

Opening Prayer

Barcheinu imeinu kulanu k'echat b'or panecha

Bless us, all of us women together, O God, with radiance and grace.

Standing on the Shoulders, Joyce Johnson Rouse

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am stronger for their courage; I am wiser for their words.
I am lifted by their longing for a fair and brighter future.
I am grateful for their vision, for their toiling on this Earth.
We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us.
They are saints and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.
We can see beyond the struggles and the troubles and the challenge.
When we know that by our effort's things will be better in the end
They lift me higher than I could ever fly.
Carrying my burdens away
I imagine our world if they hadn't tried.
We wouldn't be here celebrating today.
I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am honored by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller; I will work a little longer.
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.

Telling Our Stories

Every faith tradition, every culture, preserves and elaborates on itself through story. Tonight, is a celebration of all our stories. Each one of us is every day writing the story of our life. When you visit a cemetery, engraved on the headstones can be found the name of the deceased and the date of birth followed by a dash and then the date of death. Tonight, we celebrate the dash. The dash is the story of that person's life. Each of us is living our own dash and the story it tells is vibrant, joyous, tragic, resilient, surprising, poignant, and meaningful.

Tonight, we pause, to allow ourselves a moment of reflection. . . we focus on the part of our "dash" that was this year. It has been a year since we last met online for our women's seder, a year since we sat in our homes quarantined, not knowing when life would return to "normal." A year ago, some of us were just learning zoom, we experienced our first zoom bomber, and now we are virtual mavens. We've learned new technologies and ways to connect with folks that we may never have tried. And yet, we've missed the personal, face to face interactions, that perhaps we once took for granted. We've adapted and adjusted,

stretched our creative muscles as we've learned to live, to celebrate, to mourn all in a new reality. Tonight, as we join in celebration, we take a moment to remember this unprecedented year and how it has affected our own lives.

What is something that you've learned in this past year?
What is something you want to celebrate?
What is something you've missed this past year?
What is something you'd like to leave behind in the past year?

For all the ups and the downs, the highs and lows, the joy, and tears, together we light candles of remembrance. We remember and celebrate the year that has been and with this seder, we move forward into a year of new experiences, new possibilities and most importantly a year of new hopes.

As we light our candles, we say:

כִּי עִמְךָ מְקוֹר חַיִּים, בְּאוֹרְךָ נִרְאָה אוֹר

Ki imcha mekor chayim, borcha nireh or

For with You is the source of life, in Your light we see light.

Seder Delights

There are some festive ingredients in our Women's Seder kits to help us capture the essence of the Passover story as well as the essence of what it means to be Jewish women in 2021.

Chocolate covered Graham Cracker: We're close enough to Passover that we should save the "taste" of matzah for the seder. However, we recognize the need for sustenance to get us through our preparations. What could be better than something chocolate covered to give us energy and strength as we prepare our hearts and our homes for Passover?

Chocolate Egg: the egg represents the Festival Sacrifice brought to the Temple years ago at this season. Secondly, the roundness of the egg represents the continuous cycle of nature's seasons.

Dark chocolate Hershey's Kiss: Maror - This bitter chocolate represents the bitterness of our ancestors' enslavement in Egypt. For us, it represents the struggles (sometimes bitterness) of our lives and the stress women often face when juggling many responsibilities for which chocolate can sometimes relieve.

The Apples - Karpas Apples and women have a long history together. The apple is considered the best nature has to offer, and has something for three senses: smell, taste, and visual aesthetics. Apples are also thin-skinned and easily bruise, like us.

The Pomegranate Tea - An addition to this year's celebration. The pomegranate's many seeds represent the 613 Mitzvot to which a Jew is obligated. A pomegranate is also a symbol of fertility and all that women add to our lives. When eating the pomegranate, a special blessing is said beseeching God to make the Jewish people as fruitful as the seeds of the pomegranate. As you taste the pomegranate tea, think of one Mitzvah (commandment) you value as an expression of your Judaism.

Ready?

You'll need to travel light.
Take what you can carry: a book, a poem,
a battered tin cup, your child strapped
to your chest, clutching your necklace
in one hot possessive fist.
So, the dough isn't ready.
So, your heart isn't ready.
You haven't said goodbye
to the places where you hid as a child,
to the friends who aren't interested in the journey,
to the graves you've tended.
But if you wait until you feel fully ready
you may never take the leap at all
and Infinity is calling you forth
out of this birth canal
and into the futures wide expanse.
Learn to improvise flat cakes without yeast.
Learn to ready new alphabets.
Wear God like a cloak
and stride forth with confidence.
You won't know where you're going
but you have the words of our sages,
the songs of our mothers, the inspiration
wrapped in your kneading bowl. Trust
that what you carry will sustain you
and take the first step out the door.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat,

The First Cup of Wine

Honoring Ourselves

We drink this cup to honor ourselves, the lives we have created, and the gifts we bring into this world. Let us know that the world would not be complete without us and our gifts.

What is one way that you have honored yourself this past year?

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:
Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, O God, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Karpas

We look forward to the reawakening of flowers and greenery. We look forward to gathering in person with our community. The flowers and the community haven't been lost, just buried beneath the snow, getting ready for reappearance just when we most needed them. We all have aspects of ourselves that sometimes get buried under the stresses of our busy lives. What has this winter (quarantine) taught us? What elements of our own lives do we hope to revive? What commitments will we make to each other and our community?

When this is over,
May we never again take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Conversations with neighbors
A crowded theater
Friday Shabbat with friends and family
The taste of a shared Sabbath challah
A routine checkup
A school rush each morning
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath

A boring Tuesday
Life itself
When this ends,
May we find
That we have become
More like the people
We wanted to be
We were called to be
We hoped to be
And may we stay
That way, better
For each other
Because of the worst. (unknown)

Maggid | Telling the Story

מָה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?
Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?

Mah Nishtana Why is this night different from all other nights?

On this night, we gather in a way our foremothers could never have imagined. On this night we gather as an extended family of women. We break through the glass Mechitza, the curtain confining women to a separate sphere. What do we celebrate tonight? Women's stories long relegated to a minor place. What do we discard? The echo of exclusionary language. Let us enter this Seder as if the ancient rabbis had always asked and valued the opinions of women. Surely God never meant for women to be overlooked.

The Song of Questions

We acknowledge with pride the accomplishments of our Jewish sisters throughout history who have touched the world with their healing powers, facilitated communication between adversaries, nurtured their families, cared for the disabled, and, through teaching, ensured that our stories would be passed down from generation to generation.

The Torah bids us tell our offspring about our history. From this our tradition infers four kinds of children who appear in various guises throughout our daily lives. Their attitudes must be pondered, and answers sought. Tonight, we turn to our daughters and describe phases they go through.

The Committed Daughter wants to deepen her understanding and participate in her birthright.

She asks: What can I learn from the experiences of Jewish women who came before me that is relevant to my life today?

It is our obligation to tell her of the rich tapestry of women before us, of the struggles they endured, of the changes, and failures, and work still to do.

The Angry, Alienated Daughter has turned away from Judaism because of the pain it has caused her.

She asks, what can this sexist tribal rite possibly have to say to me?

She says to me and not to us, removing herself from our ranks and from our struggles. Although she has turned her back on us, we must not turn our back on her; we must confront her together and say, what benefits are you deriving from your separation from our joyful celebration? Don't you know you will still be identified as a Jew and as a woman in times of suffering? Join us in changing what hurts you most.

The Superficially Identified Daughter has no conflict with her Jewishness, because it is so marginal in her life.

She asks What's it all about anyway? Who needs commitment?

We must explain to her that lox and bagel Judaism is so diluted that it is no wonder she relegates Judaism to the remote reaches of her life. We can encourage her to seize the day and begin to struggle against her assimilation. . . and make lifeline connections here at our seder.

The Daughter Without Jewish Experience has never dropped out of the community because she was never in it, does not even know where to begin.

Tonight, we embrace her and involve her in our joy so that she can begin to feel a part of our people.

Plagues of our Lives

It is said that oppressed people must win their own freedom, rather than rely on the kindness of others. What is given can be taken away, and so Liberty is not a gift. Tonight, we name 10 ways women have yet to gain full freedom so that we may be eternally vigilant.

- the lack of recognition of women as leaders, scholars and decision-makers who could serve as role models for all of us.
- the acceptance of physical and verbal abuse of women on the street, in the workplace, and in the home
- the stereotypes brought upon us as Jewish women against which we have had to struggle to maintain our pride.
- the denial by omission of women who are single, childless, battered, poor or disabled from the concerns of fairness and equal opportunity.
- the emphasis on unrealistic images of physical beauty as essential for women's self-esteem, causing us to surgically alter or to starve our bodies.
- continuing barriers in the workplace: glass ceilings, differential pay, inflexibility toward job-sharing and attitudes that create the Mommy track.
- the devaluing of the professions of homemaking and volunteerism as compared to salaried jobs.
- the assumption that women are too emotional and not strong or tough enough to handle the same things as men.
- the ongoing plight of the agunah - women "chained" to husbands who won't grant them a religious divorce.
- the silence about our place in history as Jewish women from all these plagues, Judaism and women must be freed.

In our age, as Jewish women have emerged from obscurity, let us also celebrate ten accomplishments, examples of what women bring to society to balance the plagues of our past.

1 Our matriarchs would be proud that women are counted in the minyan in liberal worship services.

2. Our foremothers would be proud that a woman, Golda Meir, has served as Prime Minister of Israel.

Help us name eight more accomplishments!

Dayenu - Gratitude

Dayenu means “enough.” Traditionally it’s a hallmark of the seder experience in which we recall that if God had liberated us from slavery, *dayenu*, it would be enough. If God had given us the Sabbath, *dayenu*, it would have been enough. And if God had given us the Torah, *dayenu*, it would have been enough.

Tonight, we sing of our own story, our own journey in life thus far, and recall the blessings we have received along the way. Please join me in a creative women’s version of Dayenu by Lisa Silver:

For the chance to speak our mind
And live our lives by our design
For opportunities we find DAYENU

For doctors, nurses, lawyers, teachers
Chefs and techno-geeks and preachers
All of us who help God’s creatures DAYENU

For travel and for exploration
Precious higher education
And our righteous indignation DAYENU

For creativity and passion
Art and music, fun and fashion
Sensitivity, compassion DAYENU

For our female history
The wisdom and the mystery
And all things that are sister-y DAYENU

The Second Cup of Wine

Cup of the Future

We drink this cup to honor our daughters and the possibilities of their lives. Let them know the strength of their ties to our people and to the women before them.

What is a hope you have for the next generation of women?

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Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei p’ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, O God, who creates the fruit of the vine.

10 Things I Want My Daughter To Know When Things Get Real

by Katie Bingham-Smith

Right now, my daughter is sitting in her pajamas. It is 3:30 on a snowy March afternoon and all she cares about at this moment is snuggling with her brother. I wish she could stay this innocent, this pure, forever, but she can't. She won't. At 10 years old, she is on the cusp of so much—drama, boys, comparisons, trust, embarrassment, pressure, and other tumultuous situations that are unavoidable. It will all become very real, very soon. There is so much I want to tell her, and I will when the time is right. Here is what I need her to know:

1. Say 'F off' when it needs to be said (yes, we included in a seder because sometimes it needs to be said).

Say it with your eyes. Say it with your actions. Say it in your head or say it out loud. Say it by walking away. Say it however you want—just make sure you say it. Say it when you are overlooked. Say it when you are being disrespected. Say it when you are being judged. Say it when someone doesn't treat you the way you know you deserve. Say it when someone puts their hands on you in a way that you don't like. Say it. Make sure the person you are saying it to hears you loud and clear.

2. Know the difference between desire and value. When another person desires you, it does not always mean they value you. They may desire you so much you almost start to believe they value you, but these are two different things. If they value you, you will know it. If they don't, you will know it. Go ahead and kiss boys, but don't kiss them if they are rude to you unless you want to kiss them. Never spend the night with someone who will not want you there in the morning unless you are fine with that arrangement as well.

3. Indulge. Buy the shoes, drink the coffee, have the wine, eat the chocolate, get the massage, use the good dishes, light the candle. Even if you are the only one to enjoy it, do it. There is no point in saving these things just for other people.

4. Don't worry about your thighs. Be healthy, practice moderation, and explore different physical activities. Eat real food that makes you feel alive and makes you want to do things that make you feel alive. Donuts aren't capable of doing that. However, if you enjoy them occasionally, and then say, "That was nice, and now I am done with you," donuts are wonderful. The size of your thighs (or any other body part) is not what matters in this one life we have. What matters is how we feel when we are here and how we make others feel. Focus on that.

5. Don't force it. If a smoky eye makes you look like you got into a bar brawl, just let it go. If you have a friend who makes you feel bad or betrays your trust, let her go, too. Nothing should feel forced *ever*—not a dress, not a relationship, not a hobby. Most importantly, don't ever try to convince someone of your worth. If they aren't convinced all on their own, refer to number No. 1.

6. It is okay to be vulnerable. If someone breaks your heart or ends a relationship with you and you are crushed, let it out in front of them if you want to. Don't hold back: cry, scream, tell them everything you are feeling. If you are crushed, say it. Leave it all out there, then go. Don't tell them again; they heard you the first time. You said what you needed to say. Move on. Confide in girlfriends. Talk to me. If they want to come into your life again, they will show up.

7. Don't do anything with half your heart. Sometimes we must do things with half of our heart—things like folding laundry or shopping for a vacuum cleaner. I am not talking about those things. I am talking about the big things: your career, whom you marry, where you live, your style, your friends. Do the big things with your whole heart, your whole self.

8. Be responsible for your own validation. You are amazing. Yes, you really are. I am your mother, so I will always believe this, but I want you to believe it too. Really believe it. Don't wait for others to validate you. Even if they do but you don't believe in your own awesomeness, it will never feel real to you.

9. Don't compare yourself to others. This is a hard one—maybe the hardest. The thing is, when we compare ourselves to others, often, we are comparing our worst moments, our weaknesses, to their strengths. Remember that. Just because you have different strengths does not mean you are less-than.

10. Be gentle. Be gentle on yourself. It can be very easy to believe something bad someone says about us—easier to believe than the compliments. Just remember what you believe is what you become. Love yourself enough to focus on your gifts, your strengths. Don't beat yourself up just because you make a mistake. Instead, learn from it. Turn it into something positive. Some of these things might only make sense to you after some hard lessons, and maybe some of these things you will just know. Either way, life is not easy. In my 40 years, I have found that when you get torn up a bit, when life isn't cooperating, it is best to put on your favorite outfit, listen to music, and handle it.

Is there anything on this list you wish someone had told you? Would you have heard it?

What would you add to this list of advice to help the next generation of women?

The Third Cup of Wine

The Cup of Persistence

We lift the third cup - and our sip is a reminder of the work not yet done.

We may not feel free, but we're all in this together and one day because of our efforts, we are going to be free.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן:

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

Blessed are You, O God, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Opening the Door

We are mindful that doors can be open, inviting, and hospitable. They can also be closed, limiting, and rejecting. Let us commit ourselves to fashioning a world that is full of open doors. Let us take a few moments to tell one another about women who opened doors for us, who inspired us, who helped us - women we know personally or who we admire from afar.

These women, who opened doors and inspired us to be our best, may we be so inspired as to do that for someone else. Tonight, as we open the door for Elijah, we are mindful that Elijah only comes when our world is ready - may this be the year in which we do the hard and necessary work so that all may enjoy full equality and peace, thereby letting Elijah know, we're ready!

(A door is opened to welcome in Elijah.)

אֱלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא, אֱלִיָּהוּ הַתְּשֻׁבִי

Elia-hu Ha-na-vee. Elia-hu Ha-tish-bee.

אֱלִיָּהוּ, אֱלִיָּהוּ, אֱלִיָּהוּ הַגְּלֹעָדִי.

Elia-hu, Elia-hu, Elia-hu Ha-gi-la-ti.

בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ, יָבֵא אֱלֵינוּ,

Bim-hay-rah V'Ya-me-nu. Ya'a-vo Ay-lay-nu.

עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד.

Ee-ma-shi-ach Ben David, Ee-ma-shi-ach Ben David.

The Fourth Cup of Wine

The Cup of Challenge

We dedicate this last cup to the women of the future who will have to rise to the challenges of this century. They can be proud of their predecessors who have helped pave the way. We, tonight, celebrate our past, and the potential of women to come.

We dedicate this fourth cup of wine to:

... the memory of all the women who have gone before us, women we have known, as well as those we have never met.

... the memory of women who came before us who suffered the hardships and indignities of slavery anywhere in the world.

... the memory of the wives, mothers, and daughters whose names we do not know because they are not recorded in our sacred texts.

... the memory of those women who faced sexual exploitation in the workplace and worked very long hours for indecent pay.

... the memory of the Suffragettes who fought vehemently for women's rights, most specifically, the right to vote. Their movements and protests, both peaceful and radical, allowed for the nationwide right for women to vote in 1920s.

... all of you in this room here tonight, you the brave, the wise, the beautiful, the creative, the compassionate, the loving, the strong, the resilient, the determined, the trail blazer. Each in your own beautiful, female way.

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L'Shana Ha'Ba'ah

Future Vision - Next Year Next year in Jerusalem.

And what is the promise to women? That we effect our own lives and the generations that follow us. We have now fulfilled our obligation as Jewish women to recount our story. May we come together again as friends and as sisters. May there be courageous steps taken to bring peace and cooperation between Israel and her neighbors. May we celebrate next year in a world at peace. May we celebrate next year in a world of universal freedom for humanity.

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם:

L'shanah haba'ah biy'rushalyim

Our wish for next year is to celebrate in Jerusalem, our land of promise.