

RENÉ CASSIN'S WOMEN'S SEDER

René Cassin's Women's Seder celebrates the women of the exodus, their untold stories, and the individuals who inspire us today





Designed and produced by René Cassin www.renecassin.org; March 2020
With thanks to the Little Butterfly Foundation, the Pears Foundation
and the Sigrid Rausing Trust for making this resource possible

3	INTRODUCTION
4	JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINBURG ON PASSOVER
6	RENÉ CASSIN'S SEDER PLATE
7	RESISTANCE: FIRST CUP
8	FOUR QUESTIONS
10	FOUR DAUGHTERS
14	THE TEN PLAGUES
16	SOLIDARITY: SECOND CUP
17	EMPOWERMENT: THIRD CUP
18	LEGACY: FOURTH CUP
20	FINAL WORDS
21	MIRIAM'S CUP
22	THE SPEAKERS
24	THE ORGANISATIONS
26	ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
30	ABOUT RENÉ CASSIN

TABLE OF

CONTENTS



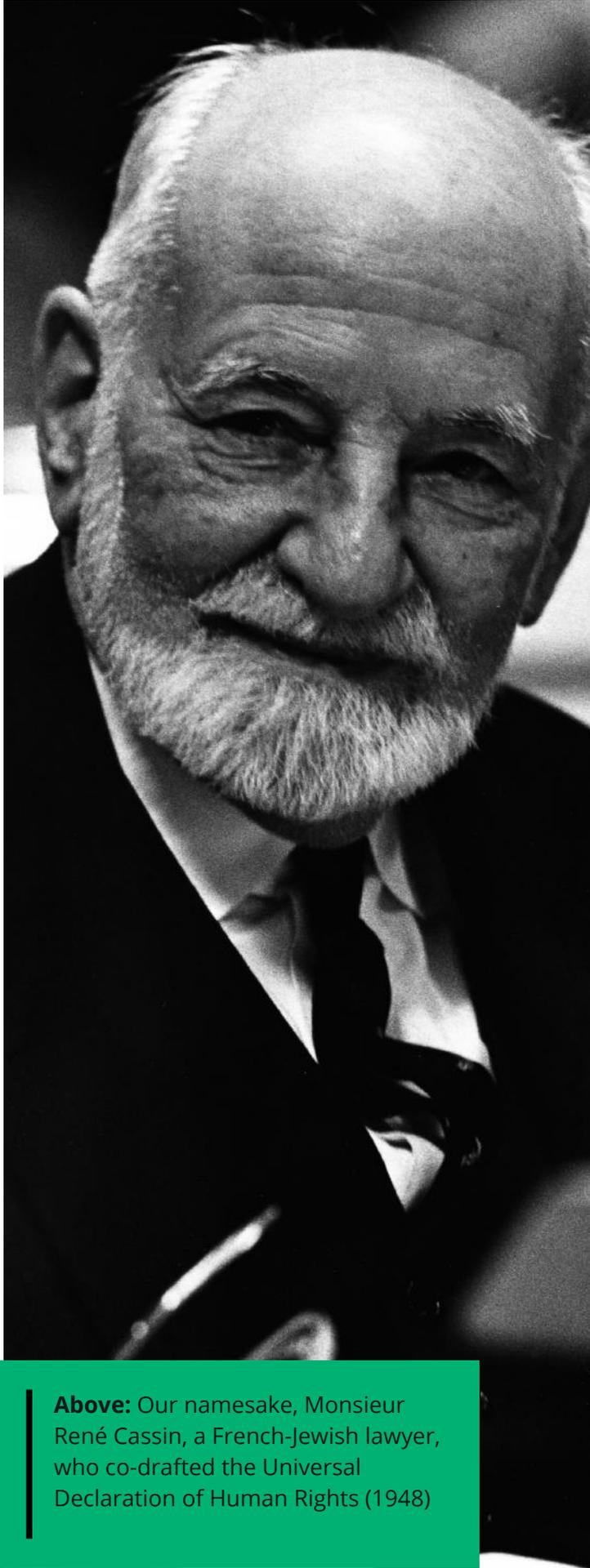
***"She was warned,
She was given an explanation,
Nevertheless, She Persisted"***

Senator Mitch McConnell, The Majority Leader about Senator Elizabeth Warren (2017)



In February 2017 Senator Elizabeth Warren was reprimanded in a debate over Trump's nomination to U.S. Attorney General. Warren was quoting a letter that argued the nominee had used his powers in office in an attempt to intimidate and frighten black voters. Her words, and actions, in the pursuit of justice and accountability prompted Senator Mitch McConnell to speak the now infamous phrase, which has become a rallying cry for the #MeToo era.





Above: Our namesake, Monsieur René Cassin, a French-Jewish lawyer, who co-drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

René Cassin, The Jewish voice for human rights, strongly believes in the importance of learning from experience; we draw on our shared Jewish values and experience to advocate for human rights now. The story of Exodus is a call to action; we are commanded to see ourselves as having personally lived through the story, to understand and inspire us to play a crucial role in liberating the oppressed.

In order to fulfil our role in the present, we must learn from our ancestors in the past. It is written in the Babylonian Talmud that:

“in the merit of righteous women, the Jews were redeemed from Egypt.”

Our Seder will call upon the experiences of these women, and women who play a role in redemption in the present day, for a night to inspire and understand how we can continue their legacies and be the righteous women of the future.

René Cassin’s vision is of a world bound by shared values, such as justice, freedom and equality, with women leading the way. By sharing stories of heroic women, we hope to empower others to continue in their tradition. In today’s world we are faced with new challenges that threaten our vision of the future. ***Nevertheless, we must persist.***

US JUSTICE RUTH BADER GINSBURG ON PASSOVER

March 18, 2015

On Passover, Jews are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus and to see ourselves as having lived through that story, so that we may better learn how to live our lives today. The stories we tell our children shape what they believe to be possible, which is why, at Passover, we must tell the stories of the women who played a crucial role in the Exodus narrative.

The Book of Exodus, much like the Book of Genesis, opens in pervasive darkness. Genesis describes the earth as

“unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep.”[1]

In Exodus, darkness attends the accession of a new Pharaoh who feared the Israelites and so enslaved them. G-d alone lights the way out of the darkness in Genesis. But in Exodus, G-d has many partners, first among them, five brave women.

There is Yocheved, Moses' mother, and Shifra and Puah, the famous midwives. Each defies Pharaoh's decree to kill the Israelite baby boys. And there is Miriam, Moses' sister, about whom the following Midrash is taught:

[When Miriam's only brother was Aaron] she prophesied... “my mother is destined to bear a son who will save Israel.”

When [Moses] was born the whole house... filled with light[.] [Miriam's] father arose and kissed her on the head, saying, “My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled.” But when they threw [Moses] into the river her father tapped her on the head saying, “Daughter, where is your prophecy?” So it is written, “And [Miriam] stood afar off to know what would be[come of] the latter part of her prophecy.” [2]

Finally, there is Pharaoh's daughter Batya, who defies her own father and plucks baby Moses out of the Nile. The Midrash reminds us that Batya knew exactly what she was doing:

When Pharaoh's daughter's handmaidens saw that she intended to rescue Moses, they attempted to dissuade her, and persuade her to heed her father. They said to her: “Our mistress, it is the way of the world that when a king issues a decree, it is not heeded by the entire world, but his children and the members of his household do observe it, and you wish to transgress your father's decree?”[3]

But transgress she did.

These women had a vision leading out of the darkness shrouding their world. They were women of action, prepared to defy authority to make their vision a reality bathed in the light of the day.

Retelling the heroic stories of Yocheved, Shifra, Puah, Miriam and Batya reminds our daughters that with vision and the courage to act, they can carry forward the tradition those intrepid women launched.

While there is much light in today's world, there remains in our universe disheartening darkness, inhumanity spawned by ignorance and hate. The Passover story recalls to all of us-women and men-that with vision and action we can join hands with others of like mind, kindling lights along paths leading out of the terrifying darkness.

This essay is part of American Jewish World Service's (AJWS) Celebration and Compassion series.

1 Genesis 1:2

2 Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 14a

3 Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 12b

4] U.S. Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary. *Nomination of Ruth Ginsburg to be Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. Hearings. 103d Cong., 1st sess., July 20-23, 1993.*



Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the second woman, and first Jewish woman, elected to the United States Supreme Court.

Jewish experience is deeply rooted in her understanding of gender and racial discrimination, evidently guiding her work in human rights.

In response to Senator Edward Kennedy, during her confirmation hearings, she declared,

"Senator Kennedy, I am alert to discrimination. I grew up during World War II in a Jewish family. I have memories as a child, even before the war, of being in a car with my parents and passing a place in Pennsylvania], a resort with a sign out in front that read: "No dogs or Jews allowed." Signs of that kind existed in this country during my childhood. One couldn't help but be sensitive to discrimination living as a Jew in America at the time of World War II."[4]

Ginsburg has spent decades advocating for the rights of women through the law, including women's access to abortion and discrimination on the basis of sex.

RENÉ CASSIN'S SEDER PLATE

Judaism: we draw from Jewish values and experience to advocate for human rights in the present

Collaboration: our work is not isolated, but intertwined with the efforts of others, so we nurture and mobilise relationships

Empowerment: we turn today's Jewish activists into tomorrow's leaders, their drive and determination will bring about a better world



Resistance: we are part of a proud tradition of resistance and campaigning for universal values, such as freedom and equality

Solidarity: human rights belong to us all, so we stand for the rights of everyone, everywhere

Legacy: we continue in the legacy of our foremothers and forefathers, Jewish human rights advocates and activists, such as our namesake Monsieur René Cassin and Simone Veil

Above: Clockwise 1. Menorah 2. Ruth Bader Ginsburg (2016) © Wikipedia, 3. Helen Suzman with Nelson Mandela in 1990 © AP, 4. Simone Veil, 5. Women of the MeToo Movement © Damian Dovarganes/AP 6. Gloria Steinem

1ST CUP RESISTANCE

"The juxtaposition of the midwives of Egypt and those courageous doctors in the Holocaust who killed foetuses to save their mothers from extermination by the Nazis is worthy to be considered at our Seder. They are all part of our Legacy and we should remember them with pride".

Dr. Agnes Grunwald-Spier (2020)



*"Dedicating these pages
to those who resisted
in whatever ways they did
sneaking through holes in
ghetto walls
stealing food
organising
leaping off trains
burying what's precious
encouraging others
dynamite in their fingernails
singing
These are my people."*

Penny Rosenwasser, Ph.D. (2013)

Above: Two girls wearing banners with the slogan "Abolish Child Slavery!" in English and Yiddish taken during May 1, 1909 labour parade in New York City.

FOUR QUESTIONS

Long gone are the days when we were the ones asking the questions at the Seder table. We take such pleasure from hearing our children, nieces and nephews ask the questions. We are tasked with answering them

As mothers, sisters, leaders and friends, we are constantly being asked to answer questions. Here is one unusual one: what does one do if one is taking Seder on their own (other than pour an extra few glasses of wine)?

Talmud, *Pesachim* 116a instructs us to ask the questions to ourselves. The reason for asking the four questions is to challenge, to inspire inquiry and action.

We are encouraging you to ask these four René Cassin Questions.

As guidance, we have directed you towards our campaign areas and ask whether the particular issue resonates as much with your 'Jewishness' as it does with ours. So we ask, ***'why this right is different to all other rights?'***

Ask these four questions of ourselves:

Q1 **'Why is this night different from all other nights? Why do we eat unleavened bread?'** It is because the rushed departure from Egypt allowed no time for the breads to rise. **What have we done to support the journeys of refugees and asylum seekers in these times?** In the desert, G-d provided water and Mana to the Israelites – are we treating asylum seekers with similar compassion?

Right: Yarlswood, Women's Immigration Removal Centre, Image by: Jess Baker



Q2

'On all other nights we eat vegetables, but on this night, we eat bitter herbs?' There is, as our collective experience has shown us, nothing more bitter than hate. **How do you understand hate crime, where have you seen it and what can we do to combat this poison?** (a good start would be to join our campaign.)

~~#CutItOut~~

I pledge to...

1. Stand for a society that is open and celebrates diversity
2. Promote respectful language in my school
3. Call out those who use stereotypes and prejudice
4. Cut it out!

Signed: _____



Above: René Cassin's 'Cut it Out' pledge

Q3

'Most nights, we do not dip our vegetables, but on Pesach we dip twice?' One answer is the symbolism of what we dip into. We dip our vegetables in saltwater, it is said, to remind us of the tears of our ancestors who were enslaved, and we dip in *charoset* to symbolise the bricks and mortar used by our ancestors in their experience of modern slavery. **What have we done in our personal and professional lives to combat modern slavery?**



Above: René Cassin's Human Rights Shabbat on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Q4

'On all other nights, we eat our meals in any manner, but on Pesach we sit together in a reclining position?' We recline at the Seder table to symbolise our freedom. The Jewish people have come a long way and 80 years on from the greatest crime in history, are flourishing in this country and abroad. We are free, but others are not. **What actions have we taken to support the Muslim Uyghurs and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities?**



Above: Supporting the Irish Travellers Community

FOUR DAUGHTERS

At Passover, the Haggadah speaks about four sons: one who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is simple, and one who is unable to ask.

Tonight, we are following in the footsteps of Miriam, Batya, Yoheved, Shifra and Puah, as role models of women who engage in social justice. They are not simply 'good, bad, guileless or silent'; but rather they represent different stages of our journeys as human beings and their roles in society. They are young and old; they are Jews of colour and white Jews; they have different sexualities and come from a range of social backgrounds; they are Mizrahi, Sephardi and Ashkenazi; some have been fighting for the rights of others for decades; and some are beginning their journeys today. These are four of them.

1 The committed daughter, whose dedication to human rights has shown itself in countless conversations, fundraisers, protests and petitions – what does she say?

“I campaign about human rights issues and want others in the Jewish community to join me. How can I raise awareness and engage my community on human rights issues?”

We can all use our Jewish voices to campaign for human rights, and what better place to start than our own community. In the words of our namesake, Monsieur René Cassin,

“human rights are an integral part of the faith and tradition of Judaism. The beliefs that man was created in the divine image, that the human family is one, and that every person is obliged to deal justly with every other person are basic sources of the Jewish commitment to human rights.”

René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, draws upon shared Jewish experience, values and teachings to engage the Jewish community in advocating for the human rights of all people. As survivors of intolerance, slavery and genocide, we believe that a 'Jewish voice for human rights' carries an authoritative weight of experience that adds force to advocacy and awareness raising efforts.

Our activities include policy analysis, advocacy, public campaigning and education, and building the capacity of activists to promote and protect human rights.

Sign your synagogue, school, youth group, or university society. up to participate in our yearly Human Rights Shabbat. Last year over 50 Jewish organisations took part.

Mobilise this daughter and those like her; She is 'the Jewish voice for human rights'.

“If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor.”

[Sefer Chassidim]

2 The skeptical daughter,

who understands the issues but thinks that all these children would be better off at school learning about the environment than following Greta Thunberg to the streets in protest – what does she say?

“Why are you wasting your time? Don’t you know that advocacy and raising awareness does nothing? You’re not going to change anything, so why bother?”

Often it can seem that our words and actions have little impact, especially when we expect individuals to carry the burden themselves. It is when we choose to shoulder the responsibility, that we inspire others to do the same.

On Friday the 6th July 2017, a woman named Christine Blasey Ford phoned her congressional representatives office to disclose that said she had been attacked by Judge Brett Kavanaugh, Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, when they had attended high school together. Christine Blasey Ford, was a scientific researcher, a mother of two sons, and passionate about surfing. She said, “With Kavanaugh’s hand over my mouth, I feared he may inadvertently kill me.” She managed to escape but the experience had haunted her ever since and she always wondered if Kavanaugh’s career success would end in the Supreme Court. When it did, she felt an obligation to speak up.

When Ford gave testimony in the Supreme Court, challenging her attacker’s nomination, she was not alone. Behind her sat women and allies who helped shoulder the responsibility that should never have been hers to carry. Tamara Burke, who founded the **#MeToo movement**, was sitting behind Ford. Burke wore trainers so she could march from the Supreme Court to the protest that was happening outside.

Ford and Burke’s individual actions were some of the many that ignited a movement. **Collectively, we are making change happen.**

René Cassin is empowering individuals to help tackle modern day slavery; with workshops and pledges, we are asking them to seek and inspire change in their communities. Whilst we cannot end modern slavery alone, we can address slavery that exists around us, *“in small spaces, close to home.”*

“it is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either.”

[Rabbi Tarfon, Pirkei Avot 2:21]

3 **The inexperienced daughter,** who reads about human rights issues in the news and on social media – what does she say?

“I want to help, but don’t know how or who to ask.”

It is easy to get overwhelmed by human rights issues and be unsure of where to start; we may be filled with doubt and anxiety over our own abilities.

Melinda Gates, co-chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, writer and campaigner, advocates for doing things that scare you, and surrounding yourself with the support and good teachers to empower and encourage you in your campaigning work.

“Just because you’ve never done something before doesn’t mean it won’t turn out fine...use fear as fuel. Embrace that jittery feeling and reframe it for yourself as the incredible, empowering feeling of pushing yourself to grow.” [1]

Greta Thunberg, climate-change activist, refers to her own sense of feeling different, and learning to see use those differences as a “superpower”. She encourages us to embrace our differences and cherish people who think outside the box, who challenge us to see things from a new perspective. In Greta’s words,

“We need these people, especially now, when we need to change things and we can’t see it just from where we are. We need to see it from a bigger perspective and from outside our current systems.” [2]

René Cassin aims to empower future generations of human rights advocates. To do that, we offer different learning opportunities, including a unique fellowship programme, which explores Jewish visions for a just society and provides individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to enhance their activism in the areas of social justice and human rights. This year’s programme is already in session but **sign up to our newsletter** for information about how to apply for next year and other ways to get involved, such as our Ambassadors Programme and work experience programme. We would be delighted to help you on your human rights journey.

“The principle of equality is of major importance. This means that everyone should be equal in a person’s eyes whether that person lacks knowledge or whether they know the whole Torah.”

[Teaching of the Ba’al Shem Tov, quoted in The Judaic Tradition p.444]

[1]Melinda Gates, ‘How Melinda Gates Learned to Overcome Fear’, in Teen Vogue (2019)

[2]Greta Thunberg, quoted in ‘Greta Thunberg Called Autism Her “Superpower” in Post Against Haters’, in Teen Vogue (2019)

4

The uninterested daughter,

who rolls her eyes and exits the conversation at the first mention of rights. What does she say?

“None of this is my fault, why are you trying to make it my responsibility? It is not my problem.”

We must not forget that the Israelites were liberated through the courageous acts of Jewish and non-Jewish women: Hebrew and Egyptian. Batya chose to rescue Moses, despite knowing he was an Israelite, despite warnings from her handmaidens and despite the orders of her father. Let us learn from her. As Rabbi Johnathan Sacks wisely said, antisemitism is dangerous

“not just to Jews but to everyone who values freedom, compassion and humanity.” [1]

It is known as the canary in the coalmine, a warning sign of *“collective breakdown.”* [2]

This too can be said of other forms of hate and marginalisation; they are all symptoms of the same disease that threatens our humanity. Therefore, it is integral that we take these lessons to heart and stand together in solidarity against all forms of hate and oppression.

The preservation of the values that human rights represent is everyone’s responsibility, and their deterioration is everyone’s problem.

René Cassin is working with The Traveller Movement to raise awareness of the harmful consequences of hateful rhetoric against minorities. Intolerance and hostility towards any community is unacceptable and stands in stark contrast to our values. We are asking individuals to pledge to:

- 1) Stand for a society that is open and celebrates diversity**
- 2) Promote respectful language at work**
- 3) Call out those who use stereotypes and prejudice.**
- 4) ~~#CutItOut~~**

“if I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? if not now, when? ”

[Hillel *Pirkei Avot*, 1:14]

[1] Rabbi Johnathan Sacks, speaking at ‘The Future of the Jewish Communities in Europe’ Conference at The European Parliament on 27th September 2016 in Brussels.

[2] Ibid.

THE TEN PLAGUES

Just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened to the Israelites, we are often faced by leaders and groups who have hardened their hearts and closed their eyes to the suffering of others.

G-d sent plagues to Egypt to challenge Pharaoh, to make him reconsider his refusal to "let our people go." They were not his people, so why should he care? It is the build-up of the pressure, created by the ten plagues inflicted on the Egyptian people and on Pharaoh personally, that makes even his hardened heart relent.

This is often the case when advocating for the rights and freedoms of others. We are met by hardened hearts and dismissal. Harvey Weinstein's defence attorney said in a recent interview, when asked if she had ever experienced sexual assault or harassment:

"no, because I would never put myself in that position... I never drank too much, I never went home with someone I didn't know... women should take precautions..." going on to argue that *"it is the women's responsibility to protect herself from sexual violence, hardening her heart to the experiences of countless women".*[1]

It is through empathy and understanding of the values we share, concepts of fairness and freedom, that we experience the story of Exodus by imagining the suffering of our ancestors as our own and drawing inspiration from them to act and share our voice on behalf of others.

In order to change the hardened hearts and minds of others, we too must persist and challenge the Pharaohs of our time who stand between us and the rights and freedoms of others. Through action and public pressure, we too can bring about change.



Above: Eleanor Roosevelt, 10th December 1948 © TheMedium

THESE ARE RENÉ CASSIN'S TEN 'PLAGUES FOR MODERN DAY PHAROHS' FOR A BETTER WORLD

1

To celebrate and advocate for universal human rights principles and protections.

2

To preserve and further the legacy of Monsieur René Cassin who helped develop human rights principles in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

3

To shine a light on human rights atrocities and honour the victims of the Holocaust by advocating for the victims of genocide today.

4

To raise awareness and mobilise support to tackle modern slavery.

5

To 'put victims at the heart' of our concerns: advocating for the human and compassionate treatment of those most vulnerable in our society.

6

To ensure those in need of refuge and protection are given safety and sanctuary in the UK.

7

To harness Jewish values of equality and justice and stand for a society that is open and celebrates diversity.

8

To work in solidarity with other marginalised and minority groups, to recognise that we face similar struggles and to find safety in our shared solidarity.

9

To empower future generations of informed and motivated human rights activists.

10

To create our own human rights legacies in the 'small places, close to home'; ensuring equality, justice and fairness in the communities we live in, for the people we pass on the street every day. *"Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."* Eleanor Roosevelt, 1958.

2ND CUP SOLIDARITY

"It's not enough, nor is it right, to only stand for ourselves. We are in this together, as Jewish and Muslim sisters, especially when the hatred is targeted at women."

Laura Marks and Julie Siddiqi, Co-Chairpersons of Nisa-Nashim



Above: Vicki Praise, René Cassin trustee, at the 'Global Day for Darfur' in 2007

3RD CUP EMPOWERMENT

“If we accept that knowledge is power, then women must acquire the same tools that men take for granted and use against women to keep them in a dependent position.”

Sally Berkovic, *Under My Hat: How Orthodox Women are Shaping the Future of Judaism*, KTAV (2019)



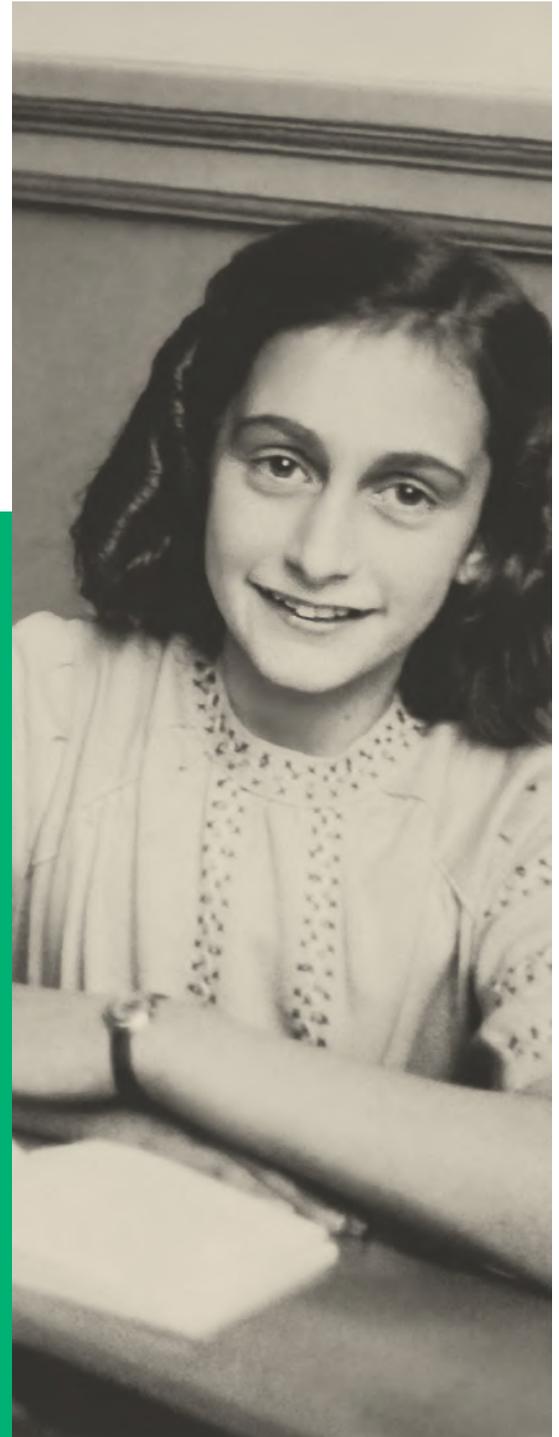
Above: René Cassin fellows visit to Strasbourg, 2011

4TH CUP LEGACY

“This is for those dedicated to justice, and firm in resistance, organising, living through slashed tyres and rising above harassment, losing friends and gaining friends; to the women with compassion, courage, strength, determination and belief - building bridges between the communities of South Africa old and new.”

Linda Berkowitz, Black Sash fieldworker and activist in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Photo: Anne Frank © Anne Frank House



ON LEGACY...

Written by Jessye Berkowitz-Werner, Campaigns Officer at René Cassin .

*The midwives,
delivering babies in Egypt and Auschwitz,
on dirt floors.*

*The mothers and their daughters,
caring for children,
the sick and vulnerable.*

*The 'camp sisters',
forming friendships,
sharing scraps of food and water.*

*The MeToo 'silence breakers',
standing together,
even when oceans apart.*

*The writers, poets and historians,
telling herstory,
and reclaiming history.*

This is all 'women's work'.

FINAL WORDS

“How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

Anne Frank

Tonight, we have **Shone a Light** on the often untold and unheard stories of women’s resistance, empowerment, solidarity, and legacy in the human rights movement.

It was women who were first to resist the oppressive and tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. Yocheved, Shifra, Puah, Miriam and Batya faced insurmountable odds, with threat of death, in the pursuit of human rights.

It is these ordinary yet determined women, who in extraordinary have led movements, fought for freedom and equality, offered sanctuary and security and continue to stand strong in the face of adversity. Few of these women are acknowledged for their contributions and the legacy they have left us.

“Much progress has been made for women and women’s rights. But rights must be fought for and conserved.

René Cassin’s vision is of a world bound by shared values, such as fairness, compassion and respect, with women leading the way. By sharing stories of heroic women, we hope to empower others to continue in their tradition. In today’s world we are faced with new challenges that threaten our vision of the future. **Nevertheless, we must persist!**”

“Gender equality is the unfinished business of our time”

*António Guterres, UN Secretary General,
IWD 2018*

MIRIAM'S CUP

By Jessye Berkowitz-Werner, Campaigns Officer at René Cassin

In the Passover story, Miriam empowers others through her courage and determination to envision a brighter future for the enslaved Israelites. It is this vision, which sees her follow her brother, Moses, along the River Nile to safety and lead the Israelites, in song, across the Red Sea, to freedom.

Her bravery and persistence, whilst often overlooked in the Passover story, did not go unnoticed by G-d, who made the miracle of 'Miriam's Well', to quench the thirst of the Israelites as they journeyed across the deserts.

'Miriam's Well' symbolised the optimism and faith of Miriam, who used it to uplift and empower the Israelites to overcome their trials in Exodus, thereby providing spiritual sustenance and oasis.

Whilst 'Elijah's Cup' symbolises the coming of the Messiah and future redemption, 'Miriam's Cup' symbolises the way she lived her life: empowering her community with her hope for the present day.

We honour Miriam's leadership and inspire others to continue in her legacy with 'Miriam's Cup.'

René Cassin invites you to pass a goblet of water, 'Miriam's Cup', around your Seder table. Encouraging guests to fill the cup with water from their own glasses, signifying the gift each person brings to the Seder.



SPEAKERS

Sally Berkovic



Sally Berkovic is a freelance writer, focusing on social issues and contemporary Jewish life. Her Book, *Under My Hat* (shortlisted for the Jewish Quarterly Prize), merges sociology, history, memoir and perceptive observations on Orthodoxy and modern life.

Dr. Agnes Grunwald-Spier



Dr. Agnes Grunwald-Spier is a survivor of the Budapest Ghetto, from where she was liberated with her mother in January 1945. Whilst she grew up with the knowledge of her survival, her dedication to Holocaust education was largely inspired by her sons with whom she wanted to be able to discuss it. Since then, Agnes has published three books on the Holocaust, including, 'Women's Experience in the Holocaust', 'The Other Schindlers' and 'Who Betrayed the Jews?'. Agnes was honoured as an 'inspirational woman' by the UK Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT), has received an MBE for her work as a founder trustee of HMDT and 'services to Holocaust awareness'. She was a member of the Board of Deputies for 15 years and has received two Honorary Doctorates for her work on the Holocaust in 2018.

Rabbi Deborah Kahn-Harris



Rabbi Deborah Kahn-Harris is one of the first woman rabbis to lead a mainstream rabbinic seminary, as Principal of Leo Baek College. She is dedicated to Jewish learning and education, completing a PhD in Bible Studies, teaching Bible and Jewish Studies at SOAS university from 2007-2009.

Linda Berkowitz



Linda Berkowitz joined the Black Sash as a fieldworker in the Eastern Cape in the late 1980s after graduating. The women's resistance organisation was formed in 1955 by a group of middle-class women in South Africa, and was recognised by Nelson Mandela in his first speech on his release, as "the conscience of white South Africa during the dark days of Apartheid". Linda now lives in Brighton, working on the advisory board for UK Jewish Film and for an international company in clinical research technologies. She considers her work at Black Sash as a formative experience which continues to inspire her pursuits.

Laura Marks



Laura Marks is the founder of Mitzvah day, an international charity which holds faith-based social action at the heart of its values. She was elected Senior Vice President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and has later gone on to become Chair of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) in 2016. Laura works as an advisor to the Muslim-led day of social action, Sadaqa Day and co-founded the Jewish Muslim Women's Network, Nisa-Nashim, earning herself an OBE for her work building interfaith relationships.

Julie Siddiqi



Julie Siddiqi is a consultant, mentor, and activist concerned with gender issues, Jewish-Muslim relations, and social action. She has over 20 years of experience in community grassroots work, founding and directing Sadaqa Day, a Muslim-led day of social action and co-founding Jewish-Muslim Women's Network, Nisa-Nashim.

ORGANISATIONS

Nisa-Nashim

Nisa-Nashim was founded by Laura Marks and Julie Siddiqi, both active members of their respective communities, after recognising the clear schism between the Jewish and Muslim communities in the UK and the underrepresentation of women's voices within these communities. This led to the creation of Nisa-Nashim, an organisation which brings together Jewish and Muslim women to promote religious harmony, to empower and encourage leadership, and benefit the wider society through programmes and initiatives.



Jewish Women's Aid

Jewish Women's Aid is the only UK-based charity offering support to Jewish women and their children who have been affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence. The organisation provides refuge for those fleeing abuse, offers a confidential freephone helpline, runs awareness-raising programmes, training, free counselling and services for children.



Black Sash

Black Sash was established in 1955 by a small group of white middle-class women. Initially the organisation was formed to expose the unconstitutional actions taken by the apartheid government, however, it soon became a non-violent platform for liberal women to resist the apartheid policies through marches, vigils and protests. The women persisted against injustice and inequality in South Africa for close to 60 years.



Above: Protest in Greenmarket Square, Cape Town, as part of the defiance campaign against apartheid, 24 August 1989



Right: Black Sash members who were part of a Five Freedoms Forum in 1989

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

An Orange on Plate for Women - And Spit out Seeds of Hate

By Susannah Heschel, March 19, 2013

Passover was high drama in my childhood. Preparations began weeks in advance, with meticulous scrubbing, shopping and organizing. Strong emotions came out in the days before the holiday, when every crumb of hametz had to be removed, and we had to tread very carefully. One mistake could bring calamity. When we finally sat down for the Seder, my mother would always claim that only women understood the Exodus, having slaved away in the kitchen for weeks and then been finally liberated when the holiday began, but too exhausted to enjoy it.

I love the Haggadah, the Hebrew text as well as all the special actions we take at the Seder; eating, drinking, reclining, discussing and debating. In my home, we immerse ourselves in the Haggadah in Hebrew and also in the centuries of commentary on each passage. While we carefully follow all the traditions, we also recognize that over the centuries, Jews have often added new customs to Passover.

At the height of the Jewish feminist movement of the 1980s, inspired by the abundant new customs expressing women's viewpoints and experiences, I started placing an orange on the Seder plate.

At an early point in the Seder, when stomachs were starting to growl, I asked each person to take a segment of the orange, make the blessing over fruit and eat the segment in recognition of gay and lesbian Jews and of widows, orphans, Jews who are adopted and all others who sometimes feel marginalised in the Jewish community.

When we eat that orange segment, we spit out the seeds to repudiate homophobia and we recognise that in a whole orange, each segment sticks together. Oranges are sweet and juicy and remind us of the fruitfulness of gay and lesbian Jews and of the homosociality that has been such an important part of Jewish experience, whether of men in yeshivas or of women in the Ezrat Nashim.

Strangely, I discovered some years ago that an urban legend was circulating: Strangers told me they placed an orange on their Seder plate because of an incident in Miami Beach in which a man angrily denounced me when I gave a lecture, saying that a woman belongs on the bimah of a synagogue no more than an orange belongs on the Seder plate.

That incident never happened! Instead, my custom had fallen victim to a folktale process in which my original intention was subverted. My idea of the orange was attributed to a man, and my goal of affirming lesbians and gay men was erased.

Moreover, the power of the custom was subverted: By now, women are on the bimah, so there is no great political courage in eating an orange, because women ought to be on the bimah.

For years, I have known about women whose scientific discoveries were attributed to men, or who had to publish their work under a male pseudonym. That it happened to me makes me realize all the more how important it is to recognize how deep and strong patriarchy remains, and how important it is for us to celebrate the contributions of gay and lesbian Jews, and all those who need to be liberated from marginality to centrality. And Passover is the right moment to ensure freedom for all Jews.

Susannah Heschel is a professor of Jewish studies at Dartmouth College.

This blog was originally published in the Forward [<https://forward.com>]

The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.

Sacrificing Motherhood: Liberating Others, Seeking Justice, and Promoting Women's Rights - Three Extraordinary Women

René Cassin's Women's Seder 2020, by Sally Berkovic [Author, *Under My Hat*]

Bertha Pappenheim: 1859 - 1936, Vienna - 'Anna O' in psychoanalytic writings, activist supporting Jewish prostitutes, writer, poet, translator of Jewish texts.

'Those who have to miss the happiness of personal motherhood may have an opportunity for spiritual motherhood if they go the quiet way of helping children and adolescents whose actual mother may have failed.'



Henrietta Szold: 1860 - 1945, USA
Established Hadassah Hospital, active in Youth Aliyah, a scholar who was the first woman to attend classes at Jewish Theological Seminary in New York

'I should have had children. Many children I would exchange everything for one child of my own.'



Sarah Schenirer: 1883 - 1935, Krakow
Founder of the Beis Ya'akov, the network of Jewish schools for girls.

'I called them my daughters to my dying day.' [When her papers were collected, they were titled *Mother in Israel*]



Protecting Pregnant Women During the Holocaust: The Story of Courageous Doctors, Nurses and Midwives

René Cassin's Women's Seder 2020, by Agnes Grunwald-Spier [Author, *Women's Experiences in the Holocaust*]

Agnes Grunwald-Spier was a baby in the Holocaust. Born in Budapest on 14 July 1944, she and her mother sent to the Budapest Ghetto in November 1944 and were liberated by the Russians in January 1945. Agnes was only 6 months old and was very fortunate to have survived.



Above: Agnes and her parents in 1947, shortly before emigrating to the UK

The Nazis' genocidal ambitions included the prevention and forced termination of Jewish children and foetuses. Jewish women in ghettos and camps were targeted. Avraham Tory, secretary of the Kovno Ghetto, wrote:

"The Gestapo issued an order: pregnancy in the Ghetto is forbidden. Every pregnancy must be terminated. An eighth- or ninth-month pregnancy may be completed. From September on, giving birth is strictly forbidden. Pregnant women will be put to death."

Dr Joseph Luntz, a prisoner at Dachau concentration camp, protected pregnant women and their families from certain death by inducing births in pregnant women. Luntz, and others, managed to smuggle instruments and rugs from the hospital to carry out the procedures.



Left:
Dr. Perl in
Auschwitz

Dr Gisella Perl Gisella was imprisoned in Auschwitz, where she was forced to work under the supervision of the infamous Dr Mengele, also known as 'Dr Death'. She was ordered to report pregnant women to Mengele, who would have them sent to another camp. Or realising the inevitable fate of these women, Perl performed secret abortion under the veil of night, without instruments or medicines. Dr. Gisella survived Auschwitz and made it to New York, where she became an expert on infertility with a practice at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.



Left: Dr. Perl
at her practice
in New York

ABOUT RENÉ CASSIN

We celebrate the timeless and universal nature of human rights laws and protections, which were shaped by the distinctive values and experiences of the Jewish people. In particular, we work to preserve and further the legacy of our namesake, Monsieur René Cassin, to the development of contemporary human rights principles in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Our Vision

René Cassin's vision is of a world where every one fully enjoys all their human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in which members of the Jewish community are actively engaged in promoting and protecting these rights.

Our Mission

Our mission is to promote and protect the universal rights of all people, drawing on Jewish experience and values. **We aim to:**

- Remake a compelling case for human rights values
- Campaign for change in defined human rights areas
- Lead and grow a group of committed Jewish human rights advocates
- Maximise our capacity to work effectively

Our Values

Solidarity - Human rights belong to us all, so we stand for the rights of everyone, everywhere.

Judaism - We are inspired by Jewish values and experience.

Collaboration - Our work is not isolated, but intertwined with the efforts of others, so we nurture and mobilise relationships.

Empowerment - We turn today's Jewish activists into tomorrow's leaders.

Monsieur René Cassin - We are determined to create a legacy worthy of our namesake.

Our Thematic Priorities

'Breaking the chains' - campaigning to end modern day slavery and human trafficking.

'Cut it Out' - campaigning to tackle hate crime.

"Innocent and vulnerable, but still behind bars" - demanding an end to the indefinite detention of migrants and asylum seekers.

'Learning the lessons of the Holocaust' - protecting human rights safeguards in the UK.

Keep in Touch

 [rene.cassin](https://www.instagram.com/rene.cassin)

 [René Cassin](https://www.facebook.com/René.Cassin)

 [@Rene_Cassin](https://twitter.com/Rene_Cassin)

 www.renecassin.org

GET INVOLVED

We are a small charity, but we are effective and successful because of the commitment of our supporters. Add your voice to our call for human rights for all by getting involved in our work:

Campaign Teams

These small teams meet regularly to discuss latest developments and review our strategy in our key campaigns:

- **Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking**
- **Asylum Detention**
- **Discrimination against Gypsies, Roma and Travellers**
- **Defending the Human Rights Act**

For more information, contact us via info@renecassin.org

Internships

Interns play a vital part in our work – researching the issues, writing reports and contributing to the day-to-day running of the charity. In return, interns get invaluable practical experience of working in an organisation at the cutting edge of some of the UK's most pressing human rights issues.

For more information, visit www.renecassin.org/get-involved/internships

Work Experience

"There are so many groups whose human rights are being exploited. René Cassin helps these people and that's why I'm proud to have worked here."

So said one of our work experience students last summer. If you are a sixth former and would like to help René Cassin's work – and get an insight into the workings of a small charity at the same time, then contact us for more information via info@renecassin.org

Volunteer

If you have specific skills – such as communications, IT, fundraising and design – and would like to volunteer with us, please contact us via info@renecassin.org

Support our Work

We rely heavily on the commitment of our supporters for the funds to continue this vital work. Please help René Cassin protect and promote the rights of some of our most marginalised and vulnerable neighbours.

You can make a one-off or regular donation to René Cassin via our website at www.renecassin.org/do

We rely on the generosity of our supporters for the funds to continue our vital work. You can make a one-off or regular donation to René Cassin via our website at www.renecassin.org/donate, or we can help you set up a donation by phone on **020 36215464**

renecassin.org

