

Thank You to those ladies who encouraged me to bring my daughter to the BJBE Sisterhood Women's Seder, and Thank You to Carol Simon and Debby Dubow for accepting my reservation at the last minute. I'd like to make it clear that I am NOT a member of Sisterhood, although I wouldn't doubt that at some point one of the lovely ladies who belongs to the group will persuade me to join.

My daughter and I were greeted with smiles and a congratulatory L'dor vador as we signed in at the event. I was beaming on the inside knowing I'd brought my daughter to something that would teach her not only how to be a stronger Jew, but also inspire her as a growing woman.

As I sat in the Sacred Hall before the seder started, I was struck by a powerful sense of awe at the gathering of so many women of varying ages. I expected to see a number of veterans as it were; those women who would be considered elders of our female population and who've been part of Sisterhood seemingly since the beginning of its inception. I also expected to see those in the middle tier, so-to-speak; those of us who are moms and have kids anywhere from elementary age through college. From my Hebrew school carpool, I knew there would be a handful of younger girls, too; those daughters who actually are elementary through perhaps college age. But as I looked around, I truly felt empowered. All these women gathered together to have a seder for themselves. Of course we all joked how nice it was to participate in a dinner where we were being served rather than having to do the cooking ourselves!

After the initial thank yous and opening words by Sisterhood's President and the Seder's organizers, Rabbi Kedar started our seder by having Lauren Sandoval lead us in singing Hallelujah (Psalm 150). At the conclusion, Rabbi Kedar exclaimed, "There is nothing so beautiful as women's voices together." She then guided us on a journey through the women's haggadah; explaining the rituals and reasons for each as we came to them, and providing some history as well. For instance, did you know that because the Jews in the ghettos made a point of mikvah, washing their hands, that they escaped the Plague more often than those around them? And that because of this, they were blamed for contaminating the water.

While holding the middle matza aloft, Rabbi Kedar encouraged us to allow the brokenness of the matza to remind us to bring in the brokenness of women in this world. Then we sang mi shebeirach, which struck me as a very female thing to do; even as we celebrate and rejoice in our freedom, as women we are still thinking about and caring for others.

At the four questions, the book noted that "This is a rite of passage. We learn our part and take our turn." We read paragraphs in which mothers said they taught their children the words while doing the dishes together or during bath time. I turned to my daughter and told her that I remembered teaching her to sing Mah Nishtanah while driving her to and from JCC daycare.

And then Rabbi Kedar told us of Shifra and Puah, two Jewish midwives who refused to kill the Jewish baby boys being born. That refusal was a conscious choice to defy the authority that was over their lives (the Egyptians) in order to cast their lot with G-d because they knew in their hearts what was the right thing to do. To add to such a powerful image, Rabbi Kedar launched into an entertaining imitation of the women's response to Pharaoh: "Those Jewish women just pull over to the side of the road and have those babies before we can even get there. I just don't know how they do it!"

In celebration of escaping the Egyptians, of course we sang Miriam's Song. I enjoyed the added touch of plastic tambourines provided at each table so we could all use our "umbrels" to make music. And a wide smile broke out on my face as several women joined hands and danced around the room. My daughter was grabbed by a few of her friends and I tried to snap a few pictures to capture the moment.

Towards the end of our seder, Rabbi Kedar finally explained the meaning behind the orange on the seder plate. I admit that when it was first being practiced, I rolled my eyes at the concept, not fully understanding what it was all about. I don't consider myself a feminist, but I do support women and their rights. To me, an orange on the seder plate just wasn't part of the tradition and I didn't care to really learn more about its use or reasoning. However, after learning more about its history, I feel ignorant in my refusal to practice such a simple ritual. Dr. Susannah Heschel was told in the 1980s that lesbians and gays would be accepted in Judaism like bread on a seder plate. In response, she began placing an orange on her seder plate as a representation of the change that should and would at some point occur. The act of spitting orange seeds out further served as a reminder that we should disavow the homophobia of Judaism.

Rabbi Kedar asked us all to gather close in the middle of the room around her to conclude the seder. As we sang tefilat haderech, I looked around at all the women in the room. From the newly acquainted to mothers hugging daughters to women with their arms around friends, we all sang as Sisters. Together. Connected by womanhood.