



Pirkei Imahot 1:1 (Sayings of the Mothers 1:1)

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“Moses received Torah from God at Sinai. He transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the Great Assembly. They formulated three precepts: Be cautious in rendering a judgment, rear many students, build a fence to protect Torah.”

Pirkei Avot 1:1 (Sayings of the Fathers 1:1)

For Kelly Washburn

1.

Miriam received Torah from God at Sinai
and she transmitted it to her daughter.
Her daughter transmitted it to the judges, Devorah and Yael,
and Yael transmitted it to the daughter of Jephthah,
and from them it passed
to Naomi and to Ruth, and all the prophets who followed,
Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, learned it from them
and transmitted it to the women of the great gathering.

They formulated three precepts:

Consider the consequences of your words.
Speak your Torah to many.
Protect what is holy.

2.

Miriam did not receive Torah from God at Sinai,
and she did not transmit it to her daughter.
Her daughter imagined a Torah from God at Sinai,
and sat by her well, singing, dribbling water through her fingers.
Her daughter did not transmit her Torah to Devorah and Yael.
At night, they arranged black letters beneath a terebinth
and breathed life into them. They felt like witches.
Jephthah's daughter did not receive Torah

from Devorah and Yael, but as she burned
she saw the letters flying free of parchment.
Samson's mother heard angels. Hannah talked back
to holy men. Ruth gleaned in the fields of others.

They formulated three precepts:

Choose your battles carefully.
Find each other quickly.
Do not let yourselves be robbed of wisdom.

3.

Miriam stole Torah from God at Sinai
and gave it to a poet. The poet
threw it out her window and conked a madwoman
on the head, making her inexplicably sane.
The madwoman left the Torah in a shopping cart,
where it was snatched by a desperate housewife.
The housewife slipped it to her raging daughter
who brought it to her rabbi as a gift. The rabbi lent it to a thief
who left it in an office along with a Bible. A secretary
made copies and delivered them to a midwife
and a pair of jazz musicians. The midwife
gave it to doctors, professors, teachers. The musicians
played it at a concert, a great assembly of hunger.

They formulated three precepts:

What if I'm not you?
Why are those your questions?
Who will transmit *my* Torah?

Four Children, Five Rabbis

© Trisha Arlin

<http://triganza.blogspot.com/2012/04/maggid-why-this-night.html>

Okay, so

Four Children sitting around a table, talking

At a seder

And they have to ask,

Why is this night different from all other nights?

Why on this night do we ask so many questions?

And who gets to answer?

And who must listen?

The first child,

Book smart.

The wise child

Knows all the rules.

He's direct,

No messin' around,

This is what you do on Pesach:

Tell the story, dip the herbs

Recline, drink four cups

Ask the questions,

Know the answers .

It's obvious.

Duh.

The second child,

A smart ass, smart and an ass.

Doesn't care about the rules

Unless she knows what they're for,

She wants meaning

And is kind of obnoxious about it

Because sometimes it's hard to ask the next logical question

Without annoying someone.

What does this story mean to you? she asks.

And it comes off as a challenge, but it's not.

She really wants to know:

What does it mean?

So you tell her,

Freedom!

To be who you are,

To make choices,

to seek God whether you find God or not,

To become a person and then a people,

To ask questions.

The third child,

A beginner,
Doesn't know what to do
Doesn't know why we're doing it,
A baby!

So you say to him,
We tell a really good story
With a beginning middle and end
And a hero
And a villain
And miracles and dancing and bugs and dead cows and blood,
You'll love it!
And this is why we tell the story:
So we don't forget we were slaves,
So we don't forget what God did for us,
So we don't forget Torah,
And the seder is what we do to remember.
And because we remember
We don't enslave others.
We bask in God's presence.
We study Torah
And we tell stories.

And then there's the fourth kid

The child who doesn't even know
that she can ask a question.
Is it because she doesn't care?
Or is it, that she doesn't have a context?
Doesn't know that she doesn't know?
So she doesn't know how interesting it all is?
Or perhaps it's because no one will let her talk
So she doesn't even try?
Sitting in the back of the bus,
Not allowed to study Torah,
Married at 17, popping out babies at 18.
So let's not wait for either of them to say something
Let's hold out our hands and say,
We were slaves
And now we're not.
And there is so much to know and do
And you can know and do it
And we will help you.
You are inspired,
You just don't know it yet.

Okay.

So

Five Rabbis sitting around a table, talking

At a seder.
They don't have to ask
Why is this night different from all other nights,

And if they did
None of them would listen.

Each of them knows the direct meaning.
All of them plumb the depths of the hidden and symbolic.
Any one of them can tell a tale that bridges a gap.
Five out of five are inspired by God's revelations.
They know the rules and the meaning and the stories and oh my God, are they empowered to talk.

They stay up all night
And talk and talk and talk!

Each one smarter than the other
But in the morning when their students come in,
They still haven't got an answer.

Hey you guys, say the students,
SHEMA!

Why is this night different from all other nights?
Listen.

The Shoebox
© Arthur Strimling

There was a man. His name was John Hirsch. He was a Holocaust survivor. He was Hungarian. He was eleven years old in Hungary when his family realized that they would have to leave, suddenly and soon. The boy was told to pack, but that he could take only a very few things. In fact all he could take was one shoebox full.

He said he spent every afternoon for months trying to decide; packing and unpacking all his treasures, his books, emptying his pockets.

Now, this pondering of what to take has always fascinated me. I've moved a lot, so I have had to ponder. And I watch old people look around their houses, trying to decide what to take with them to the nursing home. And how every object becomes a reservoir of memories.

'And that table should be left behind? But we ate half a century of meals on that table, holiday meals and everyday meals. Does it have to go?'

Or you clean out a closet and find an old blue dress, the one you first wore to meet a certain man. And its sleeves are thrown around its shoulders as if in an embrace. And that too has to go. Or you clean out a drawer, and you can't just throw away all those letters...these are not just objects, these are pieces of your life.

So, picture the Hebrew people looking around their houses the night before they left Egypt, and picture this 11-year-old boy looking around his room. What to take?

Well, finally he got it down. But he didn't have just one shoebox...[Picks up the shoebox on the table and one that has been hidden] He had two. In one he had his handkerchief, a pair of underpants, a sweater, a pocket knife, some hard candies.

In the other he had...his grandfather's Tallis, his poems and drawings, his favorite hat, some post cards and photographs, a few pieces from his gem collection. All of his treasures. Each one of these things had a history.

Which box to take? He said he never could decide.

Then one day, he came home from school, and the whole block next door was gone, just smoking ruin. His family was waiting. 'Now! Run!' And he ran inside, and he grabbed the box with the useful things. He was crying...he knew, at that moment he had left his childhood behind.

Well, they reached their hiding place, and he opened the box ...Mistakenly he had taken the wrong box! He had taken the box with the photographs and poems and the hat and things. Such a shock!

What to do with it? He said he spent the rest of his life trying to figure out what to do with that box.

He said it was as if he was drowning in the sea, and all he wanted to do was heave that shoebox back to the shore so someone could catch it. Anyone. Just so it still goes on...existing.

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D'VAR SHIRAH
דבר שירה