

Chaverim Shel Shalom, JF&CS, Boston

Excerpts from a Seder created by and for Jewish with psychiatric conditions who are members of Chaverim Shel Shalom, a program of Jewish Healing Connections of Boston. The entire Haggadah is available through Jewish Healing Connections. Also visit www.jfcsboston.org

MAGGID *Telling the Story*



Ha Lachma Anya **The Bread of Affliction** (selection in Aramaic may be read)

ALL: This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

All who are hungry, let them enter and eat.

All who are in need, let them share the hope of Passover.

Now we are here--next year in the Land of Israel.

Now we are still in bonds. Next year may we all be free.



As Jews with psychiatric conditions, what is our affliction, what is our liberation?

Kathy: Our medication is our hindrance and our help. You're allowed your freedom when you keep up with your therapy.

Mike: Feeling sick is the hardship. Judaism helps me feel psychologically good. I feel good going to shul and studying.

Annette: Matza is the road to freedom. You have to move on with your life. You don't have time to stay in the past.

The Four Questions

(questions may be read in Hebrew)

All: Why does this night differ from all other nights?

On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread; why on this night only unleavened bread?

On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs; why on this night only bitter herbs?

On all other nights we need not dip our herbs even once; why on this night must we dip them twice?

On all other nights we either eat sitting up or reclining; why on this night do we all recline?

Josh: Many thousands of years ago, our ancestors were enslaved by the Egyptians. Today some of us find ourselves enslaved by chains that bind our minds and our emotions. As we sit around the seder table with family and friends, sharing the story of our ancestors, we can be healed to some extent through our communal spirituality.

The Four Questions of Mental Health

Richard: What is oppressing us? Is it self-imposed such as lack of achievement or externally imposed such as parents or political current events that are out of our control, or both these things together?

Howard: How can this seder night help us and heal us?

Liz: How can we take care of ourselves and maintain a positive cycle?

Josh: If we were really serious about our healing, why don't we tell the story of our deliverance every night, not just Passover?

The Response

On this seder night, we recognize that, as Jews with psychiatric conditions, we have a great deal to teach our community.

- Because we know about the unpredictability and pain of having a chronic illness, we are compassionate towards others.
- Because we know what it is to be labeled as "different" and "defective" by those who don't even know us as human beings, we are the contemporary embodiment of all Jewish history.
- Because we have experienced oppression and persecution firsthand, we each feel that we, personally, are struggling to leave oppression and persecution firsthand, that we, personally, are struggling to leave Egypt behind us everyday. In this way, we are mindful of the way we pray each morning, "Moses said to the people. Remember this day in which you came out of Egypt, out of a house of slavery; for by a strong hand the Lord brought you out of this place; no leavened bread shall be eaten."
- Because we have learned from each other and from sensitive caregivers about how to care for ourselves, we respond to the needs of others whom are less fortunate than we are, who don't know how to articulate their suffering.

About Difference

We Jews have experienced what it is like to be *different* ever since our father, Abraham, discovered that God is One and tried to tell the rest of the world. Through the ages we have been bullied, oppressed, degraded, punished, tortured, even murdered for our *difference* from other people. Jews who are considered *different* from other Jews, whether they are people from Ethiopia; people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender; or people with psychiatric conditions, have a lot to teach about how to accept and be enriched by *difference*.

Hannah: Are we different? What makes us different?

Sheryl: I don't feel different but the community at large seems to think so. When I was a child in school, they picked on me and bullied me. They thought I was retarded. They threw snowballs at me and beat me up.

Howard: I don't think I really am different from other people. I may be perceived of as being different, but I have a right to be myself. Everybody has the right to be who they are. If I cut myself, do I not bleed, the same as everyone else?

Richard: If you want to observe this holiday, will this make people who aren't Jewish dislike you or think that you're weird? (like eating matza for lunch in school or at the workplace) Is being Jewish a stigma, something to be kept private, or should you outwardly show that you're Jewish, like wearing a yarmulka outside the synagogue, or leaving school or work on special occasions?



A Night of Questions

Kathy: When mentally ill people meet each other we ask, "What are you on? What's your diagnosis? Have you ever been in the hospital? For how long? Where do you live? Who's your doctor? What is s/he like? What else have you been on? What were the side effects? Which shul makes you feel good?"

This is how we connect--by asking questions.