

THE FIVE WOMEN OF THE EXODUS:

A Feminist Supplement to the Haggadah



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National Council of Jewish Women

Despite the fact that five women are integral to the story of the Book of Exodus, not one of them is named in the traditional Passover Haggadah. Their absence is more keenly felt than ever this year, after the most brutal year of attacks on reproductive autonomy since Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973, including Texas' draconian 6-week abortion ban—and as the fate of Roe v. Wade hangs in the balance with the Supreme Court's decision on Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health, which will be handed down in the coming weeks. We feel their absence as we see increasing attacks on LGBTQIA+ children and families, most especially trans people of all ages, another reminder that gender oppression comes in so many forms. And their absence is also felt as we celebrate the confirmation of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson to the highest court in the land—the first Black woman to ever hold that office in the Supreme Court's 233-year history. In our struggles for a more just world, these ancient heroines can illuminate the way, offer inspiration and perspectives on the work ahead of us. And as we mark moments of triumph, it is all the sweeter to harken back to our foremothers' stories of persistence and resilience.

National Council of Jewish Women is proud to offer a new way to honor these five heroines and to bring both their bravery lessons into your celebration of Passover. As you pour each of the four cups of wine, may your recitation and remembrance of each of these women strengthen your commitment to fighting injustice today.

In addition to these readings, some people place a Miriam's Cup (also called a Kos Miriam) on the table alongside Elijah's Cup. This additional cup, filled with water, honors Miriam the prophet, and all the ways she is associated with this essential element: Her presence at the Nile saving her brother; her role leading women and children across the Red Sea to safety; and the well of water that, midrash (traditional legend) teaches, followed her in the desert throughout the Israelites' forty years of wandering.

RECITATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEDER

Five Jewish heroines each took significant, important risks to save lives during the Exodus story, and each of them played a critical role in the work towards liberation. May their courage inspire us today to speak out against all forms of misogyny, tyranny, and oppression, and to work for a more just world.



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The First Cup of Wine: Shifra and Puah

Reader recites aloud while all pour the first cup.

Shifra and Puah were the midwives who refused Pharaoh's orders to kill the firstborn son of every Hebrew family. When confronted by Pharaoh, they lied and claimed that they simply couldn't get there before the babies were born. These midwives risked their own lives to help save the Jewish people from destruction and genocide. They practiced civil disobedience from their unique position of influence and refused to "just follow orders" when those orders were unjust. We honor their resistance.

Let us all say their names together: **Shifra and Puah.**



The Second Cup of Wine: Yocheved

Reader recites aloud while all pour the second cup.

Yocheved was the mother of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. When Moses was born she hid him from the Egyptians and their genocidal orders for as long as she could. When she could hide his cries no longer, she placed him in a basket to send him down the Nile, putting his fate in God's hands. Yocheved made the impossible choice to do whatever might be necessary to give her child a chance at life. She shows us what resistance to oppression can demand and what it can cost. We honor her agency and her pain.

Let us all say her name together: **Yocheved.**



The Third Cup of Wine: Batya

Reader recites aloud while all pour the third cup.

Pharaoh's daughter, known in our tradition as Batya, was bathing in the river when she noticed the basket holding the infant Moses. She understood that he was a Hebrew baby whose life was in danger and resolved to adopt him despite her father potentially learning of his origins and the possibility he would be displeased--or worse. Batya used her privilege and position to have the impact that she could; she teaches us to look beyond our own comfort, to take risks with the privilege we do have, and to allow our empathy and compassion to drive us towards righteous action. We honor her commitment.

Let us all say her name together: **Batya.**



The Fourth Cup of Wine: Miriam

Reader recites aloud while all pour the fourth cup.

Miriam, daughter of Yocheved and sister of Moses and Aaron, played many parts in the story of Exodus. One midrash (traditional legend) credits her for convincing her parents—exhausted and traumatized by slavery—to conceive Moses, the hero of the Jewish people. She was also brave enough to suggest to Pharaoh's daughter to allow Yocheved, Moses's mother, to be a wet-nurse for the baby, which allowed the family to stay together and earn wages. Miriam later led the women and children—the backbone of Jewish life—safely to shore across the Red Sea, dancing and singing. The Torah teaches that she was a prophet; she reminds us that caring for women, children and families is a critical part of our connection to the holy. We honor her tenacity.

Let us all say her name together: **Miriam**.

RECITATION AFTER DRINKING THE FOURTH CUP OF WINE

The five women of the Exodus story teach us that we all have the ability to act and to stand up to injustice. Women who work together accomplish more, and we must rely on and stand in solidarity with everyone in working for a better world.

We must use our privileges to fight for justice and honor the painful choices we must sometimes make. These stories teach us that we all have the power to resist oppression wherever it may be.

The Talmud (Sotah 11b) teaches that “the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt because of the merit of the righteous women of that generation.” May we merit to learn from them in our own work towards liberation for everyone.