

## **Women of the Wall Program- For Adults (by Liz Piper-Goldberg)**

### **Touchstone Text:**

In Parshat Va'era, God proclaims, "*I am Adonai. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your G-d,*" (6:6-7). These verses are the root of G-d's redemptive promise to the Jewish people.

### **Goals:**

1. Program Participants (PP's) will understand the crucial role that women have held in defending religious and civil rights throughout history;
2. PP's will familiarize themselves with the women's-only monthly prayer group, Women of the Wall and the struggle to attain freedom of religion in Israel;
3. PP's will develop personal opinions on religious and civil rights in both America and Israel.

### **Objectives:**

1. PP's will familiarize themselves with significant women throughout history who have been leaders in the fight for religious and civil rights;
2. PP's will be able to articulate their thoughts on religious and civil rights issues in Israel today, and express opinions on their connections to the Kotel & Women of the Wall.

### **Enduring Understanding:**

From the time of Torah to the present women have been essential leaders in the fight for religious freedom and civil equality.

### **Materials:**

- Multiple copies of the list of significant women throughout history (number of PP's will determine the exact number of copies needed. Every PP doesn't need a copy, but there should be a sufficient number of copies so that every few PP's have a list to look at)
- As many small sheets of paper as PP's (for their notes for the Kotel)
- As many pens or pencils as PP's.
- Multiple copies of the prayer for peace in the State of Israel (Again, the number of PP's will determine the exact number of copied needed).

### **People Needed:**

- One Program Leader (PL) responsible for the introduction, facilitation and closure of program. (This person is ultimately responsible for the overall running of the program.)
- If this program is run with one class of adult students, then one PL is sufficient.
- If the program is run with more than one class of students, a number of group leaders should be assigned so that PP's can learn in groups of no more than 15.
- The number of PP's involved in this program will determine the number of GL's required. (Remember- if the program is run with just one class of PP's, one PL is enough to lead the entire program)

### **Space Needed:**

- If this program is run with just one class of PP's, one room is sufficient.
- If the program is run with more than one class of PP's, numerous rooms will be required- provide enough rooms for PP's to learn in groups of no more than 15.

### **Time Table:**

- 00:00-00:10 Introduction by Program Leader (Introduction script found in appendices)
- 00:10-00:50\* Women of the Wall video played (don't know actual length of video)
- 00:50-01:10 Group brainstorm & creation of list significant women throughout history
- 01:10-01:25 PP's read the biographical info provided about history's key women
- 01:25-01:40 Discussion on Women of the Wall, the Kotel and civil & religious rights
- 01:40-01:45 Conclusion- PP's compose wishes for the Women of the Wall and recite prayer for peace in the State of Israel

### **Detailed Procedure:**

- 00:00-00:10 Introduction by Program Leader** (Intro script found in appendices)
  - PL can either read document to group, or allow PP's to read it aloud
- 00:10-00:50\* Women of the Wall video played** (*don't know actual length of video*)
- 00:50-01:10 Group brainstorm & creation of list history's significant women**
  - PP's now have time to brainstorm together and create a list of significant women throughout history who have been leaders in the fight for religious freedom and civil rights.
  - Many people may have stories to share of "unsung" heroes who fought for religious and civil equality.
- 01:10-01:25 PP's read the biographical information provided about key women throughout history**
  - A copy of the list of biographical information on key women throughout history can be found in the appendices.
  - PP's should take turns reading the info on these key women aloud.
- 01:25-01:40 Discussion on Women of the Wall, the Kotel and civil/religious rights**
  - PL will use the 'Discussion Guide' (copy found in appendices) to help lead the discussion and engage PP's in thought provoking dialogue.
- 01:40-01:45 Conclusion- PP's compose wishes for the Women of the Wall and recite prayer for peace in the State of Israel**
  - The PL should lead the recitation of the prayer while encouraging all PP's to join along.

### **Appendices**

- 1) *Introduction to Program (read by Program Leader)* p.3
- 2) *List of Biographical Information on Key Women Throughout History* p.4
- 3) *Discussion Guide (for Program Leader's reference)* p.7
- 4) *Prayer for peace in the state of Israel* p.8

**1) Introduction to Program (read by Program Leader)**

- Program Leader can choose to either read the following document to her/his group, or pass it around to allow a few PP's to take turns reading paragraphs out loud.

“Beginning with the Book of Exodus, throughout history, and to this day, women have served as agents of change and voices of redemption. In fulfilling this sacred role from the time of the Torah to the present, women have been essential leaders in the fight for religious freedom. The current series of events surrounding the Women of the Wall, a women’s only, non-denominational monthly prayer group, presents us with an opportunity and even an obligation to support those fighting for the religious rights of women in Israel. These events are reminders that while we are all Jews with differing approaches to ritual and halacha, we are tied together through shared devotion to the One God and a shared history.

In recent months, the Israeli police have increased pressure on Women of the Wall, a prayer group that meets at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. The late 2009 arrest of Nofrat Frenkel for wearing a prayer shawl, or tallit, while praying at the Wall, and this month's interrogation of Anat Hoffman, who serves as both director of our counterpart, the Israel Religious Action Center, and leader of Women of the Wall, are only two examples of this intensified harassment.

The Woman of the Wall have echoes of Rosa Parks in this country. They are a modern day example of women leading the way towards struggling for and defending religious equality in Israel.

The Western Wall, also known as the Kotel, is a most important historical and spiritual place for Jews. The Western Wall was originally part of the Second Temple, built by King Herod in the first century of the Common Era. When the rest of the Temple was destroyed by the Romans and the Jewish people were sent out of the Land of Israel into exile, the Western Wall remained as a symbol of religious freedom.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism, said of the Western Wall, *‘Throughout the generations, the Kotel has been a source of inspiration to Jews everywhere. It is a concrete symbol of our love for Jerusalem and our common Jewish destiny.’* Today, the Western Wall is like a synagogue – a holy place of prayer and gathering for Jews from around the world.

The extent to which non-Orthodox religious freedom is limited by the authorities is alarming. As such, the Reform Movement is urging the Israeli government to enforce the law at the Kotel in an equal and just manner, and to end harassment of women gathering there for prayer. We also urge Israeli authorities allow gatherings for civic and religious purposes by all responsible Jewish groups in the plaza area of the Wall, as was customary in the past.”

## **2) List of Biographical Information on Key Women Throughout History**

### **1) Miriam the Prophet:**

- Name means “one who loves or is loved by God”
- Older sister of Moses
- Suggested to the Pharaoh’s daughter who found Moses in the river that a Hebrew woman should be found as a nurse for the baby
- Led the Hebrew women in song and dance after Pharaoh’s army was drowned in the Red Sea

### **2) Deborah the Prophet:**

- Was a judge. She rendered her judgments from under a palm tree. Wife of Lapidot
- Asked Barak, a military commander, to attack the oppressive king of Canaan, Jabin. Barak said he would only go if Deborah came with him. She did, and the Israelites won the battle, just as she had prophesized.

### **3) Rosa Parks:**

- On December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, Parks, age 42, refused to obey a bus driver’s order that she give up her seat to make room for a white passenger.
- Her actions sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- Was a secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP
- Died in 2005 at the age of 92
- Ask teens what they know about Rosa Parks and why what she did was so important. Encourage the students to talk about how they feel about what she did and why she is considered a hero.

### **4) Susan B. Anthony:**

- Was born the 2nd of 8 children in a strict Quaker home in Adams, MA
- Played a pivotal role in the 19th century women's rights movement to introduce women's suffrage (voting rights) into the United States
- In her early years, she helped support the temperance movement to ban alcohol
- In 1869, she and Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded the National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA), an organization dedicated to gaining women's suffrage.

### **5) Lily Ledbetter:**

- A supervisor at Goodyear Tire and Rubber’s plant in Alabama, who was paid significantly less than her male counterparts at the company. She sued the company for unfair pay.
- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 was enacted by the 111th United States Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama on January 29, 2009.
- It amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 stating that the 180-day statute of limitations for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination resets with each new discriminatory paycheck.
- The law was a direct answer to Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., a U.S. Supreme Court decision holding that the statute of limitations for presenting an equal-pay

lawsuit begins at the date the pay was agreed upon, not at the date of the most recent paycheck.

**6) Miep Gies** (who died earlier this week at the age of 100):

- Was one of the Dutch citizens who hid Anne Frank and her family from the Nazis during World War II
- Discovered and preserved Anne Frank's diary after the Franks were arrested
- Unsuccessfully tried to bribe an Austrian Nazi officer to release her friends after they were discovered
- In 1994, was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany; in 1995, she received the Yad Vashem medal; and in 1997, she was knighted by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands.

**7) Helen Keller:**

- Contracted a fever when she was 19 months old, and emerged both blind and deaf
- Was instructed by Anne Sullivan, who taught her to communicate by using sign language into Helen's hand
- Was the first deafblind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree
- Wrote an autobiography, *The Story of My Life*

**8) Abigail Adams:**

- Wife of John Adams, the 2nd president of the U.S.A.
- Mother of John Quincy Adams, the 6th president of the U.S.A.
- Wrote many letters of advice to John Adams while he was in Philadelphia during the Continental Congresses
- Was very politically active when she was First Lady in Washington, D.C.
- Was an advocate for women's and slaves' rights

**9) Nellie Bly:**

- Pioneered women's roles in journalism and investigative journalism.
- Wrote an expose after going undercover into the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island in New York
- Made a trip around the world in emulation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*

**10) Eleanor Roosevelt:**

- Wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Was the first First Lady to hold weekly press conferences and started writing a newspaper column, "My Day"
- Held 348 press conferences over the span of her husband's twelve-year presidency, promoting humanitarian causes, such as unemployment, poverty, education, rural life, and the role of women in society.

**11) Sojourner Truth:**

- Born Isabella Baumfree, a slave in Swartekill, New York
- Was an African-American abolitionist and women's rights activist

- Her best-known speech, “Ain't I a Woman?”, was delivered in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio

### **12) Golda Meir:**

- Was the 4th Prime Minister of Israel, and the 1st female Prime Minister of Israel
- Was Prime Minister during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, the Six Day War, and the Yom Kippur War
- While prime minister, she spent much of her time developing support for Israel by meeting with western leaders

### **13) Anat Hoffman: The Israel Religious Action Center's Executive Director**

Anat Hoffman is a major leader for social justice in Israel. She is perhaps best known for never giving-up, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Anat was born and raised in Jerusalem and she served in the Jerusalem City Council for 14 years, leading the opposition to the right wing and ultra-Orthodox administration. Ms. Hoffman represented the Civil Rights and Peace Movement on the Jerusalem City Council. She specialized in attending to the details of municipal administration, where big decisions are often hidden away in the fine print. In doing so, she became a familiar figure in the Supreme Court, as she pursued her quest for information that the bureaucracy preferred to keep secret.

She was a founding member of Women of the Wall and continues to be a tireless advocate for freedom of religion and women's rights. She served on the Boards of the Israel Women's Network, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, and many other Israeli organizations for social change.

In a city where women are traditionally consigned to a subordinate role, Ms. Hoffman led in the battles for the right of women to pray at the Western Wall and for women's equal pay for equal work. Ms. Hoffman pushed relentlessly for the provision of adequate municipal services for the more than 200,000 Palestinian residents of Jerusalem. She has fought long and hard to see that the powerful Orthodox bloc in the City Council does not dictate lifestyle choices for the secular population of Jerusalem. Significantly, too, in a city split by religious differences, she has fought tirelessly for religious pluralism.

In 2002, Anat Hoffman became the Executive Director of the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), the legal and advocacy arm of the Reform Movement in Israel. IRAC's goals are to promote the values of religious pluralism, human equality, social justice and religious tolerance in Israel and to strengthen the public standing of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform), its congregations and institutions and to protect their rights. During Anat's tenure, she expanded IRAC's mission to go beyond the courts and the Knesset, and to engage in helping people directly through social action.

### **3) Discussion Guide**

- PL should use the following document to help guide the discussion on Women of the Wall, the Kotel and the issues of civil and religious rights in both the US and Israel.

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#### **Essential Discussion Questions:**

- So can anyone tell me who the Women of the Wall are?
- What is the relationship between the issues presented by the Women of the Wall and the Civil Rights Movement?
- Why should I care about the Women of the Wall?
- What can I do to support the Women of the Wall?
- What contributions have women made to the fight for religious and civil rights throughout history?
- In what ways are the issues that the Women of the Wall are facing similar to the issues faced by the American Civil Rights Movement?

#### **Briefly discuss the history of Jews in the Civil Rights Movement.**

- Many Jewish Americans went to Mississippi in 1964 to fight for civil rights in what became known as the "Freedom Summer." Others helped register African American voters in various southern states.

- Further, much of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act were written in the building that is home to the Reform Movement's Religious Action Center, which has long been a hub of civil rights activity.

- Several early presidents of the NAACP were Jews, including Kivie Kaplan, a former Honorary Vice-Chair of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (now the Union for Reform Judaism). Currently, Rabbi David Saperstein, the RAC's Director, is the sole white member of the National Board of the NAACP.

#### **Consider the parallels between the Israelite struggle for freedom and the struggle of African Americans.**

- First, there are common elements of enslavement, the desire for liberty, the role and importance of leadership within the community, the tendency within the ruling class to resist the forces of social change, and the ultimate triumph of justice.

In Parshat Va'era, God proclaims, "*I am Adonai. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your G-d,*" (6:6-7). These verses, well known from the Pesach seder, are the root of G-d's redemptive promise to the Jewish people.

#### **Essential Questions**

- What is the relationship between the issues of Women of the Wall and Israelite struggle for freedom as depicted in Shemot, Exodus?
- What is my role regarding the issues presented by Women of the Wall?
- Why is the Kotel a sacred place for Jews? What is my connection the Kotel?

### **3) Prayer for peace in the state of Israel**

*Oh Heavenly One, Protector and Redeemer of Israel, bless the State of Israel which marks the dawning of hope for all who seek peace. Shield it beneath the wings of Your love; spread over it the canopy of Your peace; send Your light and truth to all who lead and advise, guiding them with Your good counsel. Establish peace in the land and fullness of joy for all who dwell there.*