representing agrarian abundance."[8] He describes an ancient apotropaic ritual in which families would sacrifice a firstling from the flock at the end of the lambing season, and then they would spread the blood from this sacrifice at the entrance of their dwellings to ward off evil spirits. Arnow notes that this ritual was most likely more prevalent in the south, and in the agriculturally richer north the focus would naturally have been on the spring grain festival, the Feast of Matzot, celebrated on or near the new moon directly prior to the harvest.[9] Over time, these spring rituals would have been linked with major events in the history of the Israelites.

> Smearing blood on doorways—once a protective device against demons—came to signify the blood of the paschal sacrifice that the Israelites daubed on their doorposts so ‗Adonai will pass over [*pasach]* the door and not let the Destroyer enter and spite your home.' (Exod. 12:23). Unleavened bread acquired a new historical identity: ‗bread of distress' (Deut. 16:3).[10]

The combination and historicization of these rituals is thought to have occurred under the reign of Josaiah in the 7th century BCE, during a period of centralization of all forms of ritual and sacrifice under the jurisdiction of the Temple in Jerusalem.[11] It is also possible that there are elements of an ancient New Year's festival in the observance of Passover, as the month of Nisan (which corresponds to the biblical month of Aviv), during which Passover occurs, is considered one of several "new years" in the Israelite lunar calendar. Avoiding leaven and recounting the "creation story" of the Israelites during which *Adonai* triumphs over the Egyptian Pharaoh—even perhaps reenacting this event by

[8] Ibid., 10.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 11.
[11] Ibid.

acting it out using costumes[12]—may well have been related to the idea of Passover as a ―New Year" festival in the spring.[13]

In its most ancient and hoary origins, therefore, it appears that the observance of Passover is a work of bold creativity, combining several ancient observances to create a ritual reflective of the formative historical events and ongoing situations and values of the Israelites and their rulers. This creative force seems to have continued into the period of Rabbinic Judaism, after the fall of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. The Seder truly developed after the destruction of the Second Temple. The emphasis on telling and recounting the story of the Exodus from Egypt was not a significant aspect of the observance of Passover prior to this period of time. While the Torah contains four instructions to explain elements of the story to one's children, it is not explicitly stated that the statements in the Torah intend that one should tell one's children the story of the Exodus during the festival of Passover, much less in the format of the Seder as we have it today.[14]

The philosopher Philo (first century CE) makes no mention of a Passover observance that includes a recitation or retelling in his description of the festival of Passover, nor does the historian Josephus who postdated him slightly.[15] In the absence of the Temple, however, the Jewish people were unable to conduct the sacrifices as they had on Passover for the past several hundred years, and they therefore adapted a new method of observance. Both the *Mishna* and the *Tosefta* contain descriptions of the new ritual of

[12] Exodus 12:11 "This is how you should eat it [the paschal sacrifice]: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, your staff in your hand…"
[13] Hoffman, 13.
[14] Ibid., 16.
[15] Ibid., 15.

the Seder, containing many of the central elements that remain in our modern-day Seders, and the *Mishna* adds the important element of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt in a question-and-answer format.[16]

As mentioned above, the Torah itself provides precedent for telling children the story of the Exodus from Egypt. This is made especially powerful by the Mishnaic notion that words of Torah are an adequate substitute for the performance of sacrifices.[17] The mishnaic Seder additionally contains elements drawn from the Greek symposium, in which wine and conversation and debate on intellectual topics were central elements. Many specific physical and ritual elements of the Seder seem to have ties back to Greek symposia, such as reclining, eating dipped hors d'ourves, and use of individual plates displaying small portions of various foods. [18] The *Mishna* additionally lays out specific liturgical and conversational elements necessary to the Seder which remain in many *haggadot* today. The development of the Passover Seder and festival observance demonstrates that, at its core, the Seder is a ritual born out of adaptation to changing historical and cultural circumstances. It is a ritual that has responded to the values, needs, and situations of the Jewish people throughout the ages. While telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt became no less important, the method for doing so, by necessity, developed and changed.

The word *haggadah*, itself, means ~~t~~elling," which seems to be a fitting title for this rabbinic innovation of the Seder as a means of observing the Passover festival. The injunction contained within the Seder, that every man must think of himself as having

[16] Ibid., 16.
[17] Ibid., 17, Mishnah Avot 3:4.
[18] Ibid., 17.

been personally brought out of Egypt with the Israelites,[19] connected the generations to this story of triumph over oppressive forces and survival against all odds, with the help of their watchful and mighty God. It not only invites, but *commands* each person participating in a Seder, encountering a *haggadah*, to read him or herself into the story of the Exodus and into the yearly ritual of telling and retelling this quintessential story of Jewish birth and flourishing.

> In every generation let each man look on himself as if He came forth out of Egypt…' The directive creates a unique concept of time—to relive the Exodus rather than to remember—and transforms the ritual from a memory of the past to an experience in the present. Each spring, Jews must experience the Exodus rather than simply hear of it and, as such, immediately revisualize Egypt as whatever oppression currently exists in their lives.[20]

The story of the Exodus is, in that sense, ~~a~~ story that made it possible to tell other stories."[21] The very existence and presence of the *haggadah* itself drove women to create their own Seders and *haggadot*. Unlike other Jewish holidays whose observance occurs mainly in the realm of the home, Pesach ~~w~~was a religious ritual with a written text. The patriarchal words of *haggadot* gave feminists written evidence of unequal regard."[22] Other rituals carried out in the home—Shabbat meals, the lighting of Chanukah candles—do not have an extensive text that is repeated year after year. And while many families do not light Shabbat candles and attend services each week, and some households do not remember to kindle the Chanukah lights each of the eight nights, Passover is one holiday that American Jews are attuned to. ~~I~~In America today…Jews who belong to no synagogue, put up no *m'zuzah,* and do not keep Shabbat somehow

[19] Traditional Seder text.
[20] Joyce Antler, ed, Talking Back: Images of Jewish Women in American Popular Culture (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 222.
[21] Hoffman, 72, quoting Michael Walzer.
[22] Elizabeth H. Pleck , Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 115.

manage to schedule a Seder."[23] There could be many reasons for this, from the focus on food and entertaining, to the appeal of a holiday that focuses on the family and education of children, or the fact that it occurs just once a year rather than every week like Shabbat. The most salient reason, however, seems to be the Seder's strong theme of freedom by means of divine redemption from slavery and oppression, ~~–~~[~~a~~]a match made in heaven between Jewish tradition and American values."[24] Even the most secular of Jewish families are likely to take part in a Seder in one way or another. ~~–~~[~~P~~]assover is [therefore] often the last ritual to be forsaken in the process of assimilation."[25]

Due to the fluid and personal method of reliving the story of the Exodus, its location in the home, its homiletical alignment with core American values, and the evidence of Passover as a progressively developed ritual observance, feminists creating their own new Seder experiences can easily read themselves as a continuation of the dialectical and developmental process of the Seder as described in the *Mishna*. Changes made in the process of creating feminist Seders ~~–~~[~~e~~]embody the intersecting traditions and adaptive nature that has ensured Jewish survival. The very process of questioning and rethinking, back and forth, taking delight in dialogue and argument and interpretation—this tradition runs through the marrow of Jewish survival."[26] It could be said that ~~–~~[~~W~~]women haggadists and Seder participants are openly engaging in this tradition of dialogue, reliving rather than merely rereading…[T]he new *haggadot* are returning to the spirit of the *Mishna* goal of adaptation and survival. The new circumstance facing

[23] Hoffman, 47.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Pleck, 115.
[26] Antler, 223.

Judaism, in this instance, is feminism."[27] In a certain respect, as feminists are at work in the process of making the beliefs and observances of the past relevant to the situation of the present, they ~~u~~phold Judaism's approach to survival and paradox."[28]

Yet another question is why it is important to have Women's Seders when one could, perhaps more easily and seamlessly, insert new readings and rituals into the traditional Passover Seder in the hopes of highlighting the role of women and striving for female equality within Judaism.[29] There are, in fact, prominent feminist voices on this side of the debate. Wendy Zierler notes the concern that having a separate, women's-only Seder experience may be a necessary starting point for the cause of feminism, but —it perpetuates an age-old system of binary oppositions and exclusion, this time with women excluding men instead of the other way around…They promote a notion of feminist Judaism as a separatist, women's only affair."[30] Sandy Eisenberg Sasso wrote in 1977 of her concern that ~~o~~ut of our frustration with the lack of recognition given women in the past, we mustn't evolve a situation in which we respond in kind by being exclusivistic. The Seder which speaks only for the Jewish woman, centers purely upon her enslavements and liberations, weakens our bond of solidarity with the whole of Jewish civilization and people."[31] Similarly, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff wrote of her desire for a Seder which speaks to the experiences and desires of women and men equally, in which ~~w~~omen would be as _visible' as men, but neither men nor women would be the entire

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 228.
[29] See chapter 5 for more information on the effects of Women's Seders on mainstream Seder observance and practice.
[30] Hoffman, 73.
[31] Ibid.

focus of the Seder."[32] With these concerns in mind, then, why create a separatist Seder when one might have great success spreading the message of equality and the importance of female voices by inserting new rituals and readings into a mainstream, joint-gender Seder? Some answer these concerns by in fact inviting interested or feminist men to participate in their group or community's Women's Seders, though the majority of Women's Seders seem to remain women's-only affairs.

The simple fact that not one woman is mentioned in the traditional *haggadah*, and that women are—traditionally—not obligated to recline is evidence of their absence from important roles and events in Jewish history in the eyes of the traditional *haggadah*. A version of the Passover Seder described in tractate *Pesachim* of the *Tosefta*[33] mentions a husband's obligation to "gladden his wife with wine" at the Seder. Another account notes that it is because of the merit of righteous women that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt, and therefore a man must make his wife rejoice, through wine, clothing, or shoes.[34] However, the Mishna's account of the Passover Seder does not mention women at all in the ritual.[35] "It cannot be denied that in the Exodus story, women occupy prominent positions. In contrast, women are nowhere to be found in the *haggadah's* telling.'"[36] The *haggadah* at its core is a halakhic study text, and therefore its exclusion of women from the Seder narrative and ritual seems to be a continuation of the

[32] Ibid.
[33] Hoffman, 75, Tosefta Pesachim 10.
[34] Michael Kaurman, The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1993), 219.
[35] Hoffman, 45.
[36] Ibid., 75.

androcentric, ―homosocial" study-house model in which men study texts written by men, about men, addressed to men, with men.[37]

It is important to mention, however, that in contrast to the absence of women from the *Mishna's* description of the Passover Seder, women are bound by certain ritual obligations regarding Passover and the Seder. Partaking in the four cups of wine during the Seder is one of three rabbinic laws that women are required to fulfill.[38] Additionally, because women are included in the prohibition against consuming *chametz* (leaven) they are additionally included in the command to eat *Matzah*.[39] Passover provides the essential conflict in that, while it celebrates freedom, it crystallizes the ―contradiction between increased participation of women in all aspects of Jewish life and the content of tradition," which underlines the need to have women's-only spaces and in particular, Women's Seders.[40]

Judith Plaskow defines four levels on which Women's Seders function as separate women's space. First, they allow women to sit and either be served or serve each other rather than focusing on the needs of others at all times. As we will note below, this simple fact was a key impetus for one of the first, most prominent Women's Seders. Secondly, women are encouraged to ―teach and preside," which is a role of great value to those from traditional backgrounds. Thirdly, it ―allows those present to claim ownership of their Judaism and begin to take power to shape and transmit it." Finally, and most importantly in Plaskow's view, Women's Seders encourage their participants to ―redefine

[37] Ibid., 75.
[38] Kaufman, 219
[39] Ibid., 226.
[40] Judith Plaskow, "The Continuing Value of Separatism" In Anisfield, Mohr, & Spector, 11.
The question of whether there is still a similar or equal need for "women's-only" spaces now, over 30 years after the first Women's Seder, will be discussed in chapter 4 or the conclusion of this thesis.

their relationship to tradition by raising questions and exploring perspectives" that otherwise might have been seen as annoyances or digressions from the traditional Seder narrative.[41]

Regarding the issue of women's-only space, yet other voices note the importance of acknowledging the way women approach God. ~~–~~A place must be carved out within tradition to acknowledge and accommodate a uniquely female experience of the divine. Different ritual forms and formats must be created and woven into Jewish tradition so that voice may be given to varying modes of spiritual expression."[42] In this way, our liturgy and practice will ~~–in~~clude and embrace ritual expression that reflects the uniqueness of women's and men's need to speak authentically with God."[43] Women recreating the Seder and other rituals and ritual objects were seeking ~~–a~~ Jewish experience that more directly and personally reflected their lives…They created a Judaism that represented them and therefore asserted that Jewish women's aesthetics and lives had an uncontested place within Judaism."[44] The unique women-only environment has the potential to create safe space for women to grow and to be. Rituals such as women's-only Seders ~~–p~~rovide opportunities for Jewish women to mirror for one another what Jewish women could be."[45]

There was, essentially, both a positive and a negative impetus for the creation of Women's Seders. On the one hand, the creation of Women's Seders was a direct reaction

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds, Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), 38.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Riv-Ellen Prell, ed, Women Remaking American Judaism (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 17.
[45] Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 69.

to elements of patriarchy within Judaism, most specifically within Passover and the Passover Seder. It was a rejection of the notion that tradition trumps modernity and modern values. The creation of Women's Seders also simply reacted to the dearth of rituals that speak directly to and from the lives and experiences of women. On the more positive side, however, the Women's Seder attempts to recognize the previously unvoiced characters, stories, and discussions. It is an attempt to bring women to the discussion at the table rather than or in addition to the preparation in the kitchen. To bring women together elevates the life of both the female characters in the story of the Exodus and those lives present around the Women's Seder table. The Women's Seder at its most basic, at its core, was created as a powerful forum for telling the real stories of Jewish women, of their ups and downs and milestones, and of their personal tales of seeking freedom from any host of oppressors or rulers in their lives.

Though these impetuses were essential in the genesis of Women's Seders and *haggadot*, the context in which these rituals emerged must be noticed. As women's issues were brought to the fore of American cultural consciousness in the 1960's and 1970's, there was a heightened sensitivity to the patriarchal nature of traditional Judaism. The first inklings of Women's Seders occurred in the early 1970's. Jewish feminist groups in Berkeley and San Diego wrote *haggadot* and held Women's Seders on their own around this time, and in 1974, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff published the foundation of a feminist *haggadah* that she had used with a group of women previously.[46] The 1970's saw the second wave of American feminism and with it the establishment of women's

[46] Hoffman, p.71, Aviva Cantor Zuckoff, "Jewish Women's Haggadah," in Sister Celebrations: Nine Worship Experiences, ed. Arlene Swidler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974).

centers and buildings, which occasionally began to hold Women's Seders.[47] From these beginnings, Women's Seders began to move into private homes, with women writing their own unpublished *haggadot* and passing them informally to other women, slowly spreading the interest in and prevalence of Women's Seders.[48]

The women who crafted these new alternative, feminist *haggadot* were part of a grander stream of people in the 1960's and 1970's who were crafting new versions of the Passover story, reading many themes into Passover's grander theme of freedom from oppression.[49] One notable example is Art Waskow's 1969 Freedom Seder, which marked the first anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King.[50] When women were unsatisfied with these ~~li~~beration *haggadot*," they decided to fulfill their own desires and needs by crafting their own. The informally-titled Rice-Paper Haggadah, written in 1971 by a group of women in Portland, Oregon, ~~t~~old of the freedom-minded midwives who were the first to resist the Pharaoh's murderous edicts."[51] This *haggadah* made its way to New York and beyond. In 1973, a group of women in Berkeley, California held a Women's Seder which utilized their newly formed Pesach Haggadah: A Statement of Joyous Liberation—Women's Seder, Berkeley, California 5733—1973.[52] Similarly, in 1974 a group of women in Los Angeles began a feminist Passover ritual that developed into Women's Passover Seder—1977, which became widely distributed among women.[53]

[47] Antler, 223.
[48] Ibid., 224.
[49] Ibid., 225-226.
[50] Arthur Waskow. The Freedom Seder: A New Haggadah for Passover (San Diego: Micah Press, 1969).
[51] Ibid., 226.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

These early *haggadot* had a strong center in American feminism and the conception of the place of women in the United States, incorporating feminist culture alongside a fairly traditional *haggadah* text. From the mid-1960's through the 1970's, the feminist movement was largely concerned with access to and inclusion in the traditional power structures of American society. Therefore, Jewish women likewise worked to gain equal access to Jewish institutions and ritual practices.[54] Much of the Jewish feminist work of the 1970's centered on *halakhah*, attempting to discover how women could be more included in the halakhic structure of Jewish life.[55] Judith Plaskow identified this model of Jewish feminism as that of civil rights, rather than liberation, ~~"g~~getting a piece of the pie, not baking a new one."[56] This is reflected in the way that the women's *haggadot* of the 1970's tend to incorporate feminist values and culture into a traditional Seder structure. The most prominent and well-circulated *haggadah* was the one that was used during the Seder commonly referred to as the ~~"f~~irst" Women's Seder. While it appears from research that this was not truly the very first Women's Seder, it is often regarded as such due to its prominence and the influence it had on Women's Seders to follow. It was published in Ms. Magazine in April of 1977 as ~~"A~~ Woman's Passover Haggadah and Other Revisionist Documents," by E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod.[57] This *haggadah* was very widely circulated under several names in the coming decades.

This ~~"f~~irst" Women's Seder began with a group of women—American and Israeli, living in Haifa—who decided they should have a Seder that was ~~"d~~ifferent."

[54] Haddad and Esposito, 28.
[55] Ibid., 40.
[56] As quoted in Ibid., 41.
[57] Antler, 226. Also, E. M. Broner with Naomi Nimrod. The Women's Haggadah (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 6, 18.

—The invited men would prepare the meal, serve, and clean. The women would contemplate the traditional *haggadah* and write new and relevant prayers."[58] This Seder inspired the two women who planned it—E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod—to create their own Women's Haggadah, and begin an annual Women's Seder tradition. E.M. Broner describes the process of crafting this Women's Haggadah in her book, The Telling. She and Naomi Nimrod were living in Haifa and had been working on crafting this new *haggadah*; —the rabbis of old became the wise women connected to them; the questions of the four sons were put into the mouths of the four daughters."[59] They debated each decision, what to include and what to exclude; —We were uncomfortable with each decision: What to retain and what to restate? How to keep the bitterness and anger from overwhelming us? Where to place the traditional stories yet insert new characters?"[60] They phoned the first women rabbinical students spending their first year in Jerusalem to discuss the appropriate language for a feminine divine presence and received the guidance to refer to God as the —Shekhinah…She Who Dwells In Our Midst."[61] They noted that, even though Miriam is at the center of the story of the Exodus, she had been largely left out of the *haggadah*, and —what had been omitted from her history was also omitted from our mythic past. It was clearly time for a new Telling."[62] They decided they would therefore create their *haggadah* to accurately reflect Miriam's centrality to the story of the Exodus. Broner writes, —We, her modern daughters, would sing Miriam's songs, would reconstruct her journey, and build upon it

[58] E.M. Broner, The Telling: The Story of a Group of Jewish Women who Journey to Spirituality Through Community and Ceremony (San Francisco: HarperSanFancisco, 1993), 7.
[59] Ibid., 1.
[60] Ibid., 2.
[61] Ibid., 1.
[62] Ibid., 3.

our own journeys."[63] Broner and Nimrod succeeded in this goal, creating dual Women's Seders—in New York and in Haifa—for all the years to follow. This "first" Women's Seder in New York in 1976 housed a group of influential, change-making women who were not afraid to spark discussion and be radical. In this group were Gloria Steinem, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Phyllis Chesler and others. The next year they were joined by Bea Kreloff, Lilly Rivlin, Bella Abzug, Michelle Landsberg, and Edith Isaac-Rose.[64] In each following year the Seder grew and became more elaborate.

In her book, Deborah, Golda, and Me, Letty Cottin Pogrebin describes the scope of details of the Women's Seders conducted by this groundbreaking group of women. She describes how they use feminine prayer language, introduce themselves using a matrilineal line (i.e., "I am Letty, daughter of Ceil, who was the daughter of Jenny."[65]), and describe the plagues of women. She enumerates the themes taken on by these Women's Seders in the subsequent years after 1976; this group of "Seder Sisters" have conducted Seders on the themes of the *lamed-vavniks*, honoring mentors, the number seven, mothers and daughters, conflict resolution, and many others.[66] She describes the growth of the Seders, from the Seder in 1977 during which the women chose to invite their daughters,[67] to the Seder in 1989 when the daughters chose to host the Seders themselves.[68] Writing of the Seder in 1977 to which the daughters were first invited, Esther M. Broner writes, "We could scarcely know that in a decade or more the daughters

[63] Ibid.
[64] Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, 4.
[65] Pogrebin, 122.
[66] Ibid., 122-124.
[67] Ibid., 122.
[68] Ibid., 124.

would lead the mothers."[69] In this 1989 Seder, after asking a host of questions regarding feminism, women's ~~p~~plagues," and their ability to overcome the obstacles in their way, the daughters turned to their mothers and said ~~W~~We have broken the *afikoman* with the daughters' questions and now we choose to restore it with the mothers' answers…We ask you to help us make it whole again."[70] Pogrebin continues by describing the answer of the mothers: that they had no answers. ~~B~~But the mothers had no answers. And that, I believe, was our legacy. We said they must find their own answers. We told them to never stop asking questions…That was our way; they would find theirs."[71]

News of the 1976 New York Seder travelled by word of mouth and, quickly, Women's Seders began to pop up all around the United States and, eventually, beyond. The development and spread of the Women's Seder followed the progress of the feminist movement in the United States. The writing and informal spread of unpublished women's *haggadot* continued through the 1980's, with the women involved developing a connection to the Passover story and ritual through their personal connection with these Seder rituals.[72] For women involved in these early Women's Seders, the yearly writing of *haggadot* ~~b~~became as much a task of preparation for the Seder as making the *charoset*."[73] In 1987, leading the movement of synagogues and temples hosting Women's Seders, Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco held its first community

[69] Broner, 24.
[70] Pogrebin, 126.
[71] Ibid., 126-127.
[72] Antler, 224.
[73] Ibid.

Women's Seder on the final night of Passover, having done a traditional Seder on the first night.[74]

A great deal of research and writing was done about Jewish women in the 1980's as part of the expansion of the Jewish feminist movement and the growing field of women's studies, which affected feminist *haggadot*. The women's *haggadot* of the 1970's incorporated mainstream feminist culture alongside largely traditional prayers, and the women's *haggadot* of the 1980's built on this, drawing from a variety of sources such as Jewish history and legend, pre-Judaic goddesses, Jewish poetry and literature, and the stories of biblical women.[75]

Whereas the 1980's saw Women's Seders spreading to the home, rather than the women's center or building, the 1990's saw Women's Seders returning to official institutions such as Jewish Community Centers.[76] Eventually, Women's Seders were occurring world-wide, reaching as far as the Jewish community in the former Soviet Union.[77] It is striking that the innovation of the Women's Seder became so prevalent and mainstream so quickly. One reason for the quick spread of Women's Seders is female and feminist rabbis; these early women rabbis served as ~~b~~ridges over which crossed the feminist critique of Judaism in their homes, synagogues, and communities of US Jews."[78] Additionally, some link the speedy proliferation of the Women's Seder to the fact that it

[74] Ibid., 225.
[75] Ibid., 227.
[76] Ibid., 225.
[77] As I discovered in 2002 in Passover travels to Ukraine through HUC-JIR Jerusalem Passover Project.
[78] Prell, 211-212.

overtly names the feminist struggle within the ritual. It therefore ―became the preferred venue for the elaboration of explicit egalitarian feminism in a ritual context."[79]

From the late 1990's through today, a great variety of Women's Seders have occurred and an incredible number of women's and feminist *haggadot* have been created and published. A simple search of the words ―Women's Seder" on Amazon.com illustrates this fact![80] Little has been written about the Women's Seders from the end of the 1990's until today. Many of the questions about the current state of Women's Seders and their future will be addressed in the conclusion to this study. It is safe to say, however, that the trends within Jewish feminism have continued to be reflected by Women's Seders and *haggadot*. Judith Plaskow identifies the current Jewish feminist struggle as ―eradicating the deeply rooted historical Jewish notion that woman is _other,' thereby restoring their full humanity."[81] Plaskow identifies three steps by which this can be accomplished: first, historical research; second, exegetical work done by women and feminist men to add to the scope of Jewish *midrash* and interpretation; and thirdly, recognition and expansion of the personal and spiritual dimensions of women's life experiences.[82]

New models of femininity are also celebrated within contemporary Women's Seders. For example, Letty Cottin Pogrebin describes the women celebrated and commemorated in the Women's Seders she attended. ―At our Seder, we do not praise good girls and polite ladies; we honor rebellious women. We asked participants to undo

[79] Ibid., 237.
[80] 50 hits at the time of writing.
[81] Haddad and Esposito, 42.
[82] Ibid.

men's silencing of women and women's self-censorship."[83] A great deal of ritual is being created that marks and honors the times and special events in Jewish women's lives; as Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell remarks, "Jewish women are writing the *new* Torah text with their own lives."[84] Rituals such as Women's Seders intentionally speak to areas that used to be gaps in the religious and spiritual life of women. As Vanessa Ochs notes, "These new rituals address spiritual lacunae broadly felt by Jewish women. They reclaim, refashion, and revise the traditional ways. They come about as conscious responses and practical adjustments to contemporary needs and realities."[85]

The Seders and *haggadot* created from the beginning of the movement of the feminist Women's Seder range from the starkly feminist, calling for change and social justice, to those that simply highlight the role of women in the Exodus from Egypt and allow women to come together and celebrate liberation. It is worth mentioning here one prominent subset of the Women's Seder: the lesbian Women's Seder. In her book, Like Bread on a Seder Plate, Rebecca Alpert notes that Passover "is a time for reflection on belonging to the Jewish people,"[86] and as such, the Women's Seder and the holiday itself are particularly powerful for lesbians within the Jewish community because "images of the Seder provide an opportunity to think about Jewish time and space and to transform them from the perspective of Jewish lesbian life."[87] The narrative of gaining freedom from slavery, thriving despite the efforts of an oppressive ruler, resonates powerfully for the LGBT community within Judaism. Rebecca Alpert states it aptly: "Passover is also

[83] Pogrebin, 120.
[84] Haddad and Esposito, 43.
[85] Prell, 257.
[86] Rebecca Alpert. Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 74.
[87] Ibid., 155.

an important symbol of liberation for Jewish lesbians, a time when many of us recognize the spirit of our own freedom from the bondage of closeted life."[88]

The process of development for lesbian Women's Seders has mirrored that of the mainstream Women's Seder in certain respects. Not only have certain rituals actually been passed from the lesbian community to the mainstream Women's Seder, but also – in a process similar to the mainstream Women's Seder—as the LGBT community has gained greater centrality and respect within the Jewish community, some lesbian Women's Seders have been able to take on a more celebratory theme, rather than that of activism. "For some lesbians Passover is a time to celebrate as a Jewish lesbian community, and *haggadot* have been written for that purpose."[89] Lesbian Women's Seders and other variations upon or within the Women's Seder will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four of this thesis.

While some Women's Seders occur on one of the two traditional Seder nights, it is more often the trend that Women's Seders take place on an "off-night," during or before Passover on a day that is not a traditional Seder time. This allows the Women's Seder to occur without competing or detracting from any family celebration on the first two nights of Passover. It may also provide a freer form of engagement with the Seder and the *haggadah* as it is not expected to fulfill one's obligation to participate in a traditional, mainstream Seder. This allows a freer model of both liturgy and ritual within the Women's Seder because one is released from having concern over reciting the traditional prayers or carrying out the traditional rituals according to custom and

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 75.

halakhah during Women's Seders. This trend, of the "off-night" Women's Seder, began to take root in the 1990's. [90] This tendency of the Women's Seder to occur on a night other than one of the first two nights of Passover allows it to not compete with mainstream or family Seders, perhaps leading to less conflict or opposition to Women's Seders on the part of traditionalists. Rituals such as Women's Seders "have occasioned minimal conflict, because they do not compete with institutional liturgies or ritual events, nor do they seek to invade the sphere of public synagogue worship."[91] Yet there are those Women's Seders that nonetheless take place on one of the first two nights of Passover.

While it is clear that there are many iterations and variations to be found in the scope and spectrum of Women's Seders, in each case they allow women the opportunity to come together and share their stories and those of their female Jewish predecessors. While there has been and continues to be a process of change and development of the liturgy and rituals of the Women's Seder, there are two characteristics that seem to be shared by almost all variations of the Women's Seder. The "presence and practice of women" are two commonly recurring themes of the Women's Seder. That is, the "visibility of women within the story," and the "articulation of woman's perspectives within the story."[92] The scope of reaction or resistance to the patriarchal elements of traditional Seder and *haggadot* certainly varies a great deal from one Women's Seder to the next, but the themes of presence and practice of women remain consistent, as we will continue to note throughout the upcoming chapters.

[90] Antler, 236. For instance, the San Diego Women's Haggadah is intended for usage on the seventh night of Passover.
[91] Adler, 69.
[92] Antler, 230.

Wendy Zierler, in her article, ―Where Have All the Women Gone?" in My People's Passover Haggadah, raises a related issue. With such strong, visceral reactions to the patriarchy of the traditional *haggadah*, with all the efforts it takes to create an egalitarian Seder experience or create a Women's Seder, why continue to revise and debate and develop? Might it not be better to leave the Seder ritual behind as male-centric in both form and content? The books could be said to be ―the message and not just the container for it."[93] While they do not get the same press, there are certainly those women and feminists who have chosen that route. Zierler answers this query with a powerful theory of text. She essentially says that leaving behind the text, taking this rejectionist approach, in a sense actually reinforces and acquiesces to the concept that sacred texts are in a certain sense untouchable and unchanging. Zierler writes, ―It is my conviction that rejectionist interpretation paradoxically reinforces the idea that sacred texts inhabit a space above history, interpretation, or context."[94] She continues that she believes that sacred texts really only ―exist' and are constituted only within a community of readers; even those texts with overt masculine bias are open to reformation through the process of engagement, critique, and reconsideration."[95] Zierler believes that this is especially the case for the *haggadah* for two reasons. First, that it ―does not pretend, like the Bible, to be the word of God," and secondly, that it ―is not so much a fixed and rigid liturgy as a work of meta-telling and meta-interpretation. One best reads the *haggadah* as

[93] Zierler in Hoffman, 72.
[94] Ibid., 72.
[95] Ibid., 73.

a handbook on how to tell the story, providing examples of how one might fruitfully digress about the telling, making the experience ever fresh, relevant, and liberating."[96]

Essentially Zierler and those in agreement with her are saying that if women simply choose to reject the entire *haggadah* and Seder ritual on account of the—admittedly prominent—patriarchal elements within the liturgy and ritual, they are writing themselves out of yet another time period in our tradition. In doing so they would do to themselves what the patriarchal tradition has done for thousands of years: perpetuate the problem. They would be leaving behind all the elevating, uplifting themes and elements within the traditional Seder and story of the Exodus and—stated colloquially—throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Fortunately the greater trend appears to be engagement with the Seder and the *haggadah* to bring it along a path of development and change and to allow Women's Seders to use and incorporate traditional Seder liturgy and ritual, using it, developing it, and innovating with it in order to create meaningful Women's Seder experiences.

The following chapters will look into just what those ritual and liturgical developments have been that make up the Women's Seder. They will look into rituals that are based upon the traditional rituals of the Passover Seder as well as those that are completely new innovations. In each case, the impetus for creating such a new ritual and what purpose it serves within the Seder will be discussed. Similarly, we will turn to the topic of liturgical innovations found within the Women's Seder, similarly discussing the process of and impetus for creation of these liturgical elements. Additionally the role the liturgical innovation plays within the Women's Seder and whether it is related to a

[96] Ibid.

traditional element within the Seder will be addressed. Ritual and liturgical innovation stand at the core of the Women's Seder. As novelist Monique Wittig wrote, "Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."[97]

[97] Quoted in Adler, 69.

Chapter Two: Ritual Innovation

"It is more than the weaving together of a few prayerful or poetic lines and symbolic acts. Rituals that last tug at the private heart and the communal soul. They resonate with not only the personal but also the transcendent. They help us make meaning of our private lives because they reach back to grasp that which is timeless, renewing tradition and traditionalizing the new."[98]

"Rather than representing a break with tradition, new ritual and liturgical activity are the very essence of a living tradition. The authority to change or to reconstruct the prayer and ritual life of the community comes from tradition itself. It is the constant renewal of religious forms that keeps tradition vital and capable of giving meaning to each new generation of seekers."[99]

In this chapter we will examine ritual innovation found in Women's Seders. Ritual innovation is not only present at the Women's Seder, but it is practically its essence. Why is this? As discussed above, "Jewish women are thirsty for a mode of religious expression that celebrates their Judaism and their womanhood together, a synthesis that weaves both centralities into a single, coherent identity."[100] To share a brief anecdote, Professor Vanessa Ochs of the University of Virginia recently related the story of an innovation she witnessed at a Women's Seder at the University of Virginia Hillel in the spring of 2008 that she deemed to be truly radical. The two young women leading the Seder began by inviting everyone to eat *before* beginning the Seder, saying that for years women worked both prior to and throughout the Seder in preparation for the meal and its aftermath, so everyone should enjoy the Seder and eat whenever they want. The rituals examined in this chapter are truly "radical" in a variety of ways, from

[98] Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, "Unwrapping the Gift," in Women and Judaism, ed. Rabbi Malka Drucker (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 4.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Elaine Moise and Rebecca Schwartz, The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah: A Jewish Women's Celebration of Passover (Palo Alto, CA: Rikudei Miryam, 2002), ix.

how they use and adapt traditional Seder rituals, how they make use of Jewish rituals from other times and seasons, to even how they dispense with traditional ritual and instead, forge their own path.

These ritual innovations often take place by means of insertions into the Seder, but at times innovations are also created by utilizing the exact same order and ritual elements found in the traditional Seder itself. "The most successful religious reformers have invariably insisted that they were bringing in nothing new but discovering the true meaning inherent in the first symbols of the religion they were reforming."[101] The rituals described below can fall roughly into two broad categories: those in which a traditional ritual object or text has been imbued with new meaning, and those that are completely new creations previously foreign to the Seder and its traditions. "In creating new rituals, Jewish feminists have alternated between two approaches: adaptation of existing rituals and creation of new ones."[102] As the result of the debate among Jewish feminists between the so-called "add women and stir" method of ritual and liturgical innovation and the desire to create "distinctively female alternatives," both types of ritual and liturgical innovation have found their place in the Women's Seder. It seems therefore that both of these elements are necessary in order for Judaism to become "a religion that women as well as men have a role in shaping."[103]

Ritual & Liturgy: Some Definitions

The subject matter of this chapter raises an issue that must be addressed briefly before moving forward. While this chapter is entitled "Ritual Innovation" and the

[101] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in The Invention of Tradition, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1, 6, 7.
[102] Vanessa Ochs, Inventing Jewish Ritual (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 47.
[103] Ibid.

following chapter will be entitled "Liturgical Innovation," it is indeed challenging to draw a firm line between the two. Rituals and liturgy are by their nature bound up together and interwoven; while a ritual may be centered on an action or an object, oftentimes it will involve a liturgical element as well. Both liturgy and ritual carry a certain performative and transformative element: "Writing itself, for feminists, is a form of rebellion, usurpation, or re-visioning; it also marks the beginning of a new ritualization and a new myth-making, for language is intimately bound up with religious ritual. More than the vehicle for performing rituals, language establishes the reality of myth…[A]ctions without words are meaningless."[104] While a ritual may be focused on performance of some action, the words spoken before, during, and after the action embody the meaning of the ritual in many cases. To take an example from the traditional Seder liturgy, it is one thing to dip parsley in salt water; one could easily think that this is simply the customary way to eat parsley. However, when words are said or read that explain that parsley represents the green of spring and renewal but the salt water into which they are dipped represents the tears of the Israelites and their sorrow to live their lives as slaves—the simple act is transformed into a ritual full of meaning and symbolism during the Passover Seder. This is, therefore, one complication; to draw any clear line between ritual and liturgy proves to be a thought-provoking and challenging task.

Added to this equation is the element of innovation. If an entirely new ritual object is created or a physical action is invented, then it seems relatively clear that this can qualify as a ritual. However, if the innovation regarding a ritual is that it is imbued with new meaning and therefore new words are recited to enact the ritual, would this

[104] Claire R. Satlof, "History, Fiction, and the Tradition: Creating a Jewish Feminist Poetic," in On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 193.

reasonably still qualify as *ritual* innovation, or is it then more accurately classed as *liturgical* innovation? For an example to illustrate this ambiguity, take the ritual of *yachatz*—breaking the middle *matzah*. The action of breaking remains the same, yet the specific focus of this ritual during a Women's Seder is most likely on the personal brokenness in the lives of the women sitting around the table or the brokenness of women's lives in general.[105] In a sense, it is the interpretation but not the activity that is changed in this new version of the ritual. Is it therefore liturgical innovation because the *action* itself remains unchanged from the traditional Seder ritual?

In this way, any line drawn on this issue, no matter how considered, must by its nature be arbitrary or fuzzy to at least a certain extent. For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen to draw the line between ritual and liturgy in the following manner: If the element of the Seder being examined centers on or strongly involves an object or physical action, I have qualified it as a ritual and therefore it will be discussed in this chapter, "Ritual Innovation." However, if the Seder element in question is simply made up of singing or reciting new or modified *words*, it is liturgy and will therefore be a subject of discussion in the next chapter, "Liturgical Innovation." Therefore a vast majority of the "Maggid" (Telling) section of the Seder will be discussed in the next chapter as it is made up mainly of telling and studying the story of the Exodus from Egypt.[106]

[105] This moment of innovation will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

[106] I was influenced in my decision to draw the line between ritual and liturgy based on physical action and the centrality or use of an object by the fascinating discussion on objects and their function in ritual and Judaism in Chapter 3 of Ochs's Inventing Jewish Rituals, "Material Culture: New Rituals and Ritual Objects," 87-111. This chapter is certainly worthy of thorough reading and I would direct the reader to consider it should it be of interest.

The Nature of Ritual

Yet another topic that is worth some discussion before moving forward is the nature of ritual. This could, of course, be the topic of yet another entire thesis and is certainly the topic of many an article and book. In her book, *Inventing Jewish Ritual*, Vanessa Ochs defines rituals as ―conventional or patterned ways of doing things that have shared and often multiple meanings," and notes that they are the ―products of a time, a place, available physical materials, and appealing practices of other peoples." Ochs also notes that ―All rituals are made and remade, all rituals mean different things to different people, and all rituals were once new and are renewed—even the Jewish rituals we may cherish most of all."[107] Interestingly, Ochs views rituals as inherently innovative, at their outset a product of human creativity, and therefore certainly not immutable or beyond revision. And while certainly one could locate several other definitions of the word ―ritual" that do not imply these factors, it is a point well taken for the purposes of this thesis. Additionally, it is a telling way to view rituals from the perspective of the ritual innovators at work behind Women's Seders. While rituals can be valuable, enriching, traditional, and heartfelt, they are not beyond reinventing or editing because they are at their core *human* and therefore not impervious to change. Ochs's definition also takes into account the cultural context both at the time of creation of a ritual and at its performance. ―When we perform ancient rituals in this day, and at this time, they are no longer the same rituals they once were. With changes in performers, in context, in personal and world history, we could almost go so far as to say that every ritual act is a debut, an innovation."[108] Yet in the moment of a ritual's

[107] Ochs, 32.
[108] Ochs, 33.

performance, ―there is little consciousness of the constructed character of ritual."[109] Rituals are, in a sense, by their nature fleeting because they exist in their entirety only in the very moment of performance, and while they can be recorded on paper—even along with directions indicating proper performance—the only means by which ritual truly comes to fruition or completion is through its enactment. And even when one enacts a ritual, it says little of what may be going on in the minds and hearts of those joining in its performance. All this to shed light on yet one further caveat: while this thesis looks at much written evidence of the history of the Women's Seder and of the ritual and liturgical innovation found therein, little can be conclusively said about the effects these rituals and liturgical elements have on those involved. While anecdotal evidence can perhaps cast some light on this subject, much of that ―evidence" necessarily remains simply written on the hearts and souls of those who have experienced these liturgical and ritual innovations first-hand. It would do the reader well to keep that ephemeral and subjective quality of ritual in mind to some extent as this chapter begins to discuss the ritual innovations of the Women's Seder.

Halakhic Obligations of Women on Passover

There are certain elements of the traditional observance and ritual of Passover which women are obligated to fulfill or in which they participate. Much like kindling the Sabbath lights, women are most often the ones who kindle the lights to begin the festival of Passover as well. While this ritual act performed by women does not fall cleanly under the notion of obligation, it is certainly viewed as a women's mitzvah and the

[109] Claude Levi-Strauss as quoted in ibid.

kindling of the festival lights therefore ~~d~~evolves… upon women."[110] Women are traditionally not obligated to fulfill ~~t~~ime-bound commandments," or ~~*m*~~*itzvot asei shehazman gramah*."[111] One line of reasoning for this exemption from fulfilling such obligations is essentially that these commandments, which must be performed in a specific way at a specific time, might well come into conflict with a woman's necessary obligations of childcare and keeping the home.[112] Another way this is commonly explained is that a person can reasonably serve only one master—and therefore a woman cannot reasonably be expected to serve both her husband and God.[113] Yet another common contemporary explanation for the exemption of women from time-bound commandments is that they possess special physical or spiritual qualities that make the *mitzvot* of this type unnecessary.[114] In his very recent article published in the Hebrew Union College Annual, Moshe Benovitz makes the case that the term ~~t~~ime-bound positive commandments" is a misnomer. He argues that the reason for the exemption of

[110] Kaufman, 218.
[111] Mishnah Kiddushin 1:7, noted in Moshe Benovitz, "Time-Triggered Positive Commandments as Conversation Pieces," in Hebrew Union College Annual 78 (2007), 45-90.,
[112] One such commentator is Italian scholar Jacob Anatoli, quoted in Benovitz note 4, on page 47 as writing "If a woman were preoccupied with performing [time-triggered] commandments on time, her husband would be without a helpmate at that time, and quarreling would break out between them." Similarly, contemporary Orthodox scholar Saul Berman (quoted in note 5, Benovitz page 48) says this exemption was created "to assure that no legal obligation could interfere with the selection by Jewish women of a role which was centered almost exclusively on the home."
[113] One commentator who seems to have espoused this view is Spanish Scholar David ben Joseph Abudarham, quoted in Benovitz (page 47) as saying, "If she were to fulfill the command of the Creator and ignore his [her husband's] command, woe to her from her husband! And if she were to fulfill his command and ignore that of the Creator, woe to her from her Maker!"
[114] Samson Raphael Hirsch, as quoted in Benovitz 58-59, notes "God's Torah takes it for granted that our women have greater fervor and more faithful enthusiasm for their God-serving calling… Accordingly it does not find it necessary to give women these repeated spurring reminders to remain true to their calling, and warnings against weaknesses in their business life."

women from certain commandments is that these *mitzvoth* are intended to trigger discussion and Torah study, an action in which women are not obligated to engage.[115]

However there are three exceptions to the woman's exemption from time-bound commandments: kindling the Chanukah lights, listening to the reading of the *Megillah* on Purim, and drinking the four cups of wine during the Passover Seder.[116] These rituals defy the usual notion of women's exemption from *mitzvot asei shehazman gramah* because all three of these holidays—Chanukah, Purim, and Passover—commemorate times when the Jewish people were redeemed, and in all three of these instances it is believed that "women were instrumental in bringing about that salvation."[117] Regarding the obligation of women to drink the four cups of wine during the Passover Seder, Rashi comments, "It is stated in *Sotah*, "In the merit of righteous women were we redeemed."[118]

Women's traditional Pesach obligations do not, however, end at this point. Not only are women obligated to drink the four cups of wine during the Seder, but they are also required to refrain from consuming *chametz*. Women must not only obey this negative command against eating *chametz* but are also obligated to eat *matzah*. In the Talmud[119], it is stated, "R. Elazar said: Women are obligated by the Torah to eat *matzah*, as it is written, "You shall not eat leaven [*chametz*] with it [the Passover sacrifice]; for seven days you shall eat *matzah* with it."[120] Whoever is obligated by the command not to eat *chametz* is obligated as well in the eating of *matzah*. And since women are included

[115] See in particular Benovitz in HUCA, 81-82 when he reaches this conclusion upon the basis of the rest of the article.
[116] Kaufman, 218.
[117] Ibid., 218-219.
[118] Ibid., 219, Sotah 11B, Rashi's comment on "*She'af*" in *Pesachim* 108b
[119] Pesachim 43b
[120] Kaufman, 226.

in the prohibition against eating c*hametz* they are included as well in the command to eat *matzah*. In addition to eating *matzah* at the Seder women are also obligated to eat bitter herbs and to read or listen to the *haggadah* in a language that they understand. They are required to participate in the Seder ~~b~~because of the central role women played in the redemption from Egypt."[121]

What essential role is it that women are said to have played in the redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage? It is not, as one might think, that the Torah describes several women who were personally active and instrumental in moving the Israelites toward redemption, such as Yocheved, Miriam, the Pharaoh's daughter, or the Egyptian midwives Shiphrah and Pu'ah. Rather, the Talmud[122] describes the central role of women in the redemption from Egypt in the following manner:

> R. Avira explained: It is through the merit of the righteous Jewish women of that generation that Israel was redeemed from Egypt. At the time that they would go to draw water, the Holy One would arrange for there to be a small fish in their pails—they would draw half a pail of water and half a pail of fish. They would then take two pails to their husbands in the fields, one with warm water and the other with fish. They would wash and feed them, and when their husbands would desire them they would go between the banks of the fields together, as it is written, "When you lie between the banks."[123]…And the women would conceive, and when the time came to give birth they would go to the field and give birth under the apple tree, as it is written, "I woke you under the apple tree."[124]"[125]

[121] Ibid., 227.
[122] Sotah 11b
[123] Psalms 68:14
[124] Song of Songs 8:5
[125] Kaufman, 227. Rashi relates a similar story in which women would bring mirrors out into the fields and entice their husbands using their image reflected in these mirrors (citing Exodus 38:8, Midrash Tanchuma).

Similarly, Rabbi Akiva notes in the Talmud[126] a similar story of the Israelite women playing an essential role in redemption from Egypt. The Talmud notes that Pharaoh forced the separation of Israelite husbands and wives to prevent procreation. Rabbi Akiva says that the women of Israel thwarted that plan by ~~"d~~efiantly meeting their weary husbands in the fields under apple trees, feeding them warm food, anointing them with oil, seducing them, and later stealing off to deliver their children."[127] This episode finds its place on the Seder plate in the form of *charoset*, usually made of apples. The Talmud instructs that *charoset* must be thick as a reminder of the clay from which the Israelites made bricks, but it also must be ~~"t~~art to commemorate the apple trees" and the events that transpired beneath them.[128]

There is one additional mitzvah that may apply to women regarding which there is a debate. The counting of the Omer, which occurs during the weeks between the 2nd night of Pesach and the holiday of Shavuot, is identified by Maimonides as a mitzvah to which men are obligated but from which women are exempt, but Nachmanides disagrees because it is not time-dependent (i.e., one need not perform this ~~"c~~ounting" at a specific time during the day.) However, the *Shulchan Aruch* simply declares counting the Omer a ~~"m~~itzvah for everyone."[129] In traditional interpretation, it seems that women are not considered obligated to count the Omer but may do so if they choose. With all these facts in mind, it is clear that while women certainly had obligations and a degree of participation expected in the Passover Seder, the rituals and liturgy which this and the

[126] Pesachim 116a
[127] This midrash can additionally be found in Exodus Rabbah 1:12
[128] David Arnow, Creating Lively Passover Seders: A Sourcebook of Engaging Tales (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 170.
[129] Kaufman, 228, Shulchan Aruch, Orah Hayim 489:1

next chapter will discuss build upon and above these traditional obligations. The ritual innovations of the Women's Seder not only open rituals to women that were previously incumbent only upon men, but also create new rituals which speak to the lives of women in the modern day and commemorate the important roles of women, individually and collectively, in the Exodus from Egypt.

Candle-Lighting

As a way of acknowledging this traditional female role of candle-lighting, and as a method of deepening and expanding the ritual, The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah marks the candle-lighting not only with a blessing (the wording and God-language of which will be discussed in the following chapter), but also with Debbie Friedman's song ~~–O~~ Hear My Prayer (Let Us Light These Lights)"[130] preceding the candle-lighting and a Sephardic *t'chinah* (traditional woman's private prayer) following it. The *t'chinah* prays for health, happiness, long life, salvation, and mercy for the woman and for her family, to be blessed with wise and pious children, and ends: ~~–H~~ear the prayers I utter now in the name of our mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. May your light, reflected in these candles, surround us always. And let us say, Amen."[131] This method of reaching back into the history of women's observance (be it from Ashkenazic or Sephardic culture) and drawing from it a meaningful observance or prayer that can be used today is itself a form of ~~–in~~novation" that is relatively common in Women's Seders and in the broader scope of feminist Jewish ritual innovation. As Rabbi Sandy Sasso writes, we ~~–c~~annot simply remake the past in

[130] Tamara Cohen, Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, Debbie Friedman and Ronnie M. Horn, eds., The Journey Continues, Ma'yan Passover Haggadah (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997), 2.
[131] Ibid., 3-4

the image of our beliefs, but we can discover customs and voices…and make them a part of our sacred doing and remembering."[132] This method of ritual innovation is one way to make sure that the spectrum of ritual innovations in the Jewish feminist landscape fulfills the need identified by Sasso, for ~~r~~ritual transformation that is both evocative of the past and resonant with the present."[133]

The Four Cups of Wine

One innovative element that has been introduced in regard to drinking the four cups of wine during the Seder is that, just as certain modern *haggadot* ~~d~~edicate" each cup of wine to a different topic, many Women's Seders dedicate each cup to a ~~d~~ifferent group of historical or contemporary women." For instance, as noted by Wendy Zierler in her commentary within <u>My People's Passover Haggadah</u>, ritualwell.org[134] provides the following reading as a preference to their ceremony of four cups of wine:

> Tonight we will drink four cups of wine, traditionally linked to God's four promises to Israel.
>
> As it is written, ~~I~~ will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt. I will deliver you from bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. I will take you to be My people and I will be your God." (Exod. 6:6-6:7)
>
> In this Seder the four cups of wine are also linked to historical and living Jewish women, who in their own eras have acted as God's partners in fulfilling the divine promises of redemption and freedom.
>
> As it is written, ~~I~~t was for the sake of the righteous women of that generation that we were redeemed from Egypt." (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 9b)[135]

[132] Sasso in Drucker, 4.
[133] Ibid., 7.
[134] A website sponsored by Kolot, the Center of Women and Gender Studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.
[135] Zierler in Hoffman, 143.

Similarly, Jill Shapiro Thornton's A Women's Seder: Our Spiritual Passage to Freedom has each cup of wine serve as a celebration and reminder of women who were essential to the story of the Exodus, the women seated around the Seder table, and those who are not. The first cup notes the concept that righteous women merited and enabled the Israelites' redemption from Egypt and proceeds to note Shiphrah and Pu'ah, the Egyptian midwives who defied the Pharaoh's ruling to not help the Israelite women give birth.[136] The second cup honors Moses's mother Yocheved and Pharaoh's daughter Batya (the name given to her by rabbinic literature though she remains unnamed in Torah).[137] The third cup celebrates those participating in the Seder and provides an opportunity to discuss courageous women who are their role models,[138] and the fourth cup serves as a reminder of those women who remain unnamed and provides an opportunity for those women to be recalled aloud.[139] This represents a fairly common mode of innovation for the four cups of wine found in many Women's Seders.[140] The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah instructs the Seder leader to plan ahead because she will need to choose among many profiles of women leaders and activists to honor during the Seder, provided in an appendix within the *haggadah,* or write descriptions of influential women in her own community.[141] Yet another revision in this *haggadah* is that, unlike the traditional role of women serving and preparing the meal, at the Women's Seder each woman should feel as if she is being served so the *haggadah* instructs that the women

[136] Jill Shapiro Thornton, A Women's Seder: Our Spiritual Passage to Freedom (Atlanta: Private printing, 1996), 17-18.
[137] Ibid., 51-53. On origin of name Batya, "daughter of God," see The Torah: A Women's Commentary, ed. Tamara Cohn Eskinazi, (New York: URJ Press, 2008), p.325.
[138] Ibid., 57-58.
[139] Ibid., 66-67.
[140] As a further example, see the similar ritual for the four cups of wine found in Project Kesher's Sixth Global Women's Pre-Passover Seder Haggadah (2000), and in A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder by Judith Stein (1984).
[141] Cohen, p.10, appendix 113-122

should pour wine for each other—no woman should have to pour her own wine.[142] E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod's The Women's Haggadah contains another common mode of innovation for the four cups of wine—each has a theme or a statement related to the scope of the Women's Seder though they do not commemorate specific women. In Broner's *haggadah*, the group reads in Hebrew and English, "We Return to Egypt" for the first cup,[143] "We Return to the Desert" for the second cup,[144] "I drink to the dregs the cup of knowledge" for the third cup,[145] and for the fourth cup, "I have been in Egypt. I have been in the desert. I have learned our history. And I am still on my journey."[146] In this way are Women's Seders innovating the traditional ritual of drinking four cups of wine during the Pesach Seder.

Symbolic Foods: Matzah & Maror

In addition to the innovation and re-interpretation of the candle-lighting and drinking the four cups of wine that can be found in Women's Seders and *haggadot*, interpretations of the other traditional mitzvoth incumbent upon women—of refraining from *chametz* and consuming *matzah* and *maror*—find their way into Women's Seders in various forms as well. The introduction to Broner's The Women's Haggadah gives reinterpreted explanations of the elements found on the Seder plate such as "*Matzot* of our unleavened hearts", "The *maror*, often horseradish, representing bitter herb of our experience, our exclusion", "The *Egg*, that which is our rebirth", and "The *Lamb Shank*, which sets us apart with special markings, which continues the blood imagery of the

[142] Thornton, 18.
[143] E.M. Broner, The Women's Haggadah (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 23.
[144] Ibid., 39.
[145] Ibid., 45.
[146] Ibid., 68.

Haggadah and our own bleeding."[147] Thornton's Women's Seder additionally marks the *maror* as significant in a way particular to women: "The *Maror*, or bitter herbs, burns our mouths to remind us of the bitterness of slavery. The *Maror* we eat tonight is the symbol of the oppression of women's lives. May it remind us of the deep suffering of so many women throughout the world and help us to be in solidarity with all who are in pain."[148]

Yachatz & Afikoman

Many Women's Seders additionally make use of *yachatz*, the moment when the middle *matzah* of the three traditionally found on the Seder table is broken into two pieces, to mark moments in women's lives or the particular experience of women. The smaller piece is traditionally referred to as *lechem oni* or the bread of affliction or poverty, and the larger piece becomes the *afikoman* which is hidden and found prior to the end of the Seder. Thornton's *haggadah* includes the following in addition to a relatively traditional explanation of hiding the *afikoman*: "In spite of the obscurity of our foremothers' efforts, we will acknowledge them tonight as we begin our call to Passover, but this time it will be our story."[149] The theme of hiding and hiddenness is linked to this obscurity and absence of stories of women in the Torah and Jewish history. In the introduction to Broner's *haggadah*, she mentions *yachatz* and *afikoman* in the following manner: "In our new tradition we speak of the breaking of the *matza* as a break, a change, from the old order. We hide the past from ourselves and need to redeem it to create a whole from the broken halves."[150] She also notes different methods by which the mothers at the Seder were able to redeem the *afikoman* from their daughters, noting that

[147] Broner, 16.
[148] Thornton, 47.
[149] Thornton, 23.
[150] Broner, 17.

one year the only demand was for continued mother-daughter connection, and another year they demanded commitments and blessings, ~~–a~~nd so we put our hands on their heads and, with full hearts, blessed them. And the group made a commitment to them; we would know them and care for them."[151]

In The Dancing With Miriam Haggadah (2002), *yachatz* is marked not only by the hope that next year ~~–m~~ay we all be daughters of freedom," but additionally by a commentary on how breaking bread and *matzah* together is indicative of community, in which women are most often responsible for ~~–g~~athering, preparing, and providing food for the family." The reading notes the tradition of hospitality linked back to the biblical Sarah. Interestingly, the reading also notes that *yachatz* represents ~~–a~~ messianic hope, for in a world in which the poor and hungry are predominantly women and children, we pray that the day will come when all will have bread, and a table at which to share it."[152] Yet another example of *matzah* and *yachatz* as modes of ritual innovation is found in the Ma'yan *haggadah*, The Journey Continues (2000), in which the brittleness and cracked surface of *matzah* is noted, and the moment of breaking the middle *matzah* is used to sing Debbie Friedman's *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for healing.[153] This and other Women's Seders—whether or not they use a *Mi Shebeirach* healing prayer—often use the action of breaking and the moment of brokenness as an opportunity to pray for wholeness and healing. Wendy Zierler notes that the moment of *yachatz* and hiding the *afikoman* is commonly used in Lesbian Women's Seders not only as an opportunity to discuss parts of themselves they keep or have kept hidden (~~–h~~iding the middle *matzah* as representative

[151] Ibid.
[152] Moise and Schwartz, 8, entire ritual found on this page.
[153] Tamara Cohen, ed., The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah (New York: Ma'yan, the Jewish Women's Project, 2000), 49.

of the ways in which we hide aspects of ourselves, fearing punishment at the hands of an intolerant society"[154]), but also to discuss the ~~–s~~ymbolic meaning of breaking and brokenness" and that many feminist *haggadot* use this moment as a ~~–c~~all to break the shackles of domestic abuse and of *aginut*, a condition suffered by women who are chained in marriage by recalcitrant husbands who refuse to grant a *get* (Jewish divorce)."[155]

Miriam's Cup—Kos Miryam

One particularly prominent example of ritual innovation at the Women's Seder is the *kos miryam,* Miriam's Cup. Tradition holds that Miriam's righteousness and merit as a prophetess caused a magic well to accompany the Israelites on their journey from Egypt toward the Promised Land. ~~–~~According to the Mishna (Avot 5:8), Miriam's well was one of ten things God fashioned on the eve of the Sabbath just before completing the work of creation."[156] And the midrashic collection, Deuteronomy Rabbah, compiled sometime between the 5th and the 9th centuries CE, tells of ~~–s~~ix miraculous instances in the story of the Exodus when salvation came through water."[157] According to the Midrash, the waters of Miriam's well dried up after her death.[158] This ritual holds that—through taking part in its performance—we can access the waters of this well which, created on the second day of creation, were said to have healing and restorative powers.[159] There

[154] Zierler in Hoffman, 144.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Arnow, 186. This *aggadah*, that the well was created just before the Sabbath during the week of creation, can be found in Hayim Nachman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, The Book of Legends/Sefer Ha-Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 16:67.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 54A, Babylonian Talmud Taanit 9a.
[159] Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld, Tamara Mohr & Catherine Spector. The Women's Seder Sourcebook: Rituals & Readings for Use at the Passover Seder (Vermont: JEWISH LIGHTS Publishing, 2003), 66. Another midrash regarding Miriam's well can be found in Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:12.

are variations on this ritual to be found in women's and now even mainstream *haggadot*; there are almost as many variations on the ritual as there are *haggadot*.

Before we look at a few of these variations, we must ask—how did this ritual develop in our own day out of the rabbinic legend of Miriam's well? The concept of recalling Miriam's role in the Exodus is not a new one, as there is a 10th century text that refers to a ritual for mentioning Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron during the Seder, linking her memory to a certain food to be eaten.[160] The modern ritual of a *kos miryam* filled with water grew out of a ritual that began at a women's night in the Sukkah, during the holiday of Sukkot in 1978 in Philadelphia. As part of the *ushpizin*, inviting in of guests (real or theoretical), all of the participants agreed that they should invite the prophetess Miryam into the Sukkah with them. Afterwards they all drank a cup of water in honor of Miriam. This then developed into a ritual of drinking from a specifically designated *kos miryam* of water at a Rosh Chodesh group involving the same women, who then began the ritual of drinking from a *kos miryam* in their own homes and the ritual spread by word of mouth from that point forward.[161] Essentially, once the ritual left the hands of the Rosh Chodesh group, it became a possession of *amcha*—the people—and it was a natural progression from there into the Women's Seder.[162] It was a ritual natural enough for one of its creators to comment, ~~"~~It was as if Kos Miryam already existed and was just waiting to be discovered."[163] Part of the success of this ritual comes from its use of a ritual object similar to one already found in the traditional Seder: *Kos*

[160] Ibid., 68-69.
[161] Vanessa L. Ochs "Setting a Cup for Miriam," in The Women's Passover Companion, Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, 60.
[162] Ibid., 61.
[163] Ibid., 60.

Eliyahu, Elijah's cup, which The New American Haggadah, developed in part by Mordecai Kaplan, notes was itself a ritual innovation of the 17th century.[164] "When a new ritual is performed, the borrowings from within Jewish culture are usually highlighted. They make the ritual feel as if it is already 'ours' and genuinely Jewish, even if we have never heard of it before. Turning to the ways of the past evokes certainty, security, and imagined community."[165] Though the times during the Seder when Miriam's Cup can be introduced vary greatly, one popular time at which to do this ritual is at the same time that we open the door for Elijah. This shows the process of ritual innovation and integration.

From the Women's Seder, the ritual has spread to become incorporated into mainstream Seders and has even found its way into a number of *haggadot*. By the year 2000, this ritual "was finding its place at many family and community Seders. Miriam's cup is now encountered as a venerable tradition and not as a newfangled gesture, easy to dismiss, or as a ritual of interest only to women."[166] In fact, there have even been exhibits in Jewish museums featuring (even exclusively) Miriam's Cups commissioned from various artists.[167] In A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah, Miriam's Cup is included in the text of the Seder amongst many traditional rituals and symbols as if it had existed as a ritual in this form forever.[168] Women's Seders incorporate Miriam's Cup in a variety of ways. The Broner/Nimrod Women's Haggadah—from the first creators of the Women's Seder—does not incorporate a ritual for Miriam's Cup at all, though her

[164] Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein, The New American Haggadah (Philadelphia: Behrman House, Inc., 1999), vii.
[165] Ochs, Inventing Jewish Ritual, 6.
[166] Ibid., 170.
[167] See Ibid., 171
[168] Rabbi Joy Levitt and Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, eds., A Night of Questions: A Passover Haggadah (Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Press, 2000), noted in Ibid, 170.

presence is strongly felt and celebrated throughout the *haggadah*. They do, however, welcome in Miriam the prophetess along with Elijah the prophet in time for the festival meal.[169] *Women at the Seder*—interestingly a Women's Seder compiled by a man, but including commentary that notes the special role of women in the Exodus and a wonderful breadth of female scholarship—mentions this ritual in a brief note (although this is the format for almost all of the commentary at the bottom of the page). It notes that a goblet of pure water is put on the table to represent Miriam's well, and includes the midrashic source ~~–in~~ response to the question of significance."[170]

The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah includes a *kos miryam* ritual at the traditional time for *kos eliyahu,* noting Miriam's exile from the community as a result of her challenge to Moses's authority. It includes the Seder participants pouring their water into Miriam's cup, singing *miriam haneviah* (set to the tune of *eliyahu hanavi*), welcoming her in with an open door as is the custom for Elijah and finally, singing and dancing to *Mayim.*[171] The Ma'yan women's *haggadah*, The Journey Continues, has its *kos miryam* ritual at the beginning of the Seder, setting the tone for the rest of the Seder. Additionally, throughout the *haggadah* there are numerous pictures of beautiful examples of Miriam's Cups, so the presence of this ritual pervades the entire *haggadah*.[172] It is evident that there are many ways to observe this ritual, and it has found its way into many *haggadot*—particularly the more recently published and compiled ones. This ritual is one that has spread quite widely within and beyond the Women's Seder, and one reason

[169] E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod, The Women's Haggadah, Revised 1992 by E.M. Broner, in *The Telling,* E.M. Broner, 193-216. Miriam is welcomed in on 216.
[170] Joel Wolowelsky. Women at the Seder: A Passover Haggadah *(*New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2005), 5, Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar 2.
[171] Moise & Schwartz, 29-30.
[172] Tamara Cohen, 29-31.

might be that it not only is able to celebrate the role of an important woman within the story of the Exodus, but it also can be used as a catalyst for discussion of other important female characters and contributions throughout Jewish history. ~~"~~Miriam's Cup…harkens back to Miriam's role as the provider of water and serves to remind a new generation of women's important contributions to the survival of the Jewish people."[173] Placing a cup of water on the table as a ~~"~~Miriam's Cup" grew from the ~~"~~desire of many women to include women's stories and female-oriented rituals into traditional Jewish ceremonies."[174]

The ritual of Miriam's Cup that is described on the ritualwell.org website includes a common iteration of the blessing for *kos miryam:*

> *Zot Kos Miryam, kos mayim chayim. Zeicher l'tziyat Mitzrayim*—This is the cup of Miriam, the cup of living waters. Let us remember the Exodus from Egypt. These are the living waters, God's gift to Miriam, which gave new life to Israel as we struggled with ourselves in the wilderness. Blessed are you God, Who brings us from the narrows into the wilderness, sustains us with endless possibilities and enables us to reach a new place.[175]

One interesting element of the *kos miryam* is that in a way it blends the model of a traditional Seder ritual object and action with that of a different prophet and character from the story of the Exodus. It is indeed a completely new ritual object, yet it has come to be sold alongside *kos eliyahu* in Judaica stores in America and Israel. It blends both old and new, tradition and innovation. One cannot simply identify it as a completely new

[173] Rabbi Hara Person, "Biblical Heroes as Role Models for Jewish Women" in Drucker, 89.
[174] Rabbi Jo David, "The Transformative Nature of the Rosh Hodesh Experience," in Drucker, 207.
[175] Ochs, 170. Transcribed here directly from http://ritualwell.org website. One can easily note that the end of this blessing is modeled at least in part on the "Shehecheyanu," marking the first time a person does something or does something in a certain year or season. This blessing praises God for "giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this time/season."

innovation or as a variation upon a traditional theme. And its use in Seders—Women's Seders and mainstream Seders—varies, therefore not marking its status either as completely innovative or as borrowing heavily from tradition. While at some points it is simply used alongside *kos eliyahu*, and noted at the same time in the Seder, at other times a new reading is inserted for this ritual object when the items on the Seder plate are described. Even in mainstream Seders that do not include the ritual object or specific ritual regarding Miriam's Cup, "many haggadot open the door for Miriam as well as Elijah."[176] Nonetheless, though its use and the mode of enacting the ritual using this object varies, it has become a prominent and popular element of Women's Seders and an increasingly common presence during mainstream Seders as well.

Part of the success of this ritual could also be that it is fulfills needs that Vanessa Ochs identifies as important in providing a feeling of authenticity for a ritual. Ochs notes that "overt links to major Jewish themes, ritual objects, and the Hebrew language" help to make a ritual feel authentic. Miriam's Cup touches on themes of water as a cleansing and life-giving source, it strongly incorporates a ritual object, and the Hebrew language—*Kos Miryam* is also used in this ritual. All of these factors likely have contributed to its success in Women's Seders and beyond. Jodi Myers comments in her article, "Phasing In: Rosh Chodesh Ceremonies in American Jewish Life,"

> The fact that in America the incorporation of a Kos Miriam during the Passover Seder is no longer a sign of religious radicalism is a testimony to the way that the ritual harmonizes with other features of Judaism: the centrality of the Exodus myth and the theme of redemption, the frequent use of table rituals, and the compatibility of Kos Miriam with Kos Eliyahu—the cup of Elijah symbolizing the hope for redemption.[177]

[176] Antler, 231.
[177] Jody Myers, "Phasing In: Rosh Chodesh Ceremonies in American Jewish Life," in Prell, 244

Regardless of its reasons for success, which must on a certain level remain speculative, the placement of Miriam's Cup on the Seder table, often accompanied by a reading or use alongside Elijah's cup, has become an extremely common ritual during Women's Seders and is becoming increasingly a common and well-known ritual in mainstream Seders.

Orange on the Seder Plate

Another prominent ritual innovation of the Women's Seder is the orange on the Seder plate. Unlike the *kos miryam*, the tradition of placing an orange on the Seder plate has a nebulous story of origin and a large folkloristic element in the common understanding of the ritual in recent years. Dr. Susanna Heschel (the daughter of Abraham Joshua Heschel) first included an orange on her Seder plate in the early 1980's, intending to symbolize commitment and solidarity with gay men and lesbian women as a statement in favor of their inclusion, as well as all other marginalized groups, in Judaism and religious life. The year before, Heschel had been with a group of lesbian women for Passover, who included a crust of bread on the Seder plate, telling the story of a *rebbitzen* who stated that lesbians have a place in Judaism like a crust of bread has a place on the Seder plate.[178] According to feminist scholar Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, the Jewish women's group at UC Berkeley at one time invited the *rebbetzin* of the local Chabad House to come and speak, and during the question and answer session they asked her about the place of lesbians in Judaism. The *rebbitzen* compared lesbianism to small sins, such as ~~"e~~ating bread on Passover," that is, ~~"s~~omething you would try not to do, but if you did so

[178] Anisfeld, Mohr, & Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 208.

by accident, you would not be considered an outcast."[179] In response the women in attendance at that program placed a crust of bread on their Seder plate the following Passover, and this spread, appearing in several lesbian *haggadot* by the 1980's. Susanna Heschel, having experienced *pesach* with these women, changed the ritual of bread on the Seder plate, which would essentially nullify Passover, placing an orange on the Seder plate instead, to symbolize the fruitfulness of inclusion of the gay-lesbian community and the spitting out of homophobia.[180]

However, in a move that Heschel referred to as ~~"p~~atriarchy in action," this ritual has been folklorized and changed in meaning to focus on the role of women in Judaism. Her words have been co-opted by the story of a male rabbi who declared that a woman belongs on the *bimah* like an orange belongs on the Seder plate; the message of solidarity with the gay-lesbian community has translated into a way to celebrate female inclusion and equality in Jewish life and ritual. Therefore the crust of bread in honor of lesbian inclusion was broadened to be understood as gay-lesbian inclusion, and then to ~~"a~~ll feminist change in Judaism."[181] In a similar pattern to that of *kos miryam*, the orange has found its way onto the Seder plate not only at Women's Seders but at mainstream Seders as well. Much like the physicality of the *kos miryam* as an object, the ability to place the orange on the Seder plate as a *fait accompli* facilitates its success.[182]

[179] Ochs, 79.
[180] Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 209.
[181] Ochs, 79.
[182] Anisfeld, Mohr, & Spector, The Women's Passover Companion, 61.

Neither the San Diego Women's Haggadah[183] nor the Broner/Nimrod Women's Haggadah contains the ritual of the orange on the Seder plate; perhaps these were both too early to have incorporated the ritual into the written *haggadah*. The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah includes a ritual for *Tappuz/*Orange. It reads, "The different stories about the origins of placing an orange on the Seder plate vary from angry diatribes about women not belonging in a place of Jewish leadership to a reflection of the sweetness of the innovations women bring to Jewish spirituality through creation of new rituals."[184] It suggests that a discussion occur on this topic but specifies no ritual taking place other than discussing the orange on the Seder plate at the same time as the other Seder plate symbols are explained. In a similar fashion, the orange is mentioned only briefly in the Ma'yan *haggadah*. On the page where the symbols of the Seder are explained, a side note mentions that, "The orange, used by some to represent women's inclusion, can also be pointed to and discussed."[185] Project Kesher's Sixth Global Women's Pre-Passover Seder Haggadah includes an explanation of the orange on the Seder plate that contains the legend about the angry man approaching Susannah Heschel and declaring "A woman belongs on the *bimah* like an orange belongs on the Seder plate." The interesting part of this explanation—other than that it includes the folkloristic explanation of the ritual—is that it follows an explanation of the egg as the feminine symbol on the traditional Seder plate.[186]

[183] Irene Fine, San Diego Women's Haggadah, Second Edition (San Diego: Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 1986)
[184] Moise & Schwartz, 21.
[185] Cohen, 74.
[186] Janna Kaplan, Project Kesher's Sixth Global Women's Pre-Passover Seder Haggadah (Boston, MA: private printing, 2000), 46. The "Orange" passage includes acknowledgment, "**Orange,** adapted from Aleph: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, with thanks to Torah Aura Bulletin Board, volume 2, no.24.)

There are two interesting questions that can be derived from the discussion of the orange on the Seder plate, beside the most salient question of why the folkloristic explanation of the male rabbi rejecting female leadership on the *bimah* is so widely known and popular. The first is: why is this one of the most prominent, widespread feminist ritual found at the mainstream Seder? Secondly, why is it not included in most of the Women's Seder *haggadot* that are easily accessed? The answer to the former question may be the ease of adding this item to the Seder plate, especially due to the fact that in many households women put together the Seder plate with all of the Seder elements. Additionally, it fits easily into the format of the Seder, when many families explain all the elements of the Seder plate during the explanation of *Pesach, Matzah, and Maror*, even though items such as the *charoset*, parsley and salt water, and egg are not written in for explanation at this time either. Just as the Seder symbols serve as ~~"~~mnemonic reminders of Egyptian bondage and the redemption from slavery,"[187] so too does the orange on the Seder plate commonly find its explanation during this portion of the Seder, serving as a reminder of the prominent place of women in Jewish life and history, and their instrumentality in helping to achieve redemption from Egyptian bondage. The answer to the latter question lies in the ambiguous origin of this ritual. Perhaps because of the popularity of the ritual and the knowledge that the common explanation differs greatly from the original, makers of these women's *haggadot* erred on the side of sensitivity by omitting this ritual, knowing that many Women's Seders would add it nonetheless. Notably, Vanessa Ochs remarks that the orange on the Seder plate has

[187] Kaufman, 226.

not become a particularly popular ritual in Women's Seders, perhaps ~~b~~because the orange itself evokes no sacred Jewish texts or attitudes."[188]

The orange on the Seder plate is remarkable because, though this is quite a young ritual, the story of its origin remains nebulous. ~~T~~The act of telling the story of a ritual—like the ritual itself—can exist in multiple forms that we continually shape and reshape," Ochs comments. Whether or not it is valuable or essential to learn where a ritual comes from, Ochs notes that it is typically the case that the longer a ritual is in existence, ~~t~~the more capacious its ability to hold multiple meanings."[189] While certain sheets have been photocopied and circulated for use in Women's Seders and mainstream Seders alike, attempting to elucidate the story of the origin of the orange on the Seder plate, it seems that the explanation of meaning that has persisted is that it marks the importance of women's inclusion in Judaism and Jewish leadership. ~~T~~The practice of placing an orange on one's Seder plate affirms women's place in the history and observance of Passover; it also affirms women's inclusion as full-fledged liturgical participants, not just in the Seder ritual, but in all areas of Judaism."[190]

Interestingly, the concept of placing an item on the Seder plate to highlight the role of women in the story of the Exodus is not without precedent, though this fact is far from well known. Wendy Zierler comments in <u>My People's Passover Haggadah</u> that the work of Talmud scholar Yael Katz Levine has noted that Rabbi Sherira Gaon—a rabbi in 10th century Babylon—had a custom of placing not only a shank bone and an egg on the Seder plate, but a fish as well. ~~T~~The shank bone and the egg are symbolic of the

[188] Ochs, 81.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ochs, 79.

leadership of Moses and Aaron, while the fish item commemorates Miriam."[191] The choice of fish as the item on the Seder plate to honor female leadership in Miriam is fitting, given the midrash noted earlier in this chapter from Sotah 11b regarding the fish drawn from the well along with the water that women would bring to their husbands in their fields before initiating the sexual encounters that sustained procreation in the time of the Pharaoh's decree of separation.

The Ten Plagues

Another traditional moment in the Seder that has been reinterpreted and used as a opportunity for innovation is the recalling of the ten plagues visited upon the Egyptians when Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go, marked by spilling a bit of wine from each Seder participant's cup.[192] Wendy Zierler notes that a great many Women's Seders use this moment to recall and ~~d~~discuss societal wrongdoings against women,"[193] noting the list of ~~P~~Plagues of Jewish Women" included in the San Diego Women's Haggadah. These range from ~~th~~e consistently male image of God," and ~~th~~e repressive divorce laws, and the exclusion of women as witnesses in a Jewish court," to ~~th~~e lack of equality in salary and promotional opportunities for women in Jewish education and community service," and ~~th~~e prison created by the rigid traditional views of men and women."[194] Broner's The Women's Haggadah as well includes ~~T~~The Plagues of Women," interpreting the plague of blood as discrimination against women due to menstrual blood

[191] Zierler in Hoffman, 105.
[192] This, too, appears to be a medieval innovation, the earliest extant explanations of which derive from the 14th and 15th centuries. Arnow in My People's Passover Haggadah Volume 2: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries, Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman and David Arnow, eds. (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 45.
For further information on this custom, see Gray in Hoffman and Arnow, 58-59.
[193] Zierler in Hoffman and Arnow, 69.
[194] Fine, 41-42.

and the blood of childbirth, and similarly linking each traditional plague thusly to the experience of women.[195] The frog is linked to "false self-image,"[196] locusts to "legal discrimination,"[197] and the slaying of the firstborn to "slaying of the spirit,"[198] and each plague is followed by a poetic explanation or story describing the connection. The Dancing With Miriam Haggadah, too, contains its own innovation of the ten plagues, together with its own interesting interpretation of the traditional ten. For the plague of frogs, for example, the text reads,

> The myth of the "Frog Prince" has enslaved women to an unattainable idea of romance. In addition, we have been made responsible for "turning frogs into princes" if we can only love enough, be good enough, be self-sacrificing enough. We remove a drop of wine for all women trapped in false hopes and expectations for their lives.[199]

For the plague of locusts, this *haggadah* reads "As locusts strip a field, so patriarchy has kept us from the full fruits of our labors," and for the plague of darkness it reads, "Without the contributions of the women, we are still in a dark age of ignorance."[200] The traditional ritual, of spilling drops from a cup of wine in remembrance of plagues, has become one of the most frequently innovated rituals in Women's Seders, in line with many other themed Seders which use a similar mode of ritual innovation.[201] It provides an opportunity to air grievances and voice concerns about the state of women in Judaism and society, which is an important step on the road to bringing change to these areas of oppression and dissatisfaction.

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[195] Broner, The Women's Haggadah, 45.
[196] Ibid., 46.
[197] Ibid., 52.
[198] Ibid., 55.
[199] Moise and Schwartz, 17.
[200] Ibid.
[201] See for example the Dara Silverman and Micah Baznat, Love & Justice in Times of War Haggadah, 2003, downloadable at http://colours.mahost.org/events/haggadah.html

Bedikat Chametz—Searching for Leaven

In her book Inventing Jewish Rituals, Vanessa Ochs conveys a broader notion of the scope and timeline of a ritual than many often profess; she notes that when studying a ritual or a holiday observance it is interesting and important to view both the preparation for and the aftermath of a ritual to be just as central as the performance of the core ritual act itself. That is, for the Bat Mitzvah girl reading from Torah and leading the Shabbat service is not the only part of the ritual, but picking out invitations and shopping for a dress beforehand, and opening presents and writing thank-you cards afterwards are also important parts of the ritual observance. Blessing over and eating the *challah* only constitutes part of a ritual; kneading the dough and preheating the oven, and wiping the crumbs from the table afterwards are also essential elements of this ritual observance.[202] Following from this notion, another time for feminist ritual innovation and expansion of the Passover ritual has been in regard to preparations for Passover.

The traditional thorough cleaning of the house in search for any *chametz* that may be hiding in a corner or under a couch cushion—and the subsequent burning of this *chametz*--has been transformed in certain cases into a time for feminist Jewish practice. For example, in the San Diego Women's Haggadah, this process of preparation is noted with a poem, "A Woman's Seder." The poem begins, "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…"[203] Ending on a note of affirmation of this meticulous preparation for Passover, the poem continues, "I fill a dish with bitter herbs,/ But feel no bitterness,/ Because I know that each small task links me/

[202] Ochs, 32.
[203] Anisfeld, Mohr, and Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 10.

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."[204] Both the Women's Seder Sourcebook and Susannah Heschel's On Being a Jewish Feminist include a ~~–S~~pring Cleaning Ritual for the Eve of Full Moon Nissan" written by Lynn Gottleib. This ritual—written in poetic form—recalls the spring cleaning prior to Passover carried out by Jewish women for generations and today, noting: ~~–S~~o we labor all women/ cleaning and washing/ now with our brothers/ now with our sons/ cleaning the inner house/ through the full moon of Nisan." The ritual says that we search by candlelight ~~–f~~or the last trace of winter/ for the last crumbs grown stale inside us/ for the last darkness still in our hearts." With this candle we ~~–s~~earch in the listening silence/ search the high places/ and the low places/ inside you." It instructs, ~~–L~~ook in your pockets/and the pockets of those around you/for traces of Mitzrayim." While the thorough cleaning of the house prior to Passover has traditionally fallen mainly upon the shoulders of women, the carrying out of the *bedikah* ritual itself was and is often done by men. This powerful rewriting and expanding of the traditional ritual ends in the following manner:

> All that rises up bitter
> All that rises up prideful
> All that rises up in old ways no longer fruitful
> All Hametz still in my possession
> but unknown to me
> which I have not seen
> nor disposed of
> may it find common grave
> with the dust of the earth
> amen amen
> *selah…*[205]

[204] Ibid., 11.
[205] Quoted in Ibid, 13-15.

While I have chosen to include in this chapter just this one ritual as an example of the ritual innovation that has taken place and is possible even for just the preparation for the holiday of Passover, many Women's Seders begin at the very least with a blessing for *bedikat chametz,* the searching out of *chametz* within the home that traditionally takes place the day before the Seder and for *bi'ur chametz*, the burning of *chametz* that traditionally takes place on the day of the Seder prior to its beginning.

Rachatz and Karpas

It is not surprising to note that almost every single ritual found within the Seder can be and has been innovated in some way in Women's Seders and *haggadot*. While certain rituals are less frequently used as moments for innovation, it is worth noting that rituals as simple as hand-washing and dipping *karpas*, the green spring vegetable, in salt water have been made particular to the Women's Seder. For example, hand-washing—*rachatz*—in the Ma'yan Women's Haggadah (2000) is marked with a special reading that calls to mind the waters of the Nile from which Pharaoh's daughter drew Moses and cradled him in her arms, concluding: "May the water we offer each other now, bring us closer to their embrace."[206] Similarly this *haggadah* not only notes the traditional explanation of the ritual of dipping a green vegetable in salt water: "To remember the sweat and tears of our ancestors in bondage,"[207] but also interprets this ritual in light of women's lives. This element of the ritual reads, "To feel the sting of society's refusal to

[206] Cohen, 44.
[207] Ibid., 46.

celebrate the blossoming of women's bodies and the full range of our capacity for love."[208]

Similarly to the tradition common at Women's Seders of each woman pouring wine for another rather than serving herself wine, The Dancing With Miriam Haggadah instructs each woman to wash and dry the hands of another woman at the moment of *Rachatz*.[209] Each Women's Seder and *haggadah* is evidence of certain choices made regarding which elements should be innovated and which left in a more traditional form, but it is certainly worthy of note that even rituals as seemingly small as these have in some cases become moments that deepen and broaden the reach of the Women's Seder and its meanings.

Moments of ritual innovation in Women's Seders are manifold. While the traditional order and rituals of the Seder are most often included for continuity and to honor the tradition, allowing women to become Seder leaders, in some cases every single Seder element is expanded or reinterpreted in light of the theme of women and feminism in the Seder. While this chapter has been an effort to examine many of the most common ritual innovations found within the Women's Seder, if one were to open any particular feminist *haggadah*, it is reasonable to expect that it would be replete with its own version of rituals and its own innovations, particular to the woman or group of women who created it. In a cultural context in which women have been empowered to create and recreate rituals, Women's Seders are one example of a holiday observance in which

[208] Ibid., 47.
[209] Moise & Schwartz, 4.

feminist ritual innovation has flourished. We will discover in the next chapter that liturgical innovation in the Women‘s Seder has additionally been a fruitful enterprise worthy of analysis and discussion.

Chapter Three: Liturgical Innovation

"The Source of Strength, the Source of Song, brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Like a parent guiding her children, with power and gentleness, God brought us out…The last to come forth were the pregnant women, moving slowly but deliberately, swollen with dreams of freedom and apprehension for the children who would be born on this journey. With signs and wonders, we were led forth from Egypt, from slavery, and from shame."[210]

"Jewish feminist texts…are actual agents of change in an uncompleted society, that of contemporary Judaism. They effect the changes they portray, not merely redistributing roles, but realigning and revaluing the realms of ritual and history."[211]

Having focused on the ritual innovations found in the Women's Seder in the last chapter, the discussion now turns to liturgical innovations. It is again worth noting that any line drawn distinctly between the category of ritual and the category of liturgy can be debated and justified in any variety of ways. Ritual and liturgy are by their nature intertwined so this division, while necessary for the purposes of this thesis, is just one of many methods by which the distinction can be drawn. Any innovation within the Women's Seder that involved or centered upon an object or physical action was classified as a ritual, whereas innovations that are purely text-based or verbal in nature have been classified as liturgy, and therefore they are the subject of discussion in this chapter.

Liturgical innovation and recreation has been one of the primary modes of feminist Jewish expression over the past forty years. Liturgical innovation comes both in the form of a completely new expression and also reinterpretation or revision of a pre-existing liturgical element; much like ritual innovation, liturgical innovation can represent either a creation or a re-creation. Stated differently, liturgical innovation can

[210] Elwell, 16.
[211] Satlof in Heschel, 193.

create either something from nothing or something from *something*. Unlike in the previous chapter, the elements this chapter will examine do not necessitate a discussion of a physical action or object. This chapter discusses the written and spoken word found on the pages of *haggadot* or recounted anecdotally as having been said during a Women's Seder. One similarity, however, to the "object" used in a ritual is that when liturgy is written down—when words are printed in our *haggadot*—they too can represent a fait accompli, lending a sense of permanence to the liturgy. In a very similar sense to an orange or a Miriam's Cup being a physical object, the *haggadah* too has a physical presence; each page of the *haggadah* could itself be considered an object, and the words written on that page could, by extension, be so considered. While this chapter and this thesis will not deal exhaustively with the concept of the *haggadah* itself as a physical ritual object, it is notable that the characteristics of the *haggadah* itself make a difference, in particular because many Women's Seders began by using cut-and-pasted *haggadot* made by participants or Seder leaders, perhaps even remade every year. Is the *haggadah* comprised of Xeroxed copies of prayers and liturgical elements literally cut and pasted from other sources? Is it bound as a booklet? Does it have professional binding and look much the same as mainstream *haggadot*? These factors make a difference in how the Women's Seder *haggadah* is perceived by participants in Women's Seders and affect the experience of attending a Women's Seder.

Writing and liturgy have played an important role in the development of the Jewish feminist movement, both as a catalyst for change and as its result. Writing can explicitly call for change or implicitly demonstrate a need for it. At other times, it is only after a process of change that certain texts are able to be created. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein

notes, "Language both describes and creates reality."[212] Language can be indicative of a reality that is in need of change, or it can in certain cases drive change to occur. "Jewish feminist texts…are actual agents of change in an uncompleted society, that of contemporary Judaism. They effect the changes they portray, not merely by redistributing roles but realigning and revaluing the realms of ritual and history."[213] As each community necessitates its own variations of change, so too do Women's Seders and their liturgies reflect these varying concerns. This is one factor accounting for the broad range of variation found among Women's Seder texts. The mode of expression and the meaning expressed are specific to the community that created, adapted, or decided to borrow a liturgical element for their Women's Seder. The liturgy of the Women's Seder provides participants with an opportunity not only to recall and highlight the important role of women in the Exodus, but also allows them the opportunity to voice both frustration and hope. At its best, the liturgy that makes up the Women's Seder can allow participants to feel the bitterness that might characterize their current situation and the glimmer of hope that lies across the parted sea of change they are attempting to create. Or perhaps it can remind them of the bitterness of a prior time in their lives or in the history of women in Judaism, and allow them to be thankful for the current state of their Jewish lives or that of women in Judaism now that a great deal of change has occurred.

[212] Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, ReVisions: Seeing Torah Through a Feminist Lens (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998), 171.
[213] Satlof in Heschel, 193.

God-Language and Gendered Prayer-Language

One issue that demonstrates the importance, centrality, and even controversial potential of words is that of God-language, which has been and continues to be a hot-topic issue within feminist innovation.[214] Rachel Adler crystallizes the issue of liturgical God-language:

> When congregations pray only prayers written exclusively by men for men, prayers that invoke forefathers but never foremothers, prayers that address the God whose image both women and men are said to bear in exclusively masculine forms and metaphors, prayers that express only the hopes of men, prayers that confess only the sins of men, then women are both invisible and silent.[215]

The *haggadah*, much like the *siddur*, is not simply a document to be read silently, but enacted out loud. The experience of hearing the male-centric God-language has been, for many women and even men, a sharp edge driving them toward ritual and liturgical change. Regarding the issue of masculine God-language, Judith Plaskow remarked, ―Feminist theology begins in experience...It begins with the sense of linguistic exclusion that arises when we pray to God and the God of our fathers..the use of male language that systematically leaves women on the fringes."[216] It is Plaskow's belief, and that of many other Jewish feminists, that the predominance of male language in reference to God, both in pronouns and in imagery, is indicative of a societal perspective on the centrality of men and male experience rather than women and female experience; it is evidence of a patriarchal society and power that views women as other and of less consequence than

[214] Aviva Cantor, Jewish Women/Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 436-7. Here Cantor notes that, with the ordination of women many feminist Jewish ritual innovations have become less controversial as they are no longer viewed as weapons in the struggle for equality, the issue of gender in God-language nonetheless remains heated and controversial.
[215] Rachel Adler, Engendering Judaism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 64.
[216] Plaskow in ILIFF review, 4.

men.[217] The fact that Hebrew has no neuter, and is therefore inherently a gendered language, complicates this issue even further.

It might be easy to say that arguing over words and over pronouns is a fruitless quibble that deals with minutiae rather than with the issues that underlie the problem. There is at least a degree of truth to this. Nonetheless the power of language cannot be rightfully denied. Judith Plaskow expresses one reason why language is so powerful, saying "The language and the images we use to speak about God are taken from what we value."[218] Rabbi Elyse Goldstein further notes, "God language is not an academic discussion; nor is it a trivial matter as some have suggested. Language can of course be poetic, esoteric, or symbolic in nature, but it is not arbitrary."[219] The topic of gendered God-language is, of course, too broad and complicated to deal with fully in this thesis. However it is certainly worthy of consideration in regard to the God-language chosen for use within Women's Seders, in particular because from this one issue sprout many others, including the question of the valued models of power and leadership. Plaskow states this concept clearly: "If the feminist objections to Jewish God-language were confined to the issues of gender, the manipulation of pronouns and creation of female imagery would fairly easily resolve the difficulties described…while feminist criticisms of traditional language begin with gender, they come to focus on the deeper issue of images of God's power as dominance."[220]

[217] Plaskow in Heschel, 227.
[218] Plaskow in Iliff review, 5.
[219] Goldstein, 171.
[220] Quoted in Goldstein, 172.

Women's Seders and *haggadot* have dealt with the question of God-language in a variety of ways. E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod's Women's Haggadah is careful not to use masculine God-language, opting to eliminate the prayer formulas altogether in the printerd version of this *haggadah*, instead including the Hebrew for the symbolism of each cup of wine. However, the Hebrew of these lines of explanation reflects the feminine plural of the group gathered for the Seder, and the liturgical phrase prior to drinking the first cup of wine, announcing readiness and intention to perform the mitzvah of consuming four cups of wine at the Seder, reflects the feminine plural tense of the group and uses the word ~~S~~Shekhinah, Blessed be She," for God: ~~H~~Here am I, prepared to observe the mitzvah of the first of the four cups of wine for the sake of the Shekhinah, Blessed be She./*Hineni muchana umezumana le'kayem mitzvat shti'yat arba kosot yayin, lema'an ha'Shekhinah, titbarach shma."*[221] Judith Stein's A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder removes the issue of God-language by omitting the traditional prayer formulas altogether in English and in Hebrew, much like Broner's *haggadah*. However, when it comes time for the four questions, this *haggadah* presents an interesting mixture of masculine and feminine language—twice this *haggadah* uses ~~o~~chlin," much like the traditional Aramaic, but once it uses the word ~~*o*~~*chlot*," also changing other verbs to the feminine plural form, such as ~~*m*~~*matbilot*" and ~~*m*~~*'subot*." What seems to be a mixed-up instance of gendered language could be a comment on the gendered nature of liturgy or the issue of gender at this lesbian Seder in general. Stein in many instances elected to include traditional text or fairly simple translations of traditional texts regardless of gender issues and in others has chosen to go out of her way to change the language to the feminine. Take, for instance, the final of the four questions: ~~O~~On all other nights we eat

[221] Broner, 23.

[masculine plural] either sitting upright [feminine plural] or reclining [feminine plural], but on this night we all recline [masculine plural]," or in Aramaic, "*Sheb'chol haleylot anu ochlin beyn yoshvot ubayn m'subot. Halaila hazeh kulanu m'subin*."[222] Tellingly, Stein's *haggadah* gives the following instruction prior to the four questions: "(Read, chant or skip the Hebrew wording.)"[223]

Following this passage the questions are answered immediately, one by one, and each answer starts with the words "*Avadot hayinu*,"[224] we were slaves, written in the feminine plural form of the noun "slaves." This *haggadah* clearly demonstrates a consciousness of the gendered nature of Hebrew and Aramaic, and certainly a sensitivity to the need for liturgical change regarding prayer-language. However, simply based on the printed *haggadah*, it is hard to tell what degree of knowledge and thought went into the choices of masculine and feminine liturgical language in this one element of the *haggadah*.

Some light can be shed on this question on the basis of Stein's introduction to the *haggadah*. Within it she explains her thought process in crafting the *haggadah*, including how she sifted through several traditional *haggadot* and looked into the historical development of the *haggadah*. She notes that she has "no interest in god of prayer"[225] (note here the lack of capitalization for the word "god"). Nonetheless Stein certainly seems, with this *haggadah*, to attempt to do what she states is necessary for all Jewish women: "each woman must search for those rituals that create an honest spiritual

[222] Judith Stein, A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder (Cambridge, MA: Bobbeh Meisehs Press, 1984), 4.
[223] Ibid., 4.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid., 11.

expression."[226] Additionally, when she looks at each ritual and liturgical piece of the Seder in traditional *haggadot*, she attempts to look ~~b~~beyond the meaningless, offensive, or sexist language to the original intent…Some pieces, like the Hebrew transliteration of the four questions, were included [in this *haggadah*] because without them, this did not feel like a ~~r~~real" seder to me."[227] Stein, crafting this particular version of the *haggadah* and its introduction in 1984, clearly sees herself as part of a greater movement; she writes, ~~A~~As one of many new women's Haggadot, this Haggadah is part of a wave of women's voices which are transforming and preserving Jewish life in our own special way."[228]

Both Jill Thornton's A Women's Seder and the San Diego Women's Haggadah use the traditional prayer formulas, with masculine Hebrew prayer-language, for the wine, *maror*, *matzah*, and other blessings within the *haggadah*. In the English, however, both *haggadot* are careful to maintain gender-neutral prayer-language.[229] Interestingly, however, the San Diego Women's Haggadah includes ~~*A*~~*vadot Hayinu, Atah B'not Chorin*" in place of ~~*A*~~*vadim Hayinu, Atah B'nei Chorin*," That is, it uses the feminine rather than the masculine plural for the traditional song meaning, ~~W~~We were slaves, but now we are free men/people."[230] This clearly demonstrates knowledge of the issue of the gendered nature of the Hebrew language and its effect on liturgy. Further, this *haggadah* also includes a fascinating discussion of the traditional mishnaic phrase, ~~*B*~~*'chol dor vador chayav adam lirot et'ats'mo k'ilu hu yatsa mimits'rayim*," or ~~I~~In all generations it

[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid., 11-12.
[228] Ibid., 12.
[229] See for example the blessing over the first cup of wine and the shehecheyanu in Ibid, 18, and the traditional festival Kiddush found in Fine, 4.
[230] Fine, 25-26.

is the duty of man to consider himself as if he had come forth from Egypt."[231] The discussion continues,

> This sentence is a stumbling block for any woman reciting at a Seder who wishes to fully understand what it means to be ~~"f~~ree" as a Jew. For a woman, Jewish freedom means to be able to respond completely as a mature practicing adult to any issues which arise within the Jewish community.
>
> How can a woman recite ~~"a~~ts'mo" (himself) and still feel she is an adult decision maker? If she can, she does not yet fully understand what it means to go out from slavery to freedom…
>
> Freedom can only be gained by a woman when she herself becomes fully knowledgeable and fully capable of speaking and acting for herself…she must renew the struggle yearly until such time comes when she can stand at the Seder and recite for herself:
>
> ~~"~~*B'chol dor vador chayevet isha lir'ot et'ats'ma k'ilu hi yatsa mimits'rayim*"
>
> ~~"~~**In all generations it is the duty of a woman to consider herself as if she had come forth from Egypt**."[232]

This *haggadah*, therefore, represents a mid-point between the two radical options of either leaving prayer-language in the traditional Hebrew and simply changing the English, or a complete change in God-language and prayer-language. Perhaps the fact that this *haggadah* was produced in 1986 accounts for this example of a midway point regarding God-language innovation, wanting to open the door wide enough to keep participants comfortable yet still desiring to create a more inclusive prayer-language and raise awareness regarding this issue.

The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah not only makes significant changes in prayer-language but also addresses this issue in its introduction. The introduction notes that the *brachot* (blessings) in this *haggadah* are fashioned in a similar manner to those of

[231] Transliteration and translation of Hebrew from Fine, 57.
[232] Fine, 57-58.

Marcia Falk. These changes ~~a~~re contributions to a liturgy that speaks to and from women's experiences."[233] As such, this *haggadah* includes an entire introductory section regarding the language of the *brachot*. However the introduction states this liturgical choice cleanly: "~~W~~We refer to God as Shekhinah, the Divine Presence, who protect us in the folds of Her skirts, as Ruach ha-olam, the Breath of all Life."[234] The creators of this *haggadah* note that because God is One, therefore encompassing both male and female, being "~~b~~both and neither," consequently "~~t~~there should be no reason not to address the Deity in a feminine voice. If it seems strange, it is only because it is unfamiliar."[235] It is apparent that not only do this *haggadah's* creators see the choice in liturgical language as reflective of an ideology, but rather they read these choices into a developing stream of change enabling women to live fuller Jewish lives so that Judaism thereby may become more complete and whole. They write, "~~N~~New blessings such as these must be written and added to the traditional liturgy, as other writings have been added throughout its history. When these new prayers are added to the new rituals being created today, the completion of Judaism's missing other half begins."[236]

The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah represents a middle-ground that still consistently provides *brachot* and prayers that use feminine God-language. This *haggadah* utilizes a prayer formula very similar to that of the Dancing with Miriam Haggadah. Take, for example, the blessing over wine: "~~*B*~~*'rucha at yah eloheinu ruach ha'olam boreit p'ri hagafen*. You are Blessed, Our God, Spirit of the World, who creates the fruit of the

[233] Moise & Schwartz, xiv.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid., xxi.
[236] Ibid.

vine."[237] However, directly beneath it, the traditional prayer formula in masculine prayer-language is also offered.

What might be the motivation for providing blessings that contain both masculine and feminine prayer-language? One reason is that, as this *haggadah* seems to have been created with a broad usage in mind, it allows each community to make its own decision about prayer-language while still educating; even if a community of women decides to use the familiar masculine God-language, the presence of the innovative feminine God-language broadens their horizons nonetheless. Yet another reason to include both options of wording for blessings is related to one particular reason this prayer-language is so controversial. There are those who would say that without reciting the traditional prayer formulas (meaning, those written in the traditional masculine prayer- and God-language), one has not fulfilled the mitzvah of completing the Seder and carrying out all of its rituals. In many cases, because Women's Seders are often conducted either prior to Passover or on an "off-night" during the holiday, this is not an issue. However, should a community choose to use this Seder on one of the two traditional nights, and additionally if participants felt strongly about the issue of completing the ritual by the perceived halakhic standards that include traditional masculine prayer-language, this *haggadah* now provides them with the text to recite the *brachot* in the traditional manner.

It is clear that Women's Seders have encountered the issue of gendered prayer-language in a variety of ways, indicating the various needs and inclinations of the community creating and using the *haggadah*. It is an issue that spans many of the liturgical elements of the *haggadah* and is one of the key means of liturgical innovation

[237] Cohen, 42.

utilized by feminists creating Women's Seders. This method of liturgical innovation in Women's Seders is accurately seen as part of a broader movement of egalitarian and feminist liturgical development in many of the movements of Judaism and remains—and perhaps will continue to be—a controversial issue that each community must confront differently.[238]

Naming Matrilineal Lineage & Opening Readings

Many Women's Seders begin with a new liturgical element, inviting each woman to introduce herself to the other participants at the Seder by her mother's and grandmother's names, either in English or Hebrew or both. For example, directly after the ritual of *bedikat chametz* (searching for leaven) and *biur chametz* (burning leaven), the Ma'yan Women's Haggadah instructs participants to introduce themselves by their matrilineal lineage, providing the appropriate formulation (i.e., "I am _____ *bat* (daughter of) _____ *bat* _____").[239] This *haggadah* suggests that they use any language desired—Hebrew, Ladino, English, Yiddish, and go back as many generations as they can recall.[240] This liturgical innovation is new to the 2000 edition of this Seder and is not present in the 1997 edition. The 1997 edition does, however, suggest having Seder-goers introduce themselves at the outset of the Seder as a way to bring the group together.[241] The And We Were All There Haggadah includes a version of this ritual of introduction, requesting that both men and women introduce themselves by their full Hebrew names, including their father's and mother's Hebrew names.[242]

[238] For a fuller introduction to the issue of gendered prayer language, see Adler, Chapter 3, "And Not Be Silent: Toward Inclusive Worship," 61-103.
[239] Cohen, 22.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Cohen, Ellwell, Friedman, & Horn, v.
[242] Elwell, 1.

While this does not place the same emphasis on matrilineal lineage found in the Ma'yan Passover Haggadah, the request that women and men include their mothers' Hebrew names in their introduction is an step toward egalitarianism.

Most, if not all, women's *haggadot* begin their Seder with a reading, poem, song, or invocation, in addition to the traditional action of singing the Order of the Seder and lighting the candles in order to begin the Seder ritual. In some cases the liturgical innovation of each Seder participant introducing herself by her matrilineal lineage serves as this "opening reading" of the Seder. In other cases, there is an additional reading or liturgical passage that serves to set the tone for the Seder. The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah supplements its "Invocation" of the *bedikat chametz* ritual and the matrilineal lineage introductions with a poem, "*Makom Kadosh*,"[243] to help create the atmosphere of the Seder by describing the actions of the seder as creating a holy place: "We come to tell./ We come to hear./ We come to teach, to learn,/ We come to grow/ And so we say, // The time is now./ Sing to the One./ God's Presence is here,/ Sh'chinah, You will dwell among us."[244] The San Diego Women's Haggadah begins its Seder with an introductory reading that notes the innovative nature of the Seder: "This is a special evening, one that our ancestors would not have anticipated in a thousand years! We gather tonight as Jewish women to celebrate as well the special part that women have played in Jewish liberation."[245] Following this reading is Hanna Senesh's poem, "Blessed is the Match."[246]

[243] Cohen, 23.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Fine, 1.
[246] Ibid., 2.

Thornton's A Women's Seder begins with several opening readings. Most moving is the third in this series: after a poem and a song, a reading entitled "Birth Pangs" that describes every liberation as emerging from a narrow place, a "Mitzrayim."[247] This reading concludes, "Tonight…The poor are homeless. Tonight…many are lonely, depressed, disheartened. Tonight…we will begin our liberation."[248] In Broner's Women's Haggadah, the singing of a new version of the Order of the Seder serves as the opening reading. Much like the traditional chanted Order of the Seder, it describes the actions to take place over the next several hours but in a more descriptive way than the traditional version. "We dip greens in salt water/ And wash pain with tears./ We divide matzot/ And hide our past./ We tell Haggadah/ And each her own tale."[249] These readings, though simple, are liturgical innovations that provide *kavvanah* (focus) and direct the hearts and minds of the Women's Seder participant toward the task at hand. Many of these liturgical innovations highlight the holy nature of the task at hand. Others remind those around the table of the innovative and radical nature of the rituals to follow. Yet others note the chain of history that has led to the moment in which the Seder participants find themselves. All of these variants set the mood for the ritual and liturgical innovations that follow.

The Four Questions

Innovations regarding the four questions are extremely common in the Women's Seder. There are two basic ways in which this liturgical Seder element is innovated. Some Women's Seders choose to include the four traditional questions in some form and

[247] Thornton, 5.
[248] Ibid., 6.
[249] Broner, 11.

add answers specific to the themes of the Women's Seder, and other Women's Seders choose to ask four or more questions written specifically for that *haggadah*. The Broner Women's Haggadah uses a mix of these two methods:

> Why is this Haggadah different from traditional Haggadot?
> Because this Haggadah deals with the Exodus of women.
> Why have our mothers on this night been bitter?
> Because they did the preparation but not the ritual. They did the serving but not the conducting. They read of their fathers but not their mothers.
> Why on this night do we dip twice?
> Because of the natural and unnatural cycles of blood: our monthly bleedings; the blood spilled by war.
> Why on this night do we recline?
> We recline on this night for the unhurried telling of the legacy of Miriam.[250]

Thornton's A Women's Seder directs the four questions to four courageous women it chooses to honor during this ritual: Deborah, Beruriah, Regina Jonas, and Dona Gracia Nasi, women ~~–w~~hose lives exemplify wisdom, scholarship, courage, and strength,"[251] and the *haggadah* text continues as these exemplary women answer these questions with lessons from their lives.[252] Likewise, The San Diego Women's Haggadah addresses each of the four questions to a similar list of women: Deborah, Beruriah, Hannah Senesh, and Gluckel of Hameln.[253] Each question is addressed as a child speaking to her mother: ~~–M~~*Mother,* we ask, *why is this night different from all other nights? Why do we celebrate a women's Seder?*"[254]

The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah simply includes the traditional text of the four questions, with instructions to follow these with questions that occur to those at the

[250] Broner, 23-25.
[251] Thornton, 24.
[252] Ibid., 24-26.
[253] Fine, 13-19.
[254] Fine, 14.

Seder. —First we ask the prescribed questions. Then, we add our own,"[255] is read directly prior to the Four Questions. Afterwards, an instruction is printed: —Share additional questions about the seder, the Haggadah, and the meaning of freedom and slavery. Use the rest of the Seder to answer and discuss these questions."[256] Similarly, the And We Were All There Haggadah includes the traditional text of the Four Questions,[257] followed by instructions guiding Seder participants to ask their own questions. A few sample questions are provided: —How is this seder different from other seders I have attended? How have I changed from the last time I participated in a seder? As I ask these questions, how am I connected to those who have posed similar ones before me, and to those who will ask them after me?"[258] While taking the opportunity to ask further questions beyond the traditional four is not unknown to the mainstream Seder, the personal nature of the questions suggested by the And We Were All There Haggadah could be indicative of the atmosphere the makers of the *haggadah* hoped to create for this Seder; perhaps this indicates a desire to foster community among women in attendance both by the interactive nature of informally raising and discussing questions and by the personal phrasing of the questions provided as samples.

The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah, however, has rewritten the four questions entirely, using the traditional opening phrase of the four questions as a model. This innovative version, written in a style indicating a responsive reading, is as follows:

> **The Four Questions**
> Why Is This Night Different from All Other Seder Nights?
> At all other seders, we hear the stories of our forefathers, but the voices of our mothers are silent. *Tonight they will be heard.*

[255] Cohen, 54
[256] Ibid., 55.
[257] Cutter & Weisman, 7.
[258] Cutter & Weisman, 8.

> At all other seders the heroic deeds of our sisters Miriam, Yocheved, Shifrah and Puah are kept hidden. *Tonight we will celebrate their courage.*
> At all other seders we denounce the Pharaoh of the past. *Tonight we will also examine the pharaohs of our own day.*
> At all other seders we rejoice only in our liberation as a people. *Tonight we also celebrate our empowerment as Jewish women.*[259]

Like the traditional liturgical passage, each of these revised versions of the four questions allows the Seder attendees to discuss what is different about that evening, what is or will be different about the experience of the Seder from either all other nights or all other Seders. The most commonly shared element among these passages is that they provide the Seder participants with an opportunity to discuss either the need for Women's Seders, the power of Women's Seders, or the impetus for having a Women's Seder in the first place. The questions asked in this innovated passage address the topics to be discussed and studied for the rest of the Seder.

Yet another innovative element of this liturgical passage is that, in the context of the Women's Seder, it is not the youngest boy who recites or chants the Four Questions: rather, it is a woman, or perhaps several women or girls, in attendance at the Seder who get to both ask and *answer* these questions. Women are given the opportunity not only to ask, but to teach and preside, to fulfill the roles of inquisitive youth and wise elder. These questions set the stage for the rest of the Seder. The questions of the four daughters discussed below provide a different kind of opportunity for innovation and reflection.

[259] Moise & Schwartz, 10.

The Four Daughters

This is a liturgical element that reinfuses a traditional text with new feminist meaning. The origin of this passage is as old as the Women's Seder. The same questions that brought about Women's Seders are questions asked by all of these women: wise, wicked, simple, and the one who does not even know enough to ask. These rituals seem to take two basic forms—one in which the traditional questions (which also appear in the Talmud of the land of Israel and the Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael before that) are asked with the same proof-texts for answers, but they are then reinterpreted to fit the Women's Seder themes, and the other, in which new questions are put in the mouth of each of the ~~"d~~aughters." The most common is the second type.

We have many examples of the Four Daughters to draw from. One example relates the wise daughter to the the midwives Shifra and Puah; the wicked daughter to the those who question elders, using the example of the daughters of Zelophehad (Malhah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tizrah) who fought for and won the right to inherit their father's property; the simple daughter to one who asks ~~"W~~hy were only men redeemed by God explicitly;" and notes, of the silent child, ~~"T~~he *haggadah* assumes that behind any child's silence there are valuable, unasked questions."[260]

One noteworthy element of the ~~"F~~our Daughters" common to many women's *haggadot* is the celebration of the ~~"W~~icked Daughter," or the ~~"W~~icked Daughter" within each woman. One example reads, ~~"Y~~es, 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

[260] Anisfeld, Mohr, & Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 69.

to speak up and criticize what is wrong and what is unjust."[261] Another reads, "I did not need to be told, 'Had you been there you would not have been redeemed.' I could see that for myself."[262] Yet another reads, "If I learn my history, will I not be angry? Will I not be bitter as Miriam who was deprived of her prophecy?"[263] Another points out that the wicked daughter excludes herself noting that women have always been absent, working on the meal and preparations, rather than at the table, so the Seder lacks meaning for them. "I can only ask the men, what does this Seder mean to you?"[264] The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah speaks not of the wicked daughter, but the "irreverent" daughter.[265] In still other Seders and *haggadot*, the traditional four categories of children—Wise, Wicked, Simple, and not knowing enough to ask a question—are dispensed with and replaced with other qualities, such as "The daughter in search of a usable past," "The daughter who wants to erase her difference," and "The daughter who does not know that she has a place at the table."[266]

These examples show the development of the "Four Sons" or "Four Children" into a new liturgical element highlighting the role of women in the Exodus and in the Seder. Additionally, in the interpretations found within these texts, we find that they emphasize the role of asking questions—and, in particular, the role of women asking questions—that leads to the important process of change and acquisition of rights. Most importantly, these innovations encourage the continuation of asking questions and of women reading themselves, and various aspects of themselves and their lives, into the

[261] Ibid., 116.
[262] Ibid., 115.
[263] Ibid., 113-114.
[264] Ibid., 112.
[265] Moise & Schwartz, 12.
[266] Cohen, 61-62.

Seder ritual. Finding connection to Judaism through the telling of the story and the revealing of personal qualities is a central element not only of this liturgy but of the Women's Seder in general.

Dayeinu and Lo Dayeinu—It Is Enough, and It Is Not Enough

While many Women's Seders include the traditional text of *Dayeinu*, or at least an excerpt from the traditional text, it is extremely common for Women's Seders to include some form of liturgical innovation at this moment in the Seder. The two most frequent innovations both serve to voice discontent with the current status of Jewish women and the situation of women throughout Jewish history. The first method of innovation is to use the traditional framework, listing events that could have occurred in a different manner—in a manner more beneficial to women—and then saying, "It would have been enough, *Dayeinu."* The second method goes beyond this, saying that even if a certain thing had happened, it still would *not* have been enough, *Lo Dayeinu.* While many other ritual and liturgical innovations address the plight of women in some manner, this liturgical piece is an example of directly addressing the inequitable treatment of women in Jewish history and modern times. This liturgical segment provides women with the opportunity to voice hurt and upset in a direct manner, using the framework of one of the traditional, most well-known elements of the Passover Seder. Notably, while some Women's Seders choose to include one of these liturgical innovations alongside the traditional text of *Dayeinu*, still others choose to include both an updated "*Dayeinu*" text and a "*Lo Dayeinu*" text.

The Broner Women's Haggadah features the Wise Daughter asking "But what is *dayeinu*? What is sufficient for us?"[267] Following this question are a series of statements regarding what would have been sufficient. It begins, "If Eve had been created in the image of god and not as a helper to Adam, it would have sufficed. Dayenu."[268] Then, there is a series of similar comments regarding women throughout the course of the Torah and Jewish history. Following these, the poem continues: "If women had been the writers of Tanach, interpreters of our past, Dayenu."[269] Finally it concludes, "If every generation of women together with every generation of men would continue to go out of Egypt, Dayenu Dayenu."[270] After the "Dayenu" section, Broner's *haggadah* continues with a "*Lo Dayenu*" liturgical piece, which reads,

> If the Shekhinah had brought us forth from bondage and had not educated us, it would not have sufficed us. If She had educated us and not given us opportunity to work, it would not have sufficed us. If She had given us opportunity to work and not allowed us to advance, it would not have sufficed us. If we were allowed to advance at work but had to perform housewifely duties as well, Lo Dayenu. If we were aided by a rabbinical degree and treated with dignity, Dayenu, Dayenu. It would be enough.

This version of *Dayeinu* accompanied by *Lo Dayeinu* presented in Broner's *haggadah* seems to have served as a model for other Women's Seders that followed it. One reason for this might be that the format of a parallel statement of what would suffice for women, and what would not suffice for women, allows participants to express not only dissatisfaction and frustration, but hope for the future of women in Judaism. Not only can it celebrate overcoming the challenges that women had faced, with names

[267] Broner, 56.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Broner, 61.
[270] Ibid., 63.

unremembered throughout the course of Jewish history and obstacles that stood in between women and Torah study or the rabbinate, but it also expresses hope for the furtherance of the feminist cause in Judaism. The format of *Dayeinu* and *Lo Dayeinu* allows not only for an expression of discontent, but also a chance to voice a degree of hope similar to that in the traditional text of *Dayeinu*, as it concludes with an expression of hope for the speedy coming of the Messiah. The hope expressed in Women's Seders most likely does not qualify as Messianic, but there are strong parallels. Women attending these Seders are, perhaps, looking forward to a time more perfect than our own, in which freedom will be celebrated equally by all, sharing the fruits of the redemption of the Jewish people from the period of inequity between the sexes. Perhaps it is the powerful message of this combination that has fueled the imitation of this liturgical element in a great number of Women's *haggadot*.

After including three of the traditional verses of *Dayeinu*, the San Diego Women's Haggadah notes that the traditional prayer thanks God for each blessing, such as taking the Israelites out of Egypt, giving them the Torah, giving them Shabbat, saying that each individual act ~~w~~would have been sufficient." However, it continues to say that repeating to ourselves ~~i~~it could have been worse" is a ~~s~~sign of powerlessness typical of oppressed people." It goes on to note, ~~I~~It is important for us not only to be grateful for all the good things that have happened, but also to not settle for less than our full due as human beings."[271] This is followed by an updated English text of *Dayeinu*, starting with remembering women equally with men and remembering them in the telling of the Exodus, continuing through the course of Jewish history to Bat Mitzvah and the

[271] Fine, p.44 for all quotes.

rabbinate. Each statement is asked as a question—would it have been sufficient? ―Had women been remembered in the telling of the Exodus, but not thought of as individuals, dayeinu?"[272] This updated *Dayeinu* concludes: ―When we are treated as complete equals, then will men and women go out from Egypt together! Dayeinu, Dayeinu!"

Thornton's A Women's Seder begins this part of the Seder by quoting the ―Dayeinu" portion of Broner's *haggadah*. Following this is a reading, ―Dayeinu: Will This Be Enough for Us?" in which several social and political issues are raised. ―If we work towards affordable health care and an effective education for all, *Will This Be Enough?*...If we take the steps necessary to make our homes and streets violence free, *Will This Be Enough?"*[273] After several such statements, this reading concludes, ―If we acknowledge the many blessings in our lives, *Will This Be Enough?*"[274] This second part of the *Dayeinu* in Thornton's *haggadah* reflects the parallel structure found in Broner's *haggadah* and the San Diego Women's Haggadah, but it takes the focus of the reading a step further, or outside of the path tread by the other *haggadot* mentioned thus far regarding this liturgical element. The concerns raised in this part of the *Dayeinu* are not specific to women. Rather they reflect more global and communal concerns of women living within a broader society with its own problems and issues. Having voiced female-specific concerns by quoting the first half of the Broner *Dayeinu-Lo Dayeinu*, this *haggadah* encourages the women in attendance at the Seder to turn their concerns to the world around them, to issues affecting not just the Jewish community alone but the world. Not only does this *haggadah* seek the betterment of the lives of women in

[272] Ibid., 45
[273] Thornton, 42.
[274] Ibid., 43.

Judaism, but it turns its attention outward, toward the improvement of the lives of everyone in the community, the United States, and world-wide. This represents another method of innovation regarding *Dayeinu* that is commonly found in Women's Seders. Many *haggadot* choose this as a moment to turn attentions outward, rather than continuing to focus strictly on the status of women in Judaism and Jewish history.

The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah uses the method of innovation discussed above. Interestingly, the makers of this *haggadah* chose to include a portion of the traditional text of *Dayeinu*, thanking God for bringing us out of Egypt, giving us Shabbat, and giving us the Torah,[275] and do not follow this with an innovation solely focused on the lives of women. Certain lines do focus on women, but most of the lines have a broader focus, sometimes on the larger Jewish community, and occasionally even beyond. The participants at this Seder read together, ~~–~~If we speak truthfully about the pain, joys, and contradictions of our lives, If we listen to others with sensitivity and compassion, If we challenge the absence of women in traditional texts, chronicles of Jewish history, and in the leadership of our institutions, *dayeinu.*"[276] The conclusion of this reading is, ~~–~~If we realize our power to effect change, If we bring holiness into our lives, homes, and communities, If we honor our visions more than our fears, *dayeinu v'lo dayeinu,* It will and it will not be enough."[277] This *haggadah* takes the concept of the dual *Dayeinu* and *Lo Dayeinu* of the Broner *haggadah*, but combines it into one reading. While this ending to *Dayeinu* may very well leave Seder participants with a feeling of uncertainty, it seems most likely that the creators of this *haggadah* were hoping to reflect the complicated

[275] Cohen, 72.
[276] Cohen, 73.
[277] Ibid.

nature of social progress, both within the realm of Jewish feminism and beyond it. With every achieved hope, with every goal that is seen to fruition, yet another goal lies ahead. The ending of this version of *Dayeinu*, saying that it is and it is not enough, allows women not only to acknowledge the progress and the hopes of the Jewish feminist movement, but also the hope for *Tikkun Olam*, a bettering of the world. It also allows them to see that while every step is worth celebrating, there is always another step to take in the future.

The Dancing with Miriam Haggadah chooses to include a text of *Dayeinu* focused solely on the lives of women and Jewish women and does not include any form of the traditional *Dayeinu* text. While there is one line that explicitly focuses on Jewish women (–When we are legally equal partners in Jewish marriage and divorce") much of this reading focuses on broader concerns of women in society. This version of *Dayeinu*, too, has a two-part structure of six statements beginning –If…" followed by the word –Dayenu," continuing with six statements beginning –When…" followed by the phrase, –It will be enough." For example, the first line reads, –If we had been allowed to choose our destinies and mates as adults, and not been married off as children, Dayenu." The first phrase of the second section reads, –When we can pray as Jewish women where and how we choose, and not be seen as traitors to our history, It will be enough." The final line in this version of *Dayeinu* reads, –When the earth and all who dwell there shall thrive in peace, joy, and freedom, It will be enough."[278] This innovation of *Dayeinu* reflects a certain Messianic hope parallel to that found in the traditional Seder text, expressing the desire for a perfect age in which social ills will be fixed. This is further conveyed in this

[278] All excerpts of *Dayeinu* from Moise & Schwartz, 18.

haggadah by the fact that it is followed by Judy Chicago's poem, "And then all that has divided us will merge," which similarly ends, "And then all will live in harmony with each other and the earth/ And then everywhere will be called Eden once again."[279]

One final example is that of the And We Were All There Haggadah, which contains an innovated *Dayeinu* that is more celebratory in nature than those found in the *haggadot* discussed thus far. After a fairly traditional text of the *Dayeinu*, there is a passage entitled "A New Dayenu." This passage raises up Jewish women, saying "Had God given us…" then listing a group of important or influential Jewish women role models, following each phrase with "Dayenu." It lists the matriarchs, female judges; talmudic sages; female poets, writers, and authors of prayers; female educators, and female builders of Israel, following each with the exclamation of thanks, "Dayenu."[280] The closing line of this passage is, "Let us thank God for this rich heritage and open our hearts to praise God and God's creation on this day."[281] This version of *Dayeinu* takes a much happier and uplifting tone than many of those found in other women's *haggadot.* This *haggadah* uses this as one of many opportunities to honor women who were influential and central in Jewish history, who can serve as role models for Jewish women in this day and age. This innovated version of *Dayeinu* does not leave participants on a note of struggle, hoping for a better day; rather it celebrates the accomplishments of women that have already happened.

These many versions of *Dayeinu* represent a key moment of innovation in Women's Seders. Using this traditional text as a format to voice both hope and concern,

[279] Ibid., Judy Chicago 1979.
[280] Elwell, 15-16.
[281] Ibid., 16.

both struggle and achievement, those who have crafted Women‘s Seders have created a powerful moment to be shared by women present at the Seder, encouraging them to take action to see both their feminist and their grander social goals to fruition, and instilling in them the hope that these achievements are a possibility.

The liturgical innovations discussed in this chapter serve many functions. They reinvent traditional texts in a manner more suitable and applicable to the lives and experiences of women. They enfranchise women during the Seder by providing a feminine or egalitarian language for prayer and for God. They allow the questions on the minds of women to be voiced, whether they are printed on the pages of the *haggadah* or simply encouraged to be raised. They validate both celebration of the lives of women and the expression of frustration at dreams and goals thwarted. These liturgical innovations transform exclusion to inclusion, overhearing from the kitchen to discussing and participating at the Seder table.

The following chapter will look more closely at the ways female characters in the Exodus and beyond are honored through the Women‘s Seder. In particular this chapter will discuss women who are a part of the traditional story of the Exodus yet are not mentioned in the traditional text of the Seder, one female talmudic scholar, and the quintessential character of the Women‘s Seder: Miriam. The following chapter will demonstrate the power of story and *midrash* in feminism and particularly in the Women‘s Seder, completing the discussion of innovation in mainstream Women‘s Seders.

Chapter Four: Miriam and the Women—Maggid & Midrash

"And all who elaborate the story of the Exodus deserve praise. And the telling that includes the actions of women is exalted."[282]

"Why do we recline tonight? We recline for the unhurried telling of the legacy of Miriam."[283]

The portion of the traditional Seder entitled "*Maggid*, Telling," encompasses many different liturgical and ritual elements, including several texts from the Mishna and Talmud. Many of the examples of ritual and liturgy described thus far in this thesis are a part of *Maggid*, namely, the Four Questions, *Avadim Hayinu*, the Four Sons/Daughters, the Ten Plagues, Dayeinu, the description of the elements of the Seder plate (*Pesach*, *Matzah*, and *Maror*), the phrase "In every generation, *B'chol Dor Vador,"* and the second cup of wine all are present in the traditional *haggadah* as part of *Maggid*. All of these rituals and liturgical passages play some part in the "Telling" that is the core of the Passover Seder. In addition to the aforementioned Seder elements that make up *Maggid,* within this section we find not just the telling of the story of the Exodus from Egypt, but *midrashim* and passages describing how the Rabbis of old would tell and retell the story of the Exodus.

Yet throughout all of these various ritual and liturgical elements, through both framings of the story of the Exodus present in the traditional Seder, there are numerous men whose names and lives are recalled, yet only one woman is mentioned in the entire

[282] Cohen, 57.
[283] Broner, 25.

haggadah. This occurs during the portion of the Seder entitled *Hallel*, praise, at the end of the *haggadah*. Men are present in great numbers and at great length, not just in the form of biblical characters such as Moses and Abraham, but in the voices of the Rabbis quoted throughout the *haggadah*, as they tell the story of the Exodus in their words across the generations, in the Four Sons who the *haggadah* introduces, and in the voice of the youngest boy as he chants the Four Questions. "Named by a male community that perceives itself as normative, women are part of the Jewish tradition without its sources and structures reflecting our experience…Israel is the male collectivity, the children of Jacob who had a daughter, but whose sons became the twelve tribes."[284]

It is therefore clear that the innovators behind Women's Seders are faced with a challenging task to create a "Telling" that honors the lives of women, telling their stories in their words, representing women not just as young girls and students but as women who teach and preside over the Seder. On the basis of the research for this thesis, it is clear that the core, essential element of the Women's Seder is this telling, this *Maggid*. "We must render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources."[285] The act of identifying the names and honoring the lives of Jewish women from the Torah and throughout Jewish history is an act that validates the lives of the Jewish women of today who are participants in Women's Seders. Where voices were previously silenced, Women's Seders draw them out; when women's stories went unremembered, Women's Seders recreate them and fill in the gaps. Telling the stories of women during Women's Seders demonstrates to participants that their own stories matter. Jewish women today "cannot redefine Judaism in the present without redefining

[284] Plaskow (1990), 3.
[285] Ibid., 28.

our past, because our present grows out of our history."[286] Securing places within the Seder to honor influential women demonstrates to participants that they too can have great influence. This act of re-remembering is, then, in a sense empowering. Telling stories of the women of our Jewish past is, in a way, telling stories of women in the Jewish present. "The power of storytelling is essential…the storytelling impulse is an essential part of what it means to be human."[287] This element of Women's Seders is arguably the one that is most central to creating the uplifting and emboldening spirit with which participants can leave the Seder and return to their communities.

Through discussion of the many elements of *Maggid* listed above, we have already covered many of the ways in which women's voices and lives have returned to the story of the Exodus through the Women's Seder. It is worthwhile, however, to discuss the particular roles played by certain women in the *haggadot* of the Women's Seder. We have seen that women throughout the span of Jewish history have found their way back into the Seder text through various rituals (i.e., the *Dayeinu* list in the And We Were All There Haggadah[288], the four cups of wine in the Thornton *haggadah*[289]), and at times even non-Jewish women are honored through the Women's Seder. The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah, in particular, weaves the stories of modern Jewish women into the Seder text with great frequency; aside from Miriam, nearly every woman mentioned in this *haggadah*—and there are numerous women mentioned--is a modern role model. While several women throughout Jewish history make appearances in a variety of women's *haggadot*, a few in particular are worthy of a fuller discussion due to their

[286] Ibid., 31.
[287] Bernstein in Drucker, 18.
[288] Elwell, 17-19.
[289] Thornton, 17-19, 51-53, 57-58, 66-67.

prevalence in several *haggadot*. ―'The more one tells the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the more one is to be praised.'…Embellishing the story of the Exodus is a very significant spiritual aspect of the Seder."[290]

Yocheved & Batya

Two women from the story of the Exodus who are commonly honored in women's *haggadot* are Yocheved, the mother of Moses, and Batya, Pharaoh's daughter. These two women acted in defiance of Pharaoh's rule and were essential in bringing Moses safely from infancy into adulthood. Yocheved, Moses's mother, is not named in the beginning of the story of Moses's life, called at this point in Exodus 2:1 only ―a Levite woman,"[291] and Moses's father is called only ―a certain man of the house of Levi."[292] They remain unnamed until Exodus 6:20 when they are called by name as Amram and Yocheved. Similarly, Pharaoh's daughter who adopts Moses remains unnamed in the Torah, and it is rabbinic literature that gives her the name Batya.

Yocheved and Batya, two of the women essential to the progression of the life of Moses and therefore to the story of the Exodus, are commonly included together when mentioned in the Women's Seder. Jill Thornton's A Women's Seder honors Yocheved and Batya with the second cup of wine, quoting Exodus 6:6, ―I will deliver you out of their bondage,"[293] and Rashi's comment Pesachim 108b, ―For the sake of righteous women we were delivered from Egypt."[294] This is followed by the verse in which

[290] David in Drucker, 210.
[291] Exodus 2:1.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Thornton, 51.
[294] Ibid.

Amram and Yocheved are named for the first time, Exodus 6:20.[295] Next, Exodus 2:1-10 is quoted, in which Amram and Yocheved place Moses in the basket on the Nile, which is discovered by Pharaoh's daughter Batya, and Batya allows Yocheved to become the nurse for the baby, and names him Moses.[296] The text continues, "With the second cup of wine, we honor both the birth mother and the adoptive mother of Moses."[297] This is followed by addressing each of these women separately. "We honor Yocheved, the mother of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. It took great courage and love for Yocheved to give up her own son so he might live."[298] Regarding Batya, the text says, "We honor the Pharaoh's daughter, Moses's adoptive Mother who the Rabbis named Batya—daughter of God. It took great courage and compassion for the Pharaoh's daughter to raise a Hebrew child in her father's house."[299] Prior to the blessing for the wine, the passage concludes, "For the sake of Yocheved, for the sake of Batya, we were redeemed from Egypt."[300]

Similarly, the And We Were All There Haggadah honors Batya and Yocheved with the second cup of wine, quoting the verses mentioned above in the discussion of Thornton's *haggadah*, quoting instead of Rashi's comment on Pesachim 108b, a similar comment on Sotah 11b.[301] Following this quotation, the text describes the achievements of Yocheved and Batya separately. Speaking of Yocheved, this passage reads, "We honor Yocheved, woman of courage, who made a cradle of reeds, a fragile vessel that

[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid., 51-52.
[297] Ibid., 52.
[298] Ibid., 52.
[299] Ibid. Text in this section of Thornton's *haggadah* was written by Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman. I changed the spelling of "Batiah" to "Batya" for consistency with the spelling of this name used in the thesis.
[300] Ibid., 53.
[301] Elwell, 23.

would carry Moses away from her and towards an uncertain future. We think of her tonight, bent over with fear as she set her baby down in the Nile."[302] Following this, the passage turns to Batya, ~~–~~But God protected Moses, and he was drawn from the water by a compassionate woman who longed for a child of her own. [She] reached beyond class and station to rescue a child from death."[303] The text continues by asking questions: ~~–~~Together, these two women nurtured this child. Did these two mothers know one another's true identity? Did they know that all liberation requires cooperation?"[304] Again like Thornton's *haggadah*, this passage concludes, ~~–~~For the sake of Yocheved, for the sake of Batya, we were redeemed from Egypt."[305]

Interestingly, Judith Stein's A New Haggadah mentions Yocheved and the Pharaoh's daughter during the telling of the story of the Exodus, but claims that Yocheved was able to hide Moses in the Nile River for three months, and names Pharaoh's daughter Thermutis.[306] Stein also chooses to answer the question posed by the And We Were All There Haggadah of whether Batya and Yocheved understood each others' true identities: ~~–~~Knowing full well that this was a Jewish baby, she [the Pharaoh's daughter] wanted to save him, and so decided to take him to the palace to raise. She and Miriam agreed that Jocheved could come along as the Hebrew wet nurse, thus keeping baby and mother together."[307] Identifying these as acts of resistance that would spawn a greater rebellion, Stein's story continues, ~~–~~The Jewish women were learning more all the time about acts of resistance, and growing stronger. As they grew stronger,

[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Stein, 8.
[307] Ibid.

they began reaching out to more and more women…Slowly, slowly, they began to plan a massive escape: an exodus." The creators of the women's *haggadot* mentioned in this section believed Yocheved and Batya to be worthy of honor and remembrance, and while the means through which they are called to mind differs, these *haggadot* restore Yocheved and Batya to the position of honor and mention given to them by the Torah.

Shiphrah & Pu'ah

Aside from Miriam, the two women from the story of the Exodus most frequently and thoroughly honored through the Women's Seder are Shiphrah and Pu'ah, the midwives who defied Pharaoh's order to kill every baby boy born to a Hebrew woman. The Hebrew of the verse in which these women are introduced leaves some ambiguity as to whether they are Hebrew or Egyptian; the Hebrew could reasonably translate as "Hebrew midwives" or "midwives of the Hebrews."[308] Mentioned in a mere seven-verse section of the story of the Exodus, these simple midwives not only acted according to their consciences not only in refusing to kill the Hebrew children, but in being willing to lie while facing Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler in their lives. The text of Exodus 1:15-22 reads:

> [15] The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, [16] saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." [17] The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. [18] So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?" [19] The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth." [20] And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. [21] And because the midwives feared God, He established households for

[308] Exodus 1:15.

them. [22] Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

Not only did these midwives face Pharaoh, but they were able to thwart his plan so successfully that he had to change the policy, ordering the Hebrews directly to carry out his decree of death for Hebrew male children.

Women's *haggadot* honor these women in several ways. Broner's The Women's Haggadah calls them to memory during its "Song of the Mothers," which transforms the traditional tale retold in the *haggadah* of the Seder held by several Rabbis in B'nai Berak that lasted until the morning when the time came to recite the *Shema*, saying "Years ago in Bnai Berak/ four women learned this saying:/ "Because of Just Women/ Israel is redeemed from Egypt.'"[309] Shiphrah and Pu'ah are the first women called to memory in this "Song of the Mothers," which continues "Shiphrah, Pu'ah, brave women,/ midwife a nation/ by disobeying Pharaoh./ The Jewish children/ were born in rebellion.// Not in the sources/ were just women rewarded."[310]

Stein's A Jewish Lesbian Seder recalls Shiphrah and Pu'ah in a more midrashic way, expanding the story from the simple version recounted by the Torah. Clearly identifying these as Hebrew midwives (rather than simply midwives who served the Hebrews), Stein writes that Pharaoh "ordered the two head midwives, Shifrah and Pu'ah, to report to him and to collaborate in the murder of their own people."[311] Noting the legend that claims that Shiphrah and Pu'ah were none other than Miriam and

[309] Broner, 43.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Stein, 7.

Yocheved,[312] Stein says that the midwives ~~r~~recognized the age-old pattern of using the oppressed to oppress themselves" and they instead took extra care with the women who gave birth and the children they bore, even to the extent of bringing these women and children food when they did not have enough. When they were called to account in front of Pharaoh, Stein recounts the story found in the Torah, in which the midwives claimed that the Hebrew women ~~w~~were like animals, and that they gave birth too quickly, before the midwives could arrive."[313]

The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah brings these women to the fore in the midst of the traditional passage, *Avadim Hayinu* that is read or sung during the traditional Seder. The traditional text alternates with the voices created for Shiphrah and Pu'ah, ~~t~~the Hebrew midwives whose heroism opens the Exodus story."[314] This passage has Shiphrah and Pu'ah describing that they not only served as midwives but as leaders within the Jewish community, saying that when they refused to comply with Pharaoh's decree, they ~~f~~felt the mighty hand of God in our outstretched arms as we helped bring Israelite infants into the world."[315] The text continues by saying that if they, Shiphrah and Pu'ah, and other women essential to the story of the Exodus had not taken risks in the way they did, generations after them would have remained in slavery in Egypt.[316] This passage is not only interesting because it creates a voice for the midwives, but because it places humans—in particular the women of the story of the Exodus—in partnership with God in enabling and enacting the Exodus from Egypt. Not only are men such as Moses and

[312] Exodus Rabbah 1:13
[313] Ibid.
[314] Cohen, 56.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.

Aaron capable of carrying out the will of God, but this passage from this *haggadah* says that a woman's arm can be the outstretched arm of God, and the conscience of these women to disobey Pharaoh was more accurately God's will acting through them.

Thornton's *haggadah* remembers Shiphrah and Pu'ah in a manner similar to that of Batya and Yocheved; in introducing the first cup of wine, Exodus 6:6 and Rashi's comment on Pesachim 108b are quoted, and then the scriptural verses in which Shiphrah and Pu'ah appear are included.[317] Thornton's passage continues, "These two women are our first recorded models of civil disobedience. They teach us courage and strength in the face of adversity; they teach us how to have the courage of our convictions; they teach us the power of the individual to make a difference."[318] Again, in the same fashion as when Batya and Yocheved are honored, directly prior to the blessing for the first cup of wine the passage reads, "For the sake of Shifra and Pu'ah, we were delivered from Egypt." Thornton not only honors the role these women played in the Exodus from Egypt, but her text highlights these women as models for the civil disobedience that men and women might exercise in the present day. They are examples of the power of one person or a small group of people to affect policy and influence the course of history. Thus are Shiphrah and Pu'ah given their due in Thornton's A Women's Seder.

Noting the uncertainty as to whether these are Hebrew or Egyptian midwives, in honoring Shiphrah and Pu'ah with the first cup of wine, the And We Were All There Haggadah notes, "We are sure that these God-fearing women acted on their own sense of moral obligation and delivered our people from possible extinction. These midwives,

[317] Thornton, 17. Exodus 1:15-20.
[318] Thornton, 17-18.

working in cooperation with one another, show us that shared power and insight can change the course of history."[319] In a phrase that most likely rings in the ears of participants at this Women's Seder with echoes of the traditional *haggadah* text, ~~"~~In every generation a man is obligated to see himself as if he personally was redeemed from Egypt," this passage continues,

> In every generation we stand with the midwives Shifra and Pu'ah. When Pharaoh chose death, they chose life. When Pharaoh proclaimed that babies must be murdered, Shifra and Pu'ah revered God and resisted Pharaoh. Their eyes saw God in every mother's face, their ears heard God in every baby's cry, their hands drew forth from the narrow place not only life but the promise of freedom.

This *haggadah* lifts up Shiprah and Pu'ah not only as essential to the story of the Exodus and the ability of the Hebrews to escape from Egypt, but perhaps more importantly as examples of following one's conscience and values even in the harshest of conditions. The quintessential Jewish act of believing in life in the face of death, in the face of oppression, is embodied by these two midwives who may or may not even have been a part of the Israelite community.

For their ability to stand up to a powerful figure such as Pharaoh, for their willingness to risk their lives and their livelihood on behalf of parents and children from a community that might not even have been their own, Shiphrah and Pu'ah frequently are honored at Women's Seders. Their morality and courage are celebrated as models for women and men of this day, in every situation where one has the opportunity to stand up to a powerful force on behalf of a disadvantaged community.

[319] Elwell, 3.

Beruriah

Besides Miriam (who we save for last), the woman who is most often honored in the Women's Seders studied for this thesis is Beruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, the only woman whose opinion is quoted and accepted by the Rabbis in rabbinic literature and Jewish law. As a scholar and teacher, it is quite logical that Beruriah would be celebrated during Women's Seders as an example of the success a woman can achieve even in a time or situation in which her gender puts her at a disadvantage. The ability of Beruriah not only to learn, but also to teach and comment wisely on halakhic issues makes her a model for women in this age. Beruriah embodies the desire of women involved in these Women's Seders for women not only to prepare for the Seder, but to lead and preside.

Broner's The Women's Haggadah recounts a version of the life and legacy of Beruriah. Her story is introduced in response to a question raised in this *haggadah* by the Simple Daughter, "Who would rise against our mothers?" to which the answer is given, "The family and the state."[320] The story of Beruriah follows, entitled "The Stolen Legacy." The story is told of Beruriah who was known for her halakhic commentaries and for helping her husband to arrive at a good interpretation of the law. When her husband prayed for the death of the wicked people in the city whose behavior upset him, Beruriah noted, "In Psalm 104 [_Let sins perish from the earth'] it says *sins* and not *sinners*. You must pray for mercy toward the people and for the death of the sin."[321] And her husband followed her advice. This *haggadah* also recalls Beruriah's tragic end. When Rabbi Meir, Beruriah's husband, accused women of being light-minded, Beruriah objected ,which upset her husband, who warned her that her own end might testify to the

[320] Broner, 39.
[321] Ibid.

truth of her words."[322] In order to test her virtue, Rabbi Meir instructed one of his students to try to seduce her, and the student tried repeatedly. Eventually Beruriah gave in and allowed herself to be seduced. "Shame, it is said, drove her to suicide."[323]

The aforementioned all-night Seder at Bnai Berak re-created in Broner's *haggadah* continues with the women at the Seder asking questions, such as who is the guilty party in this story and why such a tragic story would be told about such a learned and virtuous woman. The answer is given, "Because women's learning is anathema. If women read books, soon they will write books. And the heroes and plots will change. If women read Torah, they will write the unsung songs and name the nameless women."[324] This Bnai Berak Seder re-created in Broner's *haggadah* additionally features the scholar Beruriah as one of its participants, telling a portion of the story of the Exodus which highlights the roles of the women in the story through her voice.[325] This *haggadah* also concisely describes the reason she is honored so thoroughly: "Beruriah's wisdom is known far and wide and she is praised in Talmudic literature."[326]

Thornton's A Women's Seder not only includes a passage adapted from the Broner *haggadah* recounting this female version of the all-night Seder at Bnai Berak,[327] but also includes Beruriah in its version of the Four Questions. As detailed in Chapter 3 in the section that discusses the Four Questions, Thornton's *haggadah* directs each of the four questions at a different influential woman, honoring each by allowing the question to be answered through her imagined voice. One of these women is Beruriah. The question

[322] Ibid., 40.
[323] Ibid.
[324] Ibid., 40-41.
[325] Broner, 26, 28-29.
[326] Ibid., 28.
[327] Thornton, 31.

is asked, ―Beruriah, why do we taste bitter herbs?"[328] and Beruriah answers, ―Because my wisdom and righteousness were legendary, I was the only woman in Talmudic literature whose views were revered by scholars. Would it not have been wonderful if all women had been given the opportunity to learn and study?"[329] Beruriah's imagined voice continues by saying, ―This celebration of freedom reminds us that every generation must win their own freedom. Each of us must make our own exodus from Egypt."[330] Thornton's *haggadah* gives Beruriah a position of honor, recalling her legacy of female scholarship by allowing her not to ask a question, but rather to answer one of the Four Questions that are so essential to the traditional—and to the Women's—Seder.

The character of Beruriah is also woven into several other women's *haggadot* through occasional appearances, allowing her to enter throughout other liturgical passages and rituals. One example of this is found in the <u>And We Were All There Haggadah</u>, in which Beruriah appears in a few places within the *haggadah*. During *Dayeinu,* one phrase honors Beruriah, saying ―Had God given us our Talmud sages, Beruriah and Ima Shalom, and not our poets, writers, and liturgists of days past, **Dayenu!**"[331] Beruriah also appears in a song included in the ―*Shirim*, Songs" section of this *haggadah*, in a song ―Kol Netivoteinu Shalom" by Aviva Rosenbloom. One verse calls Beruriah to mind: ―The scholar Bruriah who taught the Talmud, And Channah Senesch who gave her life/ Golda Meir who was leader of Israel, They kept us on the road we're on."[332] This song concludes, ―When we're alone, or with our sisters,/ We

[328] Thornton, 24.
[329] Ibid., 24-25.
[330] Ibid., 25.
[331] Elwell, 18.
[332] Ibid., 50.

often ask ourselves where we're goin'/ Our many answers are in the stories,/ That lead us down the road we're on."[333] Similarly, the Dancing With Miriam Haggadah recalls Beruriah during the Four Children reading, allowing Beruriah to speak, saying "I was a Talmudic scholar, learned in the laws of our people. My wit and insight were quoted by the sages that followed me. Do not be afraid to stand alone, the only woman in your field and place of business. Your light will lead the way for others, both men and women, to follow."[334]

Recalling the story of Beruriah, allowing her to ask and answer questions, honoring her scholarship and her legacy, and weaving her into women's *haggadot* allows participants in Women's Seders to live through her story. Her story invites participants in these Women's Seders to see themselves in her story, as women who can learn and teach, decide matters of *halakhah*, and whose memory will continue generations past their own time.

Miriam

Miriam is the woman most often commented on and incorporated into Women's Seders. The preceding chapters have already discussed numerous ways in which the character of Miriam has been incorporated into Women's Seders, through rituals such as placing the Miriam's cup on the table and singing *"Miriam Ha-Neviah"* to the traditional tune of *Eliyahu Hanavi*, to celebrating her life by retelling the story of the Exodus in a way that highlights her special role in bringing it about. The question arises, however, as to why the character of Miriam has become so essential to Women's Seders and other feminist rituals. As discussed above, there were at least four other women who were

[333] Ibid.
[334] Moise & Schwartz, 12.

essential to the story of the Exodus: Shiphrah and Pu'ah, Yocheved and Batya. While it might be easy to claim that Miriam's centrality to the Women's Seder is linked solely to the fact that her presence continues through the Exodus and into the wilderness, the place of Miriam within the Women's Seder and Jewish feminism in general necessitates a closer look.

In almost all cases, the memory and honor accorded women by the Torah is based on their roles as mother, seductress, and wife. Miriam, however, is not defined by these roles within that Torah. Rather she demonstrates the honor and status a woman can achieve in roles such as prophetess, judge, and priestess.[335] As Miriam's song at the sea is often identified as one of the most ancient segments of the Torah text, it could be that the role of Miriam even hints at an older conception of the role of women in society, before history ~~n~~narrowed women's sphere of action, overempowering them in the bedroom and disempowering them in political and religious realms."[336] Though Miriam is not called by name until she leads the women in song after crossing the sea, she is, in fact, the first person the Torah calls a prophet.[337] The Torah shows us a Miriam who as a young girl watched over her baby brother as he floated in a basket on the Nile and arranged for their own mother to serve as wet-nurse when the Pharaoh's daughter decided to adopt him;[338] who as an adult was a prophet who invited the Israelite women to join in song and dance with her after crossing the sea and escaping the Egyptians rather than

[335] Anisfeld, Cohen, Mohr & Spector, The Women's Passover Companion, 118.
[336] Ibid., 118-119.
[337] Exodus 15:20.
[338] Exodus 2:4-8.

singing alone like Moses;[339] who spoke out with her brother Aaron against her brother Moses and was harshly punished for it;[340] who one could say was so beloved by the people that they would not continue on their journey until she was healed and returned to them;[341] who was so beloved by her brother Moses that he was driven to strike a rock in anger rather than ask it for water after her death.[342]

Rabbinic literature adds to this story, weaving a tale in which Miriam was a prophet even as a young girl, convincing her parents not to separate despite Pharaoh's decree of death for male Israelite children, knowing full well that this would result in the birth of Moses and the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.[343] Rabbinic literature accords her yet another place of honor, claiming that she and her mother Yocheved were in fact the midwives Shiphrah and Pu'ah ,who defied the command of the Pharaoh and refused to kill Israelite babies.[344] In answer to the question of why, immediately following the description of Miriam's death and burial, the Israelites are without water, the Rabbis created a legend of Miriam's well that followed the Israelites wherever they wandered in the wilderness, providing them with water in the desert, which was a complement to the Manna that fell from heaven.[345]

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[339] Exodus 15:20-21, also discussed in Anisfeld, Cohen, Mohr, & Spector, The Women's Passover Companion, 111.
[340] Numbers 12:10.
[341] Numbers 12:15.
[342] Numbers 20:11.
[343] Exodus Rabbah commenting on Exodus 1:13, 15:20
[344] Exodus Rabbah commenting on Exodus 1:3.
[345] Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 35a. Also, Taanit 9a describes how Miriam's well disappeared on her death but eventually retuned due to the merit of Moses. See Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 141-2.

Modern Jewish women have drawn from these rich sources and taken Miriam on as a role model in their own feminism and activities. Miriam represents strong female leadership even in the face of adversity. She models courage to stand up to authority and decree and to continue to hope for a bette future when circumstances lead others to pessimism. Where Miriam was absent from the traditional Seder, Jewish feminists have written her in, making her the ~~l~~ost but now found woman hero of the Exodus tale."[346] She represents ~~p~~ossibility, transition, miracles, and redemption,"[347] as well as ~~o~~ur thirst for spiritual nourishment."[348] Miriam also represents a positive image of the feminine in midrash, in contrast to that of Lilith, who is depicted as an evil or mischievous entity, trying to kill and harm babies and young children. ~~I~~f Lilith kills babies, Miriam—as midwife and guardian of Moses-in-the-basket—saves them. If Lilith stands at the shores of the Sea of Reeds threatening pregnant women, Miriam—standing in the very same place—celebrates the successful birth of a people through a dangerous, narrow passageway."[349]

In one interpretation, Miriam represents a non-threatening image of female power within the tradition. ~~M~~iriam is emblematic of a feminism that does not disrupt community."[350] The beneficial ethical qualities that Miriam represents are easily viewed as value-added to the Jewish community. ~~M~~iriam works gracefully, yet critically, within the system. Powerful but not egoistic, Miriam stands for a set of positive virtues that include healing, inspiration, foresight, courage, cooperation, nurturance, and the

[346] Antler, 230.
[347] Anisfeld, Cohen, Mohr & Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 64.
[348] Ibid., 67.
[349] Ochs in Prell, 262.
[350] Myers in Prell, 244.

capacity to celebrate victories along the journey."[351] Due to these qualities, Vanessa Ochs interestingly identifies Miriam with a ―latter-stage Jewish feminist," because rather than sinking into anger, ―her consciousness has been raised and awakened."[352] Ochs continues, ―Miriam's anger is not debilitating: well channeled and well supported by many sisters who echo her voice, it affirms women's different ways of knowing and acting in the world."[353]

The expressions of the importance of Miriam as a role model in contemporary Jewish women's lives and Jewish feminism are manifold, as are the ways in which Miriam is incorporated into Women's Seders and *haggadot*. We will look into the way four specific *haggadot* have incorporated the character of Miriam. One *haggadah* that incorporates the character of Miriam to a great extent is Broner's The Women's Haggadah*;* Miriam is so present in this *haggadah* that one could easily say that the entire Seder centers around her. Miriam is thoroughly woven into every aspect of this Seder ritual. The beginning pages of the *haggadah* note, in answer to one of the ―Four Questions of Women," that ―We recline this night for the unhurried telling of the legacy of Miriam."[354] In response to the question of the Wicked Daughter who cynically asks about the point of an all-female gathering, removing herself from the community of women, ―Because you have broken the chain that links you to our heritage and to the legacy of Miriam, you have no history. You still are in bondage."[355] This same page refers to Miriam as the first prophet. In this opening section it is made clear that Miriam

[351] Ochs in Prell, 262.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Broner, 25.
[355] Ibid., 27.

will be the central character in this *haggadah*'s recounting of the story of the Exodus, so central in fact that detaching oneself from the chain of tradition that began with Miriam can be likened to cutting oneself off from history and tradition.

The story of the Exodus in Broner's *haggadah* begins with a narrative recounting the midrash of Miriam encouraging her parents to remain married and prophesying that they would bear a son who would lead the Israelites out of slavery. Regarding the origin of her name, this *haggadah* notes that Mar means bitter, ~~–f~~or it was a bitter time,"[356] but Meri (*mered*) means rebellion and am means people, ~~–f~~or the Jews expressed their bitterness in rebellion."[357] The story goes on to recount that when Miriam grew up, she ~~–s~~ang and danced her people to victory."[358] A poem entitled ~~–T~~he Lament of the Prophet Miriam" recounts Miriam's essential role in the Exodus from Egypt, and how she nonetheless receives very little credit compared to male characters.[359] Miriam is mentioned in numerous places throughout the rest of the *haggadah*—truly she is thoroughly woven into almost every section of this Seder ritual—until the very end of the Seder, when the fourth cup of wine is sipped, and the door is opened for Miriam to be welcomed in for the festival meal.[360] The character of Miriam and her presence define this Seder. Whereas traditional *haggadot* do not even mention Moses for fear of obscuring the fact that it was God who miraculously redeemed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, this Seder allows her character and qualities to shine through at every moment.

[356] Ibid., 29.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid.
[359] Broner, 31-33.
[360] Broner, 68-69.

The San Diego Women's Haggadah, like Broner's *haggadah*, recounts the midrashic telling of Miriam's early years, convincing her parents not to divorce and subsequently prophesying the birth of Moses who would lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.[361] During the brief section of songs of praise that occur prior to the meal, the verses in Exodus (15:20-21) in which Miriam takes up the timbrel and leads the women in joyous song and dance are recounted.[362] She is also incorporated into several other moments during the Seder, including – again like the Broner *haggadah*—the moment when the door is opened not for Elijah but instead for Miriam the prophetess. This ritual is introduced with the words, "We are told that Miriam the prophetess visits every house where a woman's seder is being held. We open the door to welcome her. Eagerly we await her arrival. As we think of Miriam, we admire her unusual strength and courage, and give honor to a great leader."[363] They note that this act of opening the door for Miriam is "a symbol for all women who are going forth with dignity and pride into the making of a Jewish future for all our people."[364]

Jill Thornton's A Women's Seder celebrates the role of Miriam in the Exodus from Egypt in several instances, in certain cases quoting directly from the Broner *haggadah*.[365] Miriam is also mentioned during one line of the "Dayeinu" reading, "If Miriam were given her seat with Moses and Aaron in our legacy, *Dayeinu!*"[366] Again similar to the Broner *haggadah* and the San Diego Women's Haggadah, Thornton includes the ritual of opening the door for Miriam the Prophetess. This passage reads,

[361] Fine, 34-35.
[362] Ibid., 50.
[363] Ibid., 71.
[364] Ibid.
[365] For instance, the Four Daughter liturgy found on 29-30 is quoted directly from Broner.
[366] Thornton, 39.

—We open the door and feel Miriam‘s presence as the prophetess visits every home where a woman‘s seder is being held. We honor Miriam as a woman of valor, a noble leader, and a prophetess.”[367] The passage goes on to note that this act —symbolizes the warmth, generosity, and companionship of our Seder. It is a symbol that no women [sic] is isolated and alone, and a symbol of the significance and value of all women.” Following the introductory passage is Debbie Friedman‘s —Miriam‘s Song.”[368]

Regarding the presence of Miriam in Thornton‘s *haggadah,* the section of the Seder entitled, —The Prophetess‘ Song” is noteworthy. This passage asks the question of why Miriam‘s song at the sea in the Torah appears to be left unfinished or cut short, and answers with a statement from the midrash: the —song is incomplete so that future generations will finish it.”[369] This *haggadah* carries on this charge with a poem entitled —I Shall Sing to the Lord a New Song” by Rabbi H. Ruth Sohn. It describes the moment after crossing the sea where Miriam turns to see the sea on one side and the endless desert on the other and feels herself moved to song. The poem continues,

> The song still unformed—
> How can I sing?
>
> To take the first step—
> To sing a new song—
> Is to close one‘s eyes
> And dive
> Into unknown waters.
> For a moment knowing nothing risking all
> But then to discover
>
> The waters are friendly. The ground is firm.

[367] Ibid., 64.
[368] Ibid., 64-65. Cohen’s, The Ma’yan Passover Haggadah also includes this and several other of Debbie Friedman’s songs.
[369] Ibid., 61.

And the song—
The song rises again.
Out of my mouth
Come words lifting the wind.
And I hear
For the first
The song
That has been in my heart
Silent
Unknown
Even to me.[370]

Flip through the pages of almost any women's *haggadah*, attend almost any Women's Seder, and it becomes clear that Miriam is a central element in the Women's Seder experience. In many ways, the command that in every generation one must see oneself as having left Egypt, personally, has been taken by the creators of Women's Seders to mean that every woman should have the opportunity to relive the story of the Exodus through the eyes and experiences of Miriam, the first prophet. Her spirit pervades the Women's Seder; she is the core figure of the feminist Passover experience. ~~—~~As contemporary Jews break Miriam's silence, and restore her memory as a prophet and teacher, all of our songs are enriched, and our people's story becomes more whole."[371]

Midrash

In reclaiming and retelling the stories of the women of the Exodus and other women from classical Jewish literature for the purposes of women's *haggadot* and Women's Seders, it is clear that midrash is a central element of this task. Midrash has become essential to Jewish feminist work because of the groundwork it can provide for a fuller understanding of and identification with the women of the Torah in places where

[370] Thornton, 62-63.
[371] Goldstein, Women's Torah Commentary, 142.

the Torah's text is either terse or challenging for modern women to confront. Much like the process of liturgical and ritual transformation, the process of feminist midrash has been twofold; at times the core undertaking has been to look back to the traditional sources to find instances where women were included and perhaps praised or their characters were explored more fully, and at other times this search has led to the realization that tradition simply does not provide enough material for a full understanding of the female characters. In these cases the choice has been to reimagine and create anew.

Yet even this process does not deviate from the methodology used by tradition. ~~F~~Feminist hermeneutics are revolutionary: they introduce a framework in which women are at the center. Yet they are also profoundly traditional; the basic methods of feminist Bible readings are little different from those of *midrash*."[372] The difference lies not in methodology, but in focus. ~~M~~Midrash lends itself to feminist reinterpretation, exactly because it raises questions, bridges gaps, interferes or introduces new elements, and helps readers find multiple stories—including their own—in the Bible."[373] These efforts help women to ~~re~~reconstruct our place in tradition that is itself continually, sometimes radically, reconstructed."[374]

This is also a key method in channeling the anger that might arise from a study of female characters in the Torah that leads to the discovery of more silence than voice. Problems in the text, rather than becoming barriers to participation or investment in

[372] Rabbi Debra Orenstein and Rabbi Rachel Litman, eds, Lifecycles: Jewish Women on biblical Themes in Contemporary Life, Volume 2 (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997), xxi.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Ibid.

Jewish tradition, can instead become through midrash ~~–a~~ way of resolving crisis and reaffirming continuity with the traditions of the past."[375] Though she is speaking in this instance of feminist midrash from a specifically lesbian perspective, Rebecca Alpert describes the benefit of the process of midrash aptly: ~~–I~~f we can, we grow beyond the rage. We begin to see these words as tools with which to educate people…We begin to use these very words to begin to break down the silence that surrounds us."[376] In this way, ~~–w~~e can transform Torah from a stumbling block to an entry path."[377]

Midrash has yet another key aspect that is beneficial to the ongoing process of Jewish feminist renewal and change. The *Tanakh* is, essentially, a closed canon. Certain books and stories were included, yet others were excluded and left to slowly fade from memory. Midrash, however, was never canonized and therefore remains an open process. ~~–M~~idrash…was never closed; by design ~~_~~there is no end and no completion to midrashic sources.' Thus, *midrash* can continue to answer questions the Bible leaves unanswered."[378] Fittingly, the process of Jewish feminist ritual and liturgical innovation remains open and unfinished; great strides have been taken and great developments have occurred. Yet gaps remain, issues remain unresolved, the place of women in Judaism—which has expanded so greatly in such recent years—has barely cemented its foothold. Feminism, like Midrash, remains an unfinished process. However, unlike midrash, perhaps the effects of the feminist movement will be far-reaching enough that it will feel as if all major ellipses have been filled, all major schisms healed.

[375] Ibid., xxii.
[376] Alpert, 44.
[377] Alpert, 44.
[378] Orenstein & Litman, xxi, quoting from *Ha'eshkol*, attributed to Rav Sherira Gaon.

The following, final, chapter will discuss the broad reach of Women‘s Seders. Not only will variations upon the Women‘s Seder be discussed (such as the lesbian Women‘s Seder, and international Women‘s Seders, for instance), but the influence of the Women‘s Seder on the mainstream Passover Seder will also be dealt with. With a solid foundational understanding of the Women‘s Seder behind us, with knowledge of the rituals, liturgy, and characters of the Women‘s Seders to guide us, we will now turn to the ways this innovation has spread and influenced other movements and mainstream Judaism.

Chapter Five: Beyond the "Typical" American Women's Seder

"The Cup of Miriam symbolizes the many ways we continue to be sustained along freedom's path."[379]

"The women of ancient Israel, in such a predicament [of packing to leave their homes on extremely short notice] had enough imagination and enough faith to pack musical instruments. They knew God would perform miracles for His people, and they wanted the wherewithal to celebrate. In such homey details, we witness the valor and the values of Israel's frontier women."[380]

There are several methods one might employ to evaluate the success of Women's Seders. One could look at the quality of the *haggadot* produced, the lasting power of the ritual and liturgical innovations used within *haggadot*, or attendance at Women's Seders as an indicator of the achievements of the Women's Seder. One could attempt to measure any change in Jewish involvement or actions on the part of those in attendance at Women's Seders. The criteria this chapter will apply to assess the success of Women's Seders is that of the broad geographic reach of Women's Seders as well as "sub-movements" or "sub-group" Seders that have been spawned by the mainstream Women's Seder. Just as each community that creates or compiles a Women's Seder does so with the specific needs of its members in mind, so too do each of these variations upon the Women's Seder create their liturgy and rituals with the members of their own communities in mind, in the hopes of creating a Seder experience that speaks to the lives and experiences of those in attendance.

[379] Mordecai Kaplan, Eugene Kohn, and Ira Eisenstein. The New American Haggadah (Philadelphia: Behrman House, Inc, 1999), 37.
[380] Rachel Anne Rabinowicz Passover Haggadah: The Feast of Freedom (The Rabbinical Assembly, 1982), 63.

International Women's Seders

Over the past thirty-five years, Women's Seders have begun to appear and grow all over the world, in particular in locations with substantial or growing liberal Jewish communities. This section will focus primarily on two international locations for the Women's Seder: Israel and the Former Soviet Union.

Israel

As described in Chapter One, some of the first Women's Seders occurred in Israel. In fact, the Seder commonly referred to as the "first" Women's Seder, created by E.M. Broner and Naomi Nimrod, was conducted as a dual Seder that took place both in New York City and across the ocean in Haifa, Israel. However a Seder that occurred in Israel a year before, while not consciously conceived as a "Women's Seder," was a catalyst for this first dual-Seder. Broner and two other women (a member of the Parliament and a social worker) decided to hold a "Seder of the North" in Haifa in 1975, in which men would prepare the meal, serve it, and clean up, whereas the women would take on the role of discussing the traditional *haggadah*, including with it new topics and prayers.[381] Certain people in attendance, particularly those who were native Israelis, resisted the change in dynamic, with some men staying in their seats rather than helping to serve or clean, and women wondering aloud what a woman will be when she is old without a man. Still, some of the first innovations of the Women's Seder—creative

[381] Broner, The Telling, 7.

prayers, midrashic explorations of the character of Miriam, and a passage entitled "The Four Daughters" all appeared in this Seder.[382]

It was after this Seder which contained the seeds of a fuller Women's Seder ritual to come, that Naomi Nimrod and Esther Broner decided to take on the task of crafting a specifically designated women's *haggadah* to be used at Women's Seders in years to come. They completed this task, leading to the dual Seders that took place in years following in both New York and Haifa. The text used in these two Seders was identical, save that one version was written in English and the other in Hebrew. "Both groups were doing something simple but radical, declaring their right to holiday."[383] Marcia Freedman, a member of the Knesset who was in attendance at the Haifa Seder, wrote of her experience there, describing the scene in Nimrod's living room. It had been cleared of furniture, and cushions and mattresses had been spread around. Candles were scattered around the room. They discussed the few women who had been mentioned in the Talmud, as well as Miriam. Their discussion continued until the morning, when Freedman's daughter awoke and came into the Seder room, informing them that it was morning.[384] This Seder had mirrored that of the all-night Seder of the Rabbis at B'nei Barak described in the traditional *haggadah*, which ran through the entire night until their students came in to inform them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema*.

Though Women's Seders have been occurring in Israel in this and other atmospheres, the phenomenon of the Women's Seder is far from well-known or accepted in Israel. A relatively recent article published in the Jerusalem Post described a Women's

[382] Ibid., 8.
[383] Ibid., 12.
[384] Ibid., 13.

Seder that took place in Caesarea at the Community Center, which was sponsored by Hamidrasha, a center for the education and renewal of Jewish life in Israel. The event combined ~~a~~ traditional Seder with modern Israeli poems, songs, and parodies for an evening for religious and secular women…to explore their common ground as Jews, Israelis, and women."[385] Women in attendance at this Seder came from all over Israel, including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Caesarea, and there were also American-born women in attendance. Many women, the article reports, had just finished a day-long hike of the Israel National Trail, from Hadera to Caesarea, part of a several-week hiking program that focused on secular-religious Jewish Israeli dialogue. This article further describes elements of the proceedings of this Seder, including beginning with dinner rather than waiting for it, each woman introducing herself at the outset of the Seder ritual, a discussion of the women important to the Exodus story, and using a Miriam's Cup filled with water. The article notes how many women in attendance had experienced nothing like this Seder in the past, exclaiming ~~I~~'ve never seen anything like this before!" A quote from an organizer at Hamidrasha, Hila Tuchmacher-Mishali, relays the positive response to the program: ~~S~~ecular and religious Israelis learn side-by-side and they learn from one another…Secular Israelis learn to claim Jewish religious texts as their own, and as relevant in their lives. Religious women learn to think about feminism and how they can pursue more rights within a religious framework. It's very productive."[386] Tuchmacher-Mishali describes her expectations for the evening of the Women's Seder, saying that she hopes participants ~~w~~ill leave inspired and feeling connected to their

[385] Rachel Schneinerman, "A New World Order," Jerusalem Post, Local Israel in Jerusalem, April 6, 2006. http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1143498810500&pagename=JPArticle%2FShowFull
[386] Ibid.

Jewish heritage and traditions at the same time as they identify as women in an embracing, feminine community."[387]

It appears that the spread of the Women's Seder has been slow but continuous in the thirty-four years since the first documented Women's Seder occurred in Israel. Only time will tell if this is a movement that will continue and eventually flourish, or one that will slowly abate and disappear in the birthplace of the Jewish people.

The Former Soviet Union

Women's Seders have been occurring in the Former Soviet Union since at least the mid-1990's. Research for this thesis has shown that the major catalyst for the Women's Seders that have occurred in the Former Soviet Union is Project Kesher. Project Kesher was founded in 1989, in Illinois, by a small group of Jewish women who strove to empower Russian Jewish women living in the Former Soviet Union. Subsequently, at an international conference held in Kiev for Jewish women in 1994, which brought together Jewish women from several countries, including South Africa, New Zealand, the United States, Germany, England, and Israel, Project Kesher set out to craft a "Global Seder" that would build community among Jewish women in each country and city that participated. Following this conference, Project Kesher implemented this idea, crafting a basic Women's Seder text to be adapted and personalized by each country or community that chose to use it. This was used as a starting point for women in many countries to adapt this text and create their own women's *haggadot* and Women's Seders. The original intent was that all of the Seders

[387] Ibid.

would occur on the same day as part of this ―Global Seder," though it appears that these Seders now typically take place over a period of days rather than on one particular day. In addition, in many parts of the Former Soviet Union, women choose to use the Conservative movement's *haggadah* and add excerpts from the Project Kesher Haggadah, which include the Four Daughters, the Global Women's Prayer, and placing an orange on the Seder plate.[388]

The Sixth Global Women's Pre-Passover Seder Haggadah (written in English and Russian) states its purpose: ―The purpose of the Project Kesher Annual Women's Seder is to bring together Jewish women of all ages and origins during the Passover season."[389] This *haggadah* includes the ―Global Women's Prayer," which discusses the common tale of the Exodus from Egypt, but interestingly does not directly reference women. The prayer-language used in this *haggadah* has not been edited to be egalitarianor to be in feminine prayer language, perhaps because this might be considered too radical for the target audience. However, the *haggadah* does honor a group of women with each cup of wine: the women of the Exodus,[390] the women of the Bible,[391] ―Women of Courage" who left their countries of origin to find a better ―Jewish life for themselves and their families,"[392] and the fourth cup calls women to recall those who have ―renewed their commitment to Judaism."[393]

[388] Solomon in Antler, 238.
[389] Janna Kaplan. Project Kesher's Sixth Global Women's Pre-Passover Seder Haggadah (Boston: Project Kesher, 2000), ii.
[390] Ibid., 17-18.
[391] Ibid., 34.
[392] Ibid., 52.
[393] Ibid., 55.

Much of the rest of the Seder ritual remains unchanged from the traditional *haggadah*, with the exception of the inclusion of a Four Daughters[394] passage in lieu of the Four Sons or Four Children, and the placement of an orange on the Seder plate with an explanation of this symbol. The *haggadah* explains the act of placing an orange on the Seder plate with the fictional story of Susanna Heschel being told, ―A woman belongs on the *bimah* as much as an orange belongs on the seder plate!"[395] This passage continues, ―Our Jewish place is publicly affirmed, visible as the orange on our plate."[396] This Seder also presents a Miriam's Cup/*kos miryam* alongside the *kos eliyahu*, with a reading that states ―As the living waters of Miriam's Well sustained the people of Israel, so we pray that these symbolic waters will nourish us and renew our will to take part in the precious work of tikkun olam, repair of the world."

Long before beginning work on this thesis, I myself experienced a Women's Seder during the ―Former Soviet Union Passover Project," a program in which rabbinical, cantorial, and education students spending their first year of study at Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem travel during Passover to areas of the Former Soviet Union to lead Seders and interact with the communities they visit. In Cherkassy, Ukraine, a classmate[397] and I were invited to help lead a Women's Seder. Approximately sixty women gathered for this event—grandmothers, mothers, daughters, friends—and participated in what was in most ways simply a mainstream Seder that did not seem to be female-specific, save for the addition of discussion of Yocheved and Miriam, and the placement of the orange on the Seder plate. It turned out, however, that they had never

[394] Ibid., 32.
[395] Ibid., 46.
[396] Ibid.
[397] Jessica Lenza, who was at that time a cantorial student at HUC-JIR.

heard the story of the origin of the orange on the Seder plate, and we discussed both its symbolism for the gay-lesbian community and how it has been taken up by Jewish feminism as a symbol of female inclusion in Jewish leadership.

Women's Seders continue to spread throughout the world. A press release from the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress notes that in 2009, from March 18th to April 6th, Project Kesher held its 15th annual International Women's Seder. This press release reports that over 2100 women participated, from 118 women's groups in many countries (Belarus, Georgia, Israel, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and others). The press release continues, "The International Women's Seder continues to be a stimulus for the development of women's groups."[398] It appears that Project Kesher is succeeding in its goal of fostering community among Jewish women world-wide through its annual Global Seder.

Other Variations on the Women's Seder

The Women's Seder has also prompted many sub-groups within and beyond Jewish feminism to craft their own Women's Seders, or Seders that follow the model of the Women's Seder. These "sub-groups" are part of the broader movement, to which the Women's Seder belongs, of themed Passover Seders, such as a Peace Seder, or a Seder for the Freedom of Soviet Jewry.[399] The Seders examined in this section are three examples of innovations upon the theme of the Women's Seder.

[398] Congress News, "15th World Women's Seder Takes Place in Eurasia," April 6th, 2009. Press release published by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress Public Relations Department, http://eajc.org/page84/news12369.

[399] This footnote will point to the page of the thesis that discussed this topic already.

Interfaith Women's Seders

As Women's Seders have become more common and better-known, Christian groups have also been exploring the ritual of the Passover Seder, commonly on the basis of their understanding that Jesus's "Last Supper" was a Passover Seder. In this way, Passover has become a key moment to foster interfaith understanding and community-building, and Interfaith Women's Seders take this opportunity not only to foster general interfaith relations, but to build a particular community among women. One particular example of this phenomenon is A Seder of the Sisters of Sarah, which is an interfaith Women's Seder described as "A Holy Thursday and Passover Feminist Liturgy." An introductory reading for this Seder describes the purpose as reclaiming symbols of both Jewish and Christian religions from women's experience and a feminist perspective. "For both traditions, this feast is a celebration of freedom and a commemoration of the struggles and sufferings of many. We gather as Jewish and Christian women to commemorate the struggles and sufferings, the freedom and new birth of women's lives."[400] The *haggadah* essentially incorporates an understanding of the importance of Passover from a Christian perspective of the life of Jesus, including several hymns, with a great deal of Passover ritual found in the traditional Passover Seder. In addition, this *haggadah* incorporates the stories of several women from the *Tanakh* as well as Christian Scriptures and honors them in much the same way that mainstream Women's Seders honor the women of the Torah, the Exodus, and Jewish history.

For example, the first cup of wine honors: "Sarah, Hagar, Rebeccah, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Jael, Deborah, Judith, Tamar, Mary, Elizabeth, Mary of Magdala, Junia,

[400] Ronnie Levin and Diann Neu, A Seder of the Sisters of Sarah: A Holy Thursday and Passover Feminist Liturgy (Washington, DC: Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, & Ritual, 1986), 4.

Priscilla, Myrta, Nympha, Thecla, mystics, witches, martyrs, heretics, saints, uppity women, slaves, poor immigrants, old hags, wise women, our mothers and grandmothers."[401] The liturgy reads, "In the spirit of our power together we bless this first cup."[402] In addition to an innovation of almost every Seder element from a feminist perspective, this Seder includes an alternative version of the Lord's Prayer,[403] and a quotation from the Broner *haggadah* of the "Four Daughters" passage. The Ten Plagues are reinterpreted as shared plagues of the Jewish and Christian women who would participate in this Seder, including the sixth plague: "We are plagued by an unequal pay scale for women working professionally in both the Jewish and Christian establishments, who are neither paid as much as our male counterparts nor promoted as readily to executive, decision-making positions."[404] It seems that this Seder liturgy was created with the hope of a possibly broad distribution, with prices for varying quantities of the *haggadah* listed in the back of the *haggadah* booklet.

Though this liturgy was created over twenty years ago, the phenomenon of the interfaith Women's Seder continues today. A recent article from April 2009 describes an upcoming, annual interfaith Women's Seder open to women of all faiths, with the hope of fostering not only Jewish feminism but interfaith learning and understanding. Women from several faith traditions are quoted in the article, noting how eye-opening and educational the experience was. Non-Jewish women expressed how it was important for their daughters to see the special place of women in all religions and to learn about other faith traditions. The Jewish women quoted expressed their joy in being able to teach

[401] Ibid., 7.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid., 9.
[404] Ibid., 13.

about their religion and realize the common experience of being religious women from many faith traditions. One woman was quoted as saying, "The experience was fantastic…I learned that even though we come from different faiths and backgrounds, our experience as women is really not that different."[405]

Lesbian Women's Seders

The phenomenon of the Lesbian Women's Seder has already been covered to some extent earlier in this thesis: in several instances, Judith Stein's 1987 A New Haggadah: A Jewish Lesbian Seder has been noted as an example of ritual and liturgical innovation. Passover can present a particular two-fold challenge for lesbians, in that they are both women and part of a group that is at certain times set apart from the larger Jewish community. Rebecca Alpert explains it aptly: "The struggle of our people for freedom resonates for lesbians with our own liberation from the oppression of hiding and points towards a time when all gay and lesbian people will be free to speak out about who we are."[406] She goes on to note that as Passover commemorates a defining moment in the history of the Israelites, "This holiday is a time for reflection on belonging to the Jewish people." Alpert continues by observing that the reading on the "Four Children" from Judith Stein's *haggadah* characterizes each of these four as different ways of being lesbian and Jewish, and Alpert suggests that even a Seder in which no lesbians are present would benefit from including this and other readings and rituals of the Lesbian Women's Seder in their observance in order to facilitate discussion of inclusion of the

[405] Sarah Henning. "Seder Sisterhood: Interfaith group staging women's gathering for Jewish holiday," Lawrence Journal World & 6News, Lawrence, Kansas, April 4, 2009. http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2009/apr/04/seder-sisterhood-interfaith-group-staging-womens-g/

[406] Alpert, 74-75.

gay-lesbian community in Judaism. Alpert would view this as an act of "Ahavat Hesed," loving-kindness.[407]

It is certainly also noteworthy that, as discussed in Chapter Two, the ritual of placing an orange on the Seder plate seems to have originated from the Jewish gay-lesbian community. The complicated story of this ritual's origin, while it seems to have spread most rapidly as a ritual of acceptance of women in roles of leadership within Judaism, is fairly certain to have originated as a statement of acceptance of the gay-lesbian community within Judaism. What was originally the act of placing a crust of bread on the Seder plate to demonstrate the feeling of exclusion on the part of gays and lesbians in the Jewish community was transformed into the act of placing an orange on the Seder plate as a symbol of acceptance and welcome. Placing an orange on the Seder plate neither breaks any laws nor nullifies the holiday, as placing a crust of bread on the Seder plate might do; an orange additionally is sweet to taste and carries the seeds of its own rebirth and continuation.[408]

Men's Seders

To many the idea of a Men's Seder seems redundant; is it not true that for millennia, Seders have been dominated by male voices, stories, and teachings, all relayed from a man's perspective? The concept of the Women's Seder remains foreign to so many that the need or impetus for having a Men's Seder may perhaps be even more foreign. However, in the liberal Jewish movements, the onset of feminism has contributed to a phenomenon that some refer to as the "flight of men" from institutional

[407] Ibid., 75.
[408] Alpert, 1-3, also see Chapter 2 of this thesis for a full discussion of this ritual.

Judaism. The Reform rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in recent years has ordained a greater number of women than men; Jewish summer camps are overrun by young girls and continually lacking an equal complement of young boys; and increasingly synagogue leadership is becoming female. A recent article in the Forward notes that in the Reform movement, boys make up only 22-43% of youth group participants, 28% of campers at Kutz Camp in Warwick, NY (the leadership camp of the North American Federation of Temple Youth), and approximately 33% of first-year rabbinical students at HUC-JIR. The numbers are not quite as stark elsewhere in the Jewish community but the ratios appear to still be roughly 2-1 in youth group participation in the other Jewish movements.[409] While this article voices a certain skepticism as to whether these statistics constitute a true "crisis," stating accurately that for a majority of the time when men dominated all movements in Jewish life, very few people thought of this as a "girls' crisis," the Reform Movement has certainly taken this trend seriously, as have some in the other liberal movements of Judaism. Simply the fact that numerous articles have been written on this topic, with titles like "Where the Boys Aren't,"[410] and "Jewish Men Need Space Too,"[411] testifies to the fact that this is at least a trend that has created a degree of concern.

More and more there has been a call to create "Men's Space" in much the same vein as the feminist movement has created "Women's Space," in which the issues and concerns specific to women can be raised in a safe and supportive environment. It does

[409] Rona Shapiro, "The 'Boy Crisis' that Cried Wolf." Forward, January 5, 2007. http://www.forward.com/articles/9792/
[410] Gary Rosenblatt, "Where the Boys Aren't," The Jewish Week New York, January 9, 2008.
[411] Doug Barden, "Jewish Men Need Space Too," 614: Haddasah Brandeis Institute eZine, 2006. http://www.brandeis.edu/hbi/614/archives/volume1/issue%203/article2.html

not take a great jump to arrive at the concept of a Men's Seder. An article published in the Jewish Journal in April of 2008 describes the third annual Men's Seder to be conducted at American Jewish University, using a *haggadah* entitled, The Men's Seder: A Haggadah-Based Exploration of Contemporary Men's Issues.[412] The article describes a ritual that seems to have taken a great deal from the model of the Women's Seder, with discussions of "What enslaves us as men," at the moment of *Avadim Hayinu*, and Ten Plagues that include "prostate cancer, heart disease, weight gain, and hair loss." The Bread of Poverty leads to a discussion of the pressures of earning a living. The leaders of this Seder, Rabbi Perry Netter and Rabbi Dan Moskovitz are quoted in this article as asking, "Where does a contemporary man go to find male bonding? Where does a man go to find a relationship with other men that is not competitive, that is not comparative, that is not threatening and dehumanizing?"[413] The Men's Seder, they say, "is the ideal structure for exploring those issues which pertain specifically to men, to be discussed by men, to be wrestled with by men, to be shared by men."[414]

It may be tempting to dismiss a movement of Men's Seders as unnecessary, or even belittling to the Women's Seder movement which has brought such feelings of empowerment and community to Jewish women and Jewish feminists. However, while these Men's Seders may not have goals similar to many of Women's Seders--advocacy for equal religious standing, the airing of historical grievances in order to create social change, the creation of a relatable narrative with biblical role models of their own

[412] Rabbi Dan Moskovitz and Rabbi Perry Netter, The Men's Seder: A Haggadah-Based Exploration of Contemporary Men's Issues (New York: Men of Reform Judaism, 2007).
[413] Amy Klein, "Women Keep out—this seder's for men only," Jewish Journal, April 10, 2008 http://www.jewishjournal.com/passover/article/women_keep_out_this_seders_for_men_only_20080411/
[414] Ibid.

gender—they nonetheless can fulfill important needs for some men of the Jewish community. As a participant in one Men's Seder stated, "I never have a man's-only environment. There are a lot of issues as a man—dealing with pressure to make sure there's money and food on the table and things are under control. It allows you to realize you're not alone."[415]

It is unclear whether Men's Seders will become more widespread, or whether they are a movement with enough energy to continue. But it seems clear that while these innovations are taking place, they are succeeding in creating supportive community in a gender-differentiated space in much the same way that Women's Seders do for Jewish women.

How Have Women's Seders Affected Mainstream Passover Seders?

While the question of how Women's Seders have affected mainstream Passover Seders is certainly important and worthy of discussion, it is also important to realize the limitations in drawing any firm conclusions about the effects of the Women's Seder on mainstream Passover Seders. Women's Seders represent one element of a broader spectrum of Jewish feminist actions and innovations that share a goal of creating a fuller spectrum of Jewish life, belief, and observance for Jewish women. Therefore, when a change occurs in a mainstream Seder, one could reasonably tie it either to the influence of Jewish feminism in general, or the Women's Seder in particular. In a certain sense, the goal of Jewish feminism could be likened to that of a "third-party" within the typical two-party American political system. One goal for a third party is to get one of their

[415] Ibid.

representatives elected to a local, state, or federal position. However, another goal or victory would be for a belief held by this party to become so popular that it, by necessity, makes its way into one or both the other of the two major parties.

Similarly, there are two types of victory for the Women's Seder: that Women's Seders are becoming more and more common and prominent, and that they have influence on the mainstream Seder. Yet changes to the mainstream Seder that either honor women or create egalitarian language where previously the prayer-language was male-referent could be linked to Jewish feminism in general or to the Women's Seder in particular. It is only with incorporation of rituals or liturgy original to the Women's Seder that one can legitimately claim that the Women's Seder had a direct effect on the mainstream Seder. With this caveat noted, this section will discuss the ways in which mainstream Seders appear to have been influenced by the Women's Seder.

The Rabbinical Assembly's Passover Haggadah: A Feast of Freedom incorporates certain egalitarian innovations, but does not show a great deal of evidence that it has been directly influenced by Women's Seders. The Four Sons in this *haggadah* are titled "The Four Children," yet within the very traditional text of this passage they are referred to with male pronouns and the word "son."[416] However, several times throughout this *haggadah*, women appear in the text, though most often only in notes on the sides of the pages. Yocheved, Miriam, Shiphrah, and Pu'ah are all mentioned as essential to the Exodus, in a commentary that notes, "Behind Moses, hero of the Exodus, stood heroic women."[417] Miriam's well is also described in a commentary on the page that relates the

[416] Rabinowicz, 39.
[417] Ibid., 50.

singing and dancing of Miriam and the other women of the Exodus after crossing the sea.[418] It is clear that while this *haggadah* seems to reflect efforts on the part of its authors to incorporate a discussion of the role of women, with no ritual innovations or additions that directly reflect the Women's Seder, one could not realistically claim that this *haggadah* was directly influenced by the Women's Seder in particular.

The New American Haggadah, the most recent edition of a *haggadah* originally created in the Reconstructionist movement by its founder, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, does include certain elements that can be directly linked to the Women's Seder. As in many recent *haggadot*, instructions note that the Four Questions are to be recited or chanted by the youngest child, rather than simply the youngest son,[419] and the passage traditionally called the Four Sons is entitled the Four Children and is consistently gender-neutral in the English throughout.[420] Moments in the Seder during which the patriarchs are mentioned also include the matriarchs within this *haggadah*,[421] and the women of the story of the Exodus are described in a manner that conveys their important role in the story.[422] In the Hebrew text of this *haggadah*, on occasion the word *Imoteinu* is included alongside the word *Avoteinu*, showing that the matriarchs are included alongside the patriarchs with these Hebrew words that are recognizable to many of those who have limited Hebrew understanding.

The way in which this *haggadah* reflects a clear influence of the Women's Seder is its incorporation of Miriam's Cup, *Kos Miryam.* The opening section of the *haggadah*

[418] Ibid., 63.
[419] Kaplan, Kohn, and Eisenstein, 12.
[420] Ibid., 17-19.
[421] Ibid., 20-21, 28.
[422] Ibid., 25.

that describes the necessary elements of the Seder table includes not only an open-ended statement that other symbolic foods from various international Jewish cultures may ―grace the Seder table,"[423] but an explanation of the Miriam's Cup. It reads,

> The Cup of Miriam is a new tradition. As the cup of Elijah was introduced into our tradition in the late 17th century, so we now enrich our tradition with the Cup of Miriam, which is filled with spring water to remind us of the legend of Miriam's Well. This legend teaches that wherever our ancestors wandered in the Sinai wilderness, Miriam's Well would appear and sustain them. The Cup of Miriam symbolizes the many ways we continue to be sustained along freedom's path.[424]

Miriam's Cup is incorporated into the reading of *Dayeinu*, as it is filled with water at that point in the Seder. The instructions read, ―Fill Miriam's Cup with water. As these verses are sung, the leader raises the cup and recites each verse. The other participants sing the refrain, *Dayeinu*, which is a way of saying: For that alone, we would have been grateful."[425] Interestingly, as many Women's Seders choose to do, this *haggadah* further celebrates the role of Miriam by including Debbie Friedman's ―Miriam's Song" as part of the *haggadah* text.[426]

Shoshana Silberman's A Family Haggadah reflects moves to egalitarianism similar to that of the New American Haggadah. The roles of women in the Exodus, such as Yocheved and Miriam,[427] Shiphrah and Pu'ah[428] and the Pharaoh's daughter[429] are described at appropriate moments in the story of the Exodus, and matriarchs are

[423] Ibid., vii
[424] Ibid.
[425] Ibid., 37.
[426] Ibid., 32.
[427] Shoshana Silberman, A Family Haggadah II (Minneapolis: Kar-Ben Publishing, Inc, 1997), 26, 30.
[428] Ibid., 24-25.
[429] Ibid., 26.

mentioned alongside patriarchs.[430] Rather than the Four Sons, this *haggadah* includes the Four Children.[431] There are, however, two times when this *haggadah* reflects the influence of the Women's Seder in particular. The first moment occurs in the description of the Seder plate that comes prior to the Seder ritual within this *haggadah*. It relates that many families and communities have taken on the custom of placing an orange on the Seder plate. It then refers to the fictional legend of the man who heckled Susannah Heschel after a talk, shouting ~~–~~A woman belongs on the *bimah* like an orange belongs on the seder plate!" In response, the *haggadah* says, ~~–~~By placing an orange on the seder plate, we assert that women belong wherever Jews carry on Sacred life."[432] There is an additional suggestion that one could put out a bowl of fragrant spices for Miriam alongside Kos Eliyahu, ~~–~~to honor her for being a fountain of strength for the Jewish people."[433] The second moment occurs at the time when the door is opened for Elijah, at which point the *haggadah* also includes an invitation to Miriam: ~~–~~Miriam Haneviah, Miriam the Prophet, come join us at our Seder to give strength and healing. May you soon lead us in joyous dance to celebrate freedom and redemption for us, for Israel, and for all humanity."[434]

There is an endless supply of *haggadot* one could examine in order to determine how far-reaching the effects of the Women's Seder truly are. Of course, no printed *haggadah* could provide evidence of the oranges placed on Seder plates and cups utilized as Miriam's Cups at Seders world-wide, because these actions do not require a formal

[430] Ibid., 24.
[431] Ibid., 22.
[432] Ibid., 4.
[433] Ibid.
[434] Ibid., 49.

printed *haggadah* to allow them to occur. It is, again, impossible to distinguish the line between the effects of Jewish feminism in general on the Seder and the effects of the Women's Seder in particular. However it is clear that in instances when Miriam's Cup, opening the door for Miriam, or the inclusion of an orange on the Seder plate appear in *haggadot*, this reflects a movement that is not simply inward-looking, affecting only those who attend Women's Seders. When we open the door for Miriam at a ~~–n~~ormal" Passover Seder, the door has been opened for the innovation of the Women's Seder to have lasting effects on the Seder ritual beyond just the feminist movement.

Regardless of the longevity of the particular ritual of the Women's Seder, no matter whether this is an innovation that is lasting or simply a way-station on the road to fully egalitarian Passover Seders and inclusion of women alongside men at every stratum of Jewish practice and observance, it is clear that Women's Seders and Jewish feminism are –slowly but surely—making strides in achieving their goals of creating community among Jewish women, empowering them to take charge of their spiritual, Jewish lives, and affecting the ritual of the broader Jewish community.

Conclusion: Next Year In…

The seder is complete, the ritual fulfilled.
Our daughters' questions awakened our hearts;
Our sisters' music invited us to dance;
Our mothers' stories welcomed us home.
Nourished by words ancient and new,
We tasted a future of justice and care.
Tonight, a new history begins:
In the cities of Judaism and wherever our people gather,
The voices of daughters join the voices of sons
In songs of freedom and celebration.

L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim.[435]

It is traditional to conclude the Passover Seder with the words, ~~"~~*L'shana Ha-Ba'ah B'Yerushalayim*—Next Year In Jerusalem." These words convey the long-held hope for the coming of the Messiah, who will herald a Messianic age in which the Jews of the world will be released from their exile and gathered back to the land of Israel in rejoicing. If Passover commemorates the moment at which the Jewish people miraculously gained freedom from slavery, then these words convey a hope that within the year following the Passover Seder, the Jewish people will miraculously gain its freedom from exile and enslavement to the demands of the everyday. These words are likely to be taken in a more metaphorical sense in the liberal Jewish movements; rather than expressing a hope for the coming of the Messiah, they convey instead a hope for a day when the world will be perfected through a process of *tikkun olam* and turning to the one God.

[435] Sue Levi Elwell, in Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, The Women's Seder Sourcebook, 262.

There is a certain hope conveyed by the Women‘s Seder, too, for the dawning of a certain type of improved, more perfect age in which women have places of greater honor and equality within Judaism, when the stories around which we build our Jewish lives celebrate the roles played by both men and women, when women and men together share the duties and rewards of Jewish life in both the synagogue and the home. These hopes lay both in the positive and negative statements found within the Women‘s Seder. By emphasizing the roles played by women in the Exodus and by celebrating the importance of women in Jewish life in the current age, feminists have taken one more step toward this ―Messianic" day for which they hope. By stating openly those things that plague the modern Jewish woman, by asserting what is enough, *dayeinu*, and what is not enough, *lo dayeinu*, participants in Women‘s Seders open the door to change that will better the lives of Jewish women.

Through the Women‘s Seder, through other feminist ritual and liturgical innovation, and through continued activism for the equality of women within Judaism, it is clear that Jewish feminism has achieved a great deal within the past thirty to forty years. The statistics noted in the final chapter of this thesis, which demonstrate that women make up more than half of the active participants in many sectors of Jewish life, are but one example of the ever-strengthening presence of women in Judaism and the success of the demands for equality in Jewish religious and cultural life posed by Jewish feminism. Women‘s Seders have increasingly affected the observance of Passover in the broader scope of Judaism, creating space not only for the women of the Exodus to be honored through the telling of the Passover story, but even opening the door for ritual innovations such as the orange on the Seder plate and Miriam‘s Cup.

In fact, the reach of the Women's Seder has become so broad that Ma'yan, the women's group that created one of the most prominent and commonly used women's *haggadot*[436] and that put on large and publicly recognized Women's Seders each year, decided to cease holding its yearly Women's Seders. In April of 2005, Ma'yan held its final Women's Seder thirty years after the first Women's Seders came into being. The leaders of the Seder decided it was time to close the book on this phase of their work because Ma'yan had ~~a~~ccomplished what it set out to do: create change."[437] Eve Landau, Director of Ma'yan, said, ~~O~~ur goal is to be a catalyst. We can give it up because it has become mainstream, because girls don't think there's anything terribly unusual about a women's seder and because now Miriam's cup is part of what they see on their seder table at home." Over the years, Ma'yan's Women's Seders drew participation of over 20,000 women, and its *haggadah*, The Journey Continues has sold well over 40,000 copies and continues to sell copies each year.

It is understandable that a group like Ma'yan, which established a specific aim of creating change, being a catalyst, and spreading the phenomenon and goals of the Women's Seder, might decide to cease holding its annual Women's Seders. It is true that Women's Seders take place at synagogues nation-wide and in over one hundred locations throughout the world each year. But, based on both my research and on the experience of speaking with numerous people about this thesis and about Women's Seders in general, it is clear that the need for Women's Seders has not ceased. There is still both a need and a desire in the Jewish world to have Women's Seders that celebrate the role of women in

[436] Cohen, 2000.
[437] Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "Feminist Seders Reach the Promised Land," The New York Times, April 16th, 2005. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/16/national/16religion.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1

the Exodus and both honor and expand the role of women in contemporary Jewish life. Even as more and more mainstream Passover Seders, particularly in the liberal streams of Judaism, incorporate rituals from the Women's Seder and effectively honor the women of the Exodus, it is important to remember that this change is limited to but one segment of Jewish society.

There is a related phenomenon, which I consider very troubling, that has become increasingly pervasive as women have gained more equal standing in Jewish life and particularly as women have entered and become accepted in the rabbinate in liberal Judaism. Many people—men and women alike—consider Jewish feminism to be outdated and obsolete; they believe that since women can ascend to the highest role of leadership in Jewish life as rabbis, and because there have been certain liturgical developments (in particular the addition of the *imahot* alongside the *avot,* of the matriarchs alongside the patriarchs, during the first blessing of the *Amidah* in the Jewish prayer service), Jewish feminism has achieved its ultimate goal and can therefore be laid to rest in the memory of our people. Sadly, this belief has been consistently demonstrated by many of my classmates at HUC-JIR in numerous ways, including a lack of student interest in covering topics relating to Jewish feminism within the rabbinical school curriculum. Perhaps even more troubling than this is the lack of interest among female rabbinical students in Cincinnati in participating in any women's Rosh Chodesh observance or Women's Passover Seder, to such an extent that Rosh Chodesh observance has dwindled to a complete halt, and there has not been sufficient interest to even attempt to create a Women's Passover Seder at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati during the last four years.

Notwithstanding this trend, Women's Seders remain relevant. There is still a reason for this observance, but the needs of the constituents have changed. Therefore, for Women's Seders to continue their success and maintain and increase their prominence within the Jewish community, the ritual and liturgy of Women's Seders need to evolve to reflect these changed needs. Within the liberal Jewish community, as women have gained equality and in most cases lead Jewish lives as full and as diverse as their male counterparts, many women no longer identify with elements of Jewish feminism nor with a Women's Seder that expresses anger and dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs for women within Judaism. Passages expressing rage at the loss or exclusion of women from Jewish history and readings and rituals meant to validate feelings of distress and exclusion no longer resonate with a vast majority of women in the liberal Jewish movements. However, those elements of the Women's Seder that celebrate the role of women, that describe their important role in the Exodus, and that affirm the importance of women within Judaism—these passages remain relevant and resonate for women in Judaism today. Women's Seders need not completely leave behind any statement of dissatisfaction or hope for an improved future. But for Women's Seders to continue to flourish and grow, they must focus more energy on the celebration of the role of women in Jewish history and modern life and take seriously the task of creating women's-only space within which participants can discuss and grow their Judaism and Jewish identities. If Women's Seders are able to achieve this new, somewhat altered purpose, I am certain that this is an observance that will continue long into our Jewish future.

There is truly a wealth of resources available to groups of women planning Women's Seders and exploring this ritual, from online resources to booklets to the

wonderful two-volume set of The Women's Passover Companion[438] and The Women's Seder Sourcebook.[439] This too supports the view that the Women's Seder is a ritual and liturgical innovation that will endure and continue to evolve. As long as there are women who want to examine their place and their history within Jewish life, and as long as there are still questions to ask about women's Jewish life and ritual, the Women's Seder will be here to stay, and this is a blessing for the Jewish world.

[438] Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, 2003.
[439] Anisfeld, Mohr & Spector, 2003.

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