TZEDEK, TZEDEK (TASHIR V') TIRDOF:

Music in Doing Justice, Part 1

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סיפורי מוסיקה

STORIES OF MUSIC

A PROGRAM OF THE LOWELL MILKEN CENTER FOR MUSIC OF AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE
AT THE UCLA HERB ALPERT SCHOOL OF MUSIC

This two-part lesson explores the use of music in the work of doing justice. It will explore three facets of that work:

- railing and protesting against injustice in real time: The Power of Protest
- teaching and mobilizing against injustice: The Power of Ritual
- advocating and galvanizing against injustice: The Power of Performance

The lesson, Part 1, will highlight:

- several key protests against injustice in American history, music that propelled and sustained them, and Jewish involvement in both;
- (especially) the era of the civil rights movement (hereafter, CRM), with other eras explored as well;
- how the Passover seder serves as an example of and model for the revisioning, refocusing, and utilization of rituals/liturgical moments in service of social justice values and concerns;
- Jewish involvement in many aspects of most entertainment genres and moments that served to reflect and/or forward the work of justice.

The lesson, Part 2, will highlight:

- several key moments in the history of musical performance, especially in the era of the CRM, and how music served them or responded to them;
- Jewish involvement in many aspects of most entertainment genres and moments that served to reflect and/or forward the work of justice;
- how Jewish creativity continues to draw from and motivate the call to social justice.

What This Lesson Does and Does Not

This lesson on *tzedek*, justice, is structured around and focuses upon the pillars of live protest, ritual, and musical performance. These three areas are not separate; there is much overlap. To help buttress this claim, this lesson often adduces material during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. In order to accomplish this, this lesson:

- does not organize all material chronologically;
- does not distinguish the types of justice (often: distributive, procedural, retributive, and restorative).
- explores *tzedek*, justice and does not introduce related Jewish concepts
- does not focus on one movement or type of approach to Judaism.Such distinctions were not significant for most American Jews through and beyond the first half of the twentieth century. Many Jews felt connected to their Jewishness living among other Jews freely and through concern for the common good and social justice. [***NOTE:*** See Resource Guide, Works Consulted, Gurock: 2000.] Instructors may wish to supplement the lesson by bringing in statements from one's movement and local social justice initiatives to educe the lesson's Enduring Understandings and to bring greater immediacy and intimacy to the lesson's ideas.
- selectively explores key figures and musical works. Instructors can call attention to other artists and/or musical works.

Timing This Lesson

This Stories of Music lesson has two parts and is designed to be presented over four sessions, two sessions for each part, but it can easily be used for more than four sessions.

- **For those completing the lesson over four sessions**, we have marked where the instructor might break each part, giving bullet points that can help review the opening session of each part, to be given before the break and/or when resuming after the break.
- **If electing to teach this in more than four sessions**, the instructor will need to decide where the breaks will best occur.
- **If completing this material in one session**, the instructor will have to decide what material to omit and yet still transmit the essence of the lesson. This can be done with some preplanning.

How many sessions will be best for your cohort can depend upon many factors, including but not limited to the length of your session, the number of learners, how much of the content you wish to include, the number of videos and audios you might include and how much of each you want your cohort to experience, and how many of the interactive elements (e.g. discussions, pair shares) to include and how long to allow for each.

Preparation

I. Content

We have built a rich lesson for you, so some preplanning will be necessary and useful. We have again provided a substantial number of links, in order to provide biographical, historical, and cultural context. Some of this will serve as helpful background material for the instructor; some may be worthy of incorporation into the presentation. We have provided more music than usual, and we have even provided some extra material that appears only in the Resource Guide (and, if appropriate, in the Student Worksheet), but not here — although we annotate here when that occurs, so that you can go to the Resource Guide to see that material.

The instructor will also want to consider time management, and may need to make decisions about breadth (presenting excerpts of musical selections to give attention to context, interactivity, et al) versus depth (presenting all of the musical selections and limiting contextualization and interactivity). For this, each instructor will want to gain clarity for themself regarding their goals for their particular cohort.

II. Your Cohort

We Jews have had a wide breadth of lived experience and have lived in many places. It is quite possible that you have some people in your class who have been activists for important causes, including civil rights. Indeed, some may possibly have been a party or witness to some events here. If so, think of those people as good resources, and definitely check in with them in advance to see if they feel comfortable sharing personally in some way. Even if they do, please honor not merely their perseverance and achievements, but their bravery: the work of social justice is not always easy or fun, and often exacts a toll. Some may have had traumatizing experiences.

Finally, we highly recommend that the class sings together (at least) one song per session. Whether the song is un/familiar, the singing together gives a flavor of the experience and gestalt of these songs in a way that watching a video cannot, helps them to take a step in appreciating the doing of social justice,

builds the class community, and is just fun! This can even be done in online formats, whether only one person is singing, or taking turns unmuting willing participants.

Enduring Understandings

- Peaceful protests for a worthy end, in all forms (marches, sit-ins, etc.), are embedded within American life. Jews have often supported the goals of these marches, and have supported these marches in various ways; music has often been a major component of peaceful protests.
- Many rituals in Jewish life express hope for a better day wherein human dignity will be upheld. Some of these rituals go further, and give examples of social injustice to motivate us to consider social justice needs today. Many of these rituals include music to educate, inspire, and/or galvanize a wider public.
- In the entertainment world, Jews have often sought to raise important issues of social justice, educating the public and even galvanizing them to act. Music is often part of this experience.

Essential Questions

- What factors and events have helped propel a concern for dignity and civil rights in the United States? What factors and events have weighed against this?
- What factors and events have helped propel a concern for dignity and civil rights within the American Jewish community? What factors and events operated against this concern?
- How can the Passover Haggadah and Seder be revisioned in light of specific civil rights (and other social justice) concerns?
- How does music support and propel social justice efforts?

Lesson Outline

[Part 1]

I. Prelude/Introduction: The Prophetic Voice ("*Olam Chesed Yibaneh*"; *The Gates of Justice,* IIIb. Chorale)

II. Music and Protest

- **A. The Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913 ("She's Good Enough to Be Your Baby's Mother and She's Good Enough to Vote with You")**
  1. Background on the women's suffrage movement
  2. Background to the Procession/March
  3. Result of the Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913
- **B. Yiddish Culture, Workers Rights, and Economic Justice *("Arbeter Ring Himnen")***
- **C. The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**
  1. Background to the March
  2. The March: Rabbi Prinz' speech; Peter, Paul and Mary; Rabbi Miller's prayer; Bob Dylan ("Blowin' in the Wind," "When the Ship Comes In")
  3. Result of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

III. Ritual and Protest

- **A. The Role of Ritual in Doing Social Justice Work**
- **B. The Freedom Seder ("We Shall Overcome")**
- **C. Seder Sisters: The Women's Seder ("Miriam's Song")**

IV. What We've Learned Today: Weaving Our Threads Together

V. Coda/Conclusion of Part 1 ("Freedom: Mi Chamocha")

[Part 2]

VI. Entr'acte/Introduction ("Somewhere")

VII. Performance and Protest

- **A. The Concert Stage ("It Ain't Necessarily So" from *Porgy and Bess*; *The Gates of Justice*, excerpts)**
- **B. The Broadway Theater ("Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" from *Americana*; "No More" from *Golden Boy*)**
- **C. The Jazz Venue ("Strange Fruit")**
- **D. The Folk Music Revival Performance: Phil Ochs ("Here's to the State of Mississippi")**

VIII. Music and Social Justice Havruta

- A. *The Gates of Justice* (excerpts)
- B. "The Eagle and Me" (from *Bloomer Girl*)
- C. "Long Ago, Far Away" (Bob Dylan)

IX. Contemporary Jewish Music of Social Justice

- A. The Concert Hall (*I Will Not Remain Silent*, Mvt. 2 by Bruce Adolphe)
- B. Broadway ("I Know Where I've Been" from *Hairspray* by Marc Shaiman)
- C. Reggae ("Go Down, Moses" by Alan Eder and Friends)
- D. Experimental Hip Hop ("Chapter 319" by clipping.)
- E. Klezmer ("Mermaid Avenue" by Woody Guthrie and The Klezmatics)
- F. Hanukkah ("Light Is Returning"/"*Banu Choshech*" performed by Noah Aronson and Banot)

X. What We've Learned (Weaving Our Threads Together)

XI. Outro ("One Day" by Matisyahu, performed by Koolulam)

THE LESSON

TITLE SLIDE

PLAY (as people enter): "*Olam Chesed Yibaneh*" (Rabbi Menachem Creditor, 2015)

I. PRELUDE/INTRO

SLIDE 1

The song you heard as you were entering was "*Olam Chesed Yibaneh*." The song was written by Rabbi Menachem Creditor, who was inspired by the phrase in Psalm 89:3, "*olam chesed yibaneh*," "let a world of loving kindness be built." The Hebrew phrase is passive, and Rabbi Creditor balances this with an English that is very active: "I will," "You will," "We will," and "God will" — we will all together build a world of love. Yet, as Rabbi Creditor indicates, it begins with you and me.

DISCUSS: Take 2–3 responses to the following question.

So, *nu*, how do we build a world of lovingkindness?

There may not be one definitive answer to this question, but the impulse to build a better, kinder, more loving world has always been an aspiration of Judaism. That impulse is the impulse to do social justice. In Judaism, the doing of social justice is a prominent category of mitzvah, understood as both an imperative and a responsibility that we all carry, both as individuals and as a community. The book of Deuteronomy (16:20) adjures: "*Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*," "Justice, justice, you must pursue."

The Prophetic Voice

Much of the biblical emphasis on *tzedek*, social justice, is found in Nevi'im, the Prophets. The voice of the prophets is a call to social justice. In the last century among Jewish religious groups, the Reform Movement has emphasized the prophetic voice and social justice. Yet the prophetic call to justice has been a persistent voice within the Tradition. While the Torah forms the foundation of the Bible, the Nevi'im have been placed at its center. Moreover, while in the practice of Shabbat and major holy days we often focus on the reading of the Torah, we also read a haftarah, a selection from one of the Nevi'im, prophets. This feature of Jewish experience indicates that it is not merely the Torah, but the interaction of the Torah with the prophetic voice that we are meant to hear.

In that vein, let's look at an excerpt from one haftarah now:

[***NOTE:*** The instructor might chant the Hebrew or invite someone they know who can do so if they would. If no one can chant the haftarah, read the Hebrew and English or just the English aloud.]

Isaiah 58:6–7, 9, and 12

הֲלֹוא זֶה֙ צ֣וֹם אֶבְחָרֵ֔הוּ פַּתֵּ֖חַ חַרְצֻבּ֣וֹת רֶ֑שַׁע הַתֵּ֥ר אֲגַדּ֖וֹת מוֹטָ֑ה וְשַׁלַּ֤ח רְצוּצִים֙ חָפְשִׁ֔ים וְכָל־
מוֹטָ֖ה תְּנַתֵּֽקוּ׃ הֲלֹוא֙ פָּרֹ֣ס לָרָעֵ֔ב לַחְמֶ֑ךָ וַעֲנִיִּ֥ים מְרוּדִ֖ים תָּבִ֣יא בָ֑יִת
כִּֽי־תִרְאֶ֤ה עָרֹם֙ וְכִסִּיתֹ֔ו וּמִבְּשָׂרְךָ֖ לֹ֥א תִתְעָלָֽם׃ אָ֣ז תִּקְרָ֤א וַיהוָה֙ יַעֲנֶ֔ה תְּשַׁוֵּ֖ע וְיֹאמַ֑ר
הִנֵּ֣נִי אִם־תָּסִ֣יר מִתּוֹכְךָ֗ מוֹטָה֙ שִׁלַּ֣ח אֶצְבַּ֔ע וְדַבֶּר־אָ֖וֶן׃ וּבָנ֣וּ מִמְּךָ֔ חָרְבֹ֖ות עוֹלָ֑ם
מוֹסְדֵ֣י דֹור־וָדֹ֔ור תְּקוֹמֵ֖ם וְקֹרָ֣א לְךָ֔ גֹּדֵ֥ר פֶּ֖רֶץ מְשֹׁובֵ֥ב נְתִיבֹ֖ות לָשָֽׁבֶת׃

No, this is the fast that I desire: unlock of the fetters of wickedness,
untie the cords of injustice, set the oppressed free. Break off every yoke!
This is the fast that I desire: share your bread with the hungry,
take the poor into your homes, clothe the naked. Don't ignore others!...

When you do this, God will respond. When you cry out, God will answer, "I am here" — but only If you banish injustice from your midst; only if you send away the menacing hands and twisted speech....Then people from your midst shall rebuild ancient ruins. You shall restore foundations laid generations ago. Then you shall be called "Repairer of Fallen Walls, Restorer of Lanes for Habitation."

QUICK QUESTION: (call out loud if you know!)

Does anyone know the holy day on which we read this haftarah?

This haftarah is from Yom Kippur. We often think of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement,

- as a day when we seek atonement for wrongs we committed during the past year;
- as a day for continued thinking about our inner work, our *teshuvah*;
- as a day of reconciliation between ourselves and God or between ourselves and those people in our lives; and/or
- as a day of abstaining from eating, drinking, work, and pleasures to concentrate on more weighty concerns.

Yet the haftarah, read when we are a good two-thirds through the holy day, asserts that Yom Kippur is a day for social justice, a day for committing ourselves to ending oppression, hunger, homelessness, and poverty. We are asked on Yom Kippur to think about *tzedek* at the very moment we are starting to feel at least a pang of deprivation.

DISCUSS:

- **Why might we read these words as a haftarah two-thirds through the fast day and not as a reading at Kol Nidre when Yom Kippur is beginning?**
- **The haftarah tells us that we "shall rebuild ancient ruins" and "restore foundations." In terms of social justice, what might those ruins and foundations be?**
- **If we look at Yom Kippur as having an emphasis on social justice, how might we interpret other elements of the day in terms of *tzedek*, social justice? [*NOTE:* Participants might think in terms of fasting, the theme of reconciliation, the idea of atonement, the image of the gate closing, the final shofar blasts, Martyrology, et al.]**

The Yom Kippur Haftarah and American Judaism

One way that American synagogues have made the haftarah of Yom Kippur more meaningful is by running a food drive. The food collected is often given to a local agency which distributes the food to the food-insecure in the local vicinity. Indeed, the Conservative Movement has encouraged all of its congregations to do so by branding the effort as Project Isaiah, honoring Isaiah's words in the day's haftarah as the inspiration for our own acts of justice.

Isaiah 58: A Musical Setting

SLIDE 2

While the haftarah cantillation may be the oldest musical setting for Isaiah 58, it is not the only one. After the death of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (hereafter, MLK), jazz great Dave Brubeck wrote a cantata entitled *The Gates of Justice*. He excerpts Isaiah 58, employing the same four verses of the haftarah that we just discussed. As you listen, please notice the message of this piece, and how the music interacts with the words.

PLAY: *The Gates of Justice*, IIIb. Chorale [***NOTE:*** Some instructors may wish to play Anselm Rothschild's setting of Isaiah 58:5–8 (sung here by Cantor David Berger). If so, the instructor should only use the first discussion question.]

DISCUSS:

- **What is the message of this movement of *The Gates of Justice*? How does the music interact with the words of Isaiah?**
- **Based on this selection, how does *The Gates of Justice* react to the death of MLK?**

Isaiah's words are part of what is called "the prophetic voice," the call to conscience that motivates us to do the work of social justice. It is the call that has inspired synagogues to food and clothing drives and has inspired artists like Dave Brubeck to write *The Gates of Justice*. It is the call of *Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof.*

It is a call to action, through protest and art (in all forms of both!), to make this world a better place. As the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) passed at its 1999 Pittsburgh Convention:

> *"We are obligated to pursue tzedek, justice and righteousness, and to narrow the gap between the affluent and the poor, to act against discrimination and oppression, to pursue peace, to welcome the stranger...and to redeem those in physical, economic and spiritual bondage. In so doing, we reaffirm social action and social justice as a central prophetic focus of traditional... Jewish belief and practice."*

The artists — composers, lyricists, musicians — that you will encounter in this lesson have all pursued this call to righteous, transformative behavior, to *tzedek*, that comes from their Jewishness (whether directly expressed or not). It is a reminder that Judaism does not intend for Jewish living to be a pastime but, rather, something of consequence. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, known for his civil rights and human rights activism, asserted, "Know that every deed counts, that every word is power...Above all, remember that you must build your life as if it were a work of art." The artists and stories of this lesson are role models for us, inspiring us so to live.

II. MUSIC AND PROTEST

SLIDE 3

One way for people to have their voices heard, to speak truth to power, to redress specific grievances, and to advocate for justice is to stage a public protest. Such a public protest can take many forms: rallies, sit-ins, boycotts, walkouts, picket lines, and marches are all common. [***NOTE:*** For a list of 198 forms of nonviolent action, see here.] Protests can also incorporate speeches, music, chanting, performance art, poetry, the use of symbols, holding signs, and confronting people. Often the choice of venue is significant. They may take place at sites of historic significance, near monuments or other artifacts that are relevant to the cause, or near to where people in power may take note.

DISCUSS:

- **When you think of a public protest, what comes to mind?**
- **What kinds of public protest are effective in promoting a cause, and what kinds are ineffective? [*NOTE:* See here for Dr. Eran Halperin's "What Kinds of Protests Actually Work?," *Psychology Today*, November 21, 2020. Dr. Halperin is a professor of psychology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.]**

Pair Share or Discuss:

- **If you have attended or seen (e.g. on TV) a public protest where music was a component, please share the nature of the event. What was it? What was the music? Did someone perform or did everyone sing? What impact do you think it had upon you and others in attendance (whether live or not)? [*NOTE:* This is a good place to bring in protests in recent times, e.g. the deaths of George Floyd or Tyre Nichols, Women's Marches across the country, teachers protesting work conditions, truck drivers at the Canadian-U.S. border]**

Among the many ways to protest in public, marches have a long history in this country. The word "march" has not always been used; terms such as "procession," "parade," and "rally" have at times been used interchangeably, whether or not actual marching is involved. Here we use the term "march" for occasions where marching was significant (even if the event was not promoted as a "march") as well as public protests that were promoted as a "march" even if marching was not involved or central to the event.

We highlight two important marches: The Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913 and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom of 1963.

II. A. Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913 (Monday, March 3, 1913) **SLIDE 4**

1. Background on the women's suffrage movement

- The long-stalled movement was reinvigorated in 1909, when the state of Washington approved of women's suffrage, with California following suit in 1910. [***NOTE:*** The word "suffrage" refers to the right to vote. Selina Solomons played a key role in California.]
- Jews, religious and nonreligious, supported women's suffrage, and Jewish women were key mobilizers. For example, the politically and religiously conservative magazine *Di Froyen Velt* — ran a column called "From the Women's World" which covered suffrage activism around the world.
- For Jews, women's suffrage was indelibly linked to worker's rights and economic justice. The socialist-leaning Workmen's Circle monthly publication, *Der Fraynd* ("The Friend") made the connection between women's suffrage and the right to work and to unionize. Labor activist Rose Schneiderman (1882–1972) also hammered this point home from her position as Vice President of (and lobbyist for) the New York Women's Trade Union League.
- Schneiderman organized the Uprising of the 20,000 in 1909, when over 20,000 shirtmakers went on strike. Mostly women, it was the largest strike in U.S. history. The strikers demanded better workplace conditions and higher wages [***NOTE:*** For more on the Uprising of the 20,000, see here.].
- The procession of 1913 came while the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire was still fresh in the minds of women, when 146 garment workers, 123 of which were women or girls, mostly Italian or Jewish immigrants, were killed. It led to protests (some 80,000 attended a march on April 5, 1911), investigations, and spurred initiatives toward workers' rights and economic justice. [***NOTE:*** For more on this episode and its legacy, see our lesson "Jewish Music 101: Sounds, Settings & Significance. Part 5 — Music in Jewish Communal Experience, Song of Communal Angst."]

DISCUSS:

Jewish women of the 1910s connected the right to vote to their economic well-being. *Is* the right to vote interconnected with economic well-being? How so? To what degree?

2. Background to the Procession/March:

- The procession was held one day before the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson (his first term). With so many people in Washington, D.C., this timing maximized attendance and attention.
- Over 5,000 women marched in the procession, along with over 20 parade floats, nine bands, and four mounted brigades.

- Marchers were yelled at, jostled, tripped, and attacked. Over 100 women were hospitalized. Police stood aside, not getting involved. Yet the women held their dignity and completed the procession.
- It's unknown how many Jewish women participated in the Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913, but it was organized by the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which had Jewish participation, including that of Maud Nathan, one of the most prominent suffragists.
- Even the *Yidishes Tageblatt* ("Jewish Daily News"), a Yiddish-language newspaper from New York City with a traditional religious perspective, and a circulation of seventy thousand, covered the procession for its readers.

SLIDE 5

SONG: "She's Good Enough to Be Your Baby's Mother and She's Good Enough to Vote with You"

Many songs in support of women's suffrage were written during the 1910s. This one was written by Jewish composer Herman Paley (1879–1955), with lyrics by Alfred Bryan (1871–1958). Jewish-Irish collaborations were common from 1890–1930. [For more, see Professor Mick Moloney's talk on this topic here.] Here the song is performed by Jewish vaudeville actress and mezzo-soprano Anna Chandler (1884–1957), recorded in 1916.

As you listen to this recording, put your reactions to the music and/or lyrics into the chat. [***NOTE:*** If in person, have participants jot down three thoughts about the music and/or lyrics.]

PLAY: "She's Good Enough to Be Your Baby's Mother and She's Good Enough to Vote with You"

SHARE: Read some of the interesting comments in the chat. If live, have several participants share their reactions.

3. Result of the Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913

The procession led to major news stories and even congressional hearings. Historians credit the procession for giving the suffrage movement a new wave of inspiration and purpose, which was sustained, eventually leading to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, enshrining a woman's right to vote (1920).

II. B. Yiddish Culture, Workers Rights, and Economic Justice

SLIDE 6

Over 2 million mostly Eastern European Jews were among the more than 20 million people who entered the U.S. during the third wave of immigration (1880–1920). They joined the 250,000 Jews who had previously immigrated from Central Europe. In the 1920s, Yiddish culture was such that a number of different Yiddish newspapers across the country circulated hundreds of thousands of copies every day, and Yiddish theaters on Second Avenue (in New York City) seated thousands of spectators every night. Moreover, Yiddish culture became a part of American entertainment, cuisine, business, speech, and politics. [***NOTE:*** For an overview of Yiddish culture in America from the late nineteenth century until today, see here.]

Because these immigrants left their home countries due to prejudice, violence, and poverty, the majority of these immigrants supported, were even active in, causes and organizations focused on workers' rights and economic justice. One such organization was the Arbeter Ring (Workers Circle, formerly the Workmen's Circle). Begun as a mutual aid society in 1900 in New York City, the Arbeter Ring quickly

grew to encompass socialist views, schools, and programming (cultural, educational, and political). They helped found many of the unions (particularly garment workers unions). Their concern for social justice and economic justice (through a Jewish lens) continues today. They also promoted Yiddish culture and social justice values through their schools and camps, as well as through the arts, which included orchestras and singing groups, both for adults and for children.

SONG: "*Der Arbeter Himnen*" ["The Hymn of the Workers Circle"] **SLIDE 7**
(M: Meyer Posner, 1890–1931; L: Abraham Liessin, 1872–1938)

- The anthem of the Arbeter Ring clearly announces its populist agenda: "the union's our anvil and shield," while the chorus closes with an affirmation of "the working class ideal."
- It is representative of many such songs in support of workers' rights and economic justice.
- Posner became the conductor of the Workmen's Circle Choir after arriving in this country in 1919. In March 1920 he arranged the first concert of Yiddish folk songs at Carnegie Hall.
- His melody for this anthem was the contest winner in 1925, the melody was set to the poem by Liessin, a socialist whose activism forced him to emigrate to the United States in 1897.
- Noting a dearth of spiritual grounding among socialists, Liessin's poetry provides positive models of revolution from within Jewish tradition, including Judah Maccabee, Bar Kochba, and Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg.

PLAY: "*Der Arbeter Himnen*"

Pair Share:

How do you honor social justice heroes of yesteryear for the gains they helped usher in, whether in the area of voting rights or economic justice?

II. C. March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom **SLIDE 8**
(August 28, 1963)

1. Background to the March

The second march we explore occurred 50 years after the Women's Suffrage Procession of 1913. The year 1963 marked the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. Planning for the event began in March, 1963 and gained steam after May 3, when Birmingham's segregationist Commissioner of Public Safety, Bull Connor, unleashed high-powered fire hoses, which could rip bark off a tree, onto a children's march. German shepherds were set upon the children, and white onlookers were allowed to encroach. Americans across the nation watched the images of mayhem on their television screens. [To find out more about the CRM's Birmingham Campaign, see here.]

Included among the planners was Arnie Aronson (1911–1998), the Jewish co-founder of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (1950) and its Executive Director from then through 1980. He helped coordinate lobbying campaigns for the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

Among the stated goals of the march were: **SLIDE 9**

- "a comprehensive civil rights bill" that would do away with segregated public accommodations;
- "protection of the right to vote";
- mechanisms for seeking redress of violations of constitutional rights;
- "desegregation of all public schools in 1963";
- a massive federal works program "to train and place unemployed workers"; and
- "a Federal Fair Employment Practices Act barring discrimination in all employment."

DISCUSS:

- **Which of these goals do you feel have been met? What evidence can you provide?**
- **Which goals remain unrealized?**
- **Should your Jewish community be involved in helping effectuate progress toward these goals, or not?**
- **If so, what kinds of actions should your Jewish community be involved in, and from which should they refrain? Explain your response.**

2. The March **SLIDE 10**

Over 250,000 people attended the March on Washington, and many distinguished people spoke. Today most people remember the march for MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech. Immediately before he spoke, however, the gathered crowd heard from Rabbi Joachim Prinz, then president of the American Jewish Congress. Rabbi Prinz was an anti-Nazi dissident who was expelled from Germany. Here are some of the words he spoke on that day. [***NOTE:*** For the official program of the day, see here. For an unpacking of the biblical allusions and, especially, MLK's biblically influenced oratorical style, see here. For a video of Rabbi Prinz speaking at the March on Washington, see here. For the full text of Rabbi Prinz' speech, see here.]

READ: Read, or have a student read, the excerpt of Rabbi Prinz' speech (in the Resource Guide, Study Texts and Additional Learning Material).

DISCUSS:

- **What does Rabbi Prinz highlight here that you find relevant today?**
- **How might you make the case of Jewish commitment to racial equality?**

In addition to the distinguished slate of speakers, the March on Washington offered a prestigious line-up of performers. For example, Joan Baez performed "We Shall Overcome," a song which we shall explore later in this lesson. At the March on Washington, the folk group Peter, Paul and Mary sang Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind."

Peter, Paul and Mary

SLIDE 11

- Formed in 1961 by Peter Yarrow, Paul Stookey, and Mary Travers, they were part of the American Folk Music Revival phenomenon.
- The group members received numerous death threats due to their social justice activism, particularly on behalf of civil rights.
- Peter Yarrow (b. 1938), the son of Ukrainian immigrants, has often credited Judaism for his views of and activities for social justice. He was an anti-war activist (singing at a benefit for the Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange), a leader in the movement to free Soviet Jews (singing his Chanukah song, "Light One Candle," at the U.S. Capitol), and a founder of Operation Respect. He is also known for his efforts on equal rights, the environment, and gender equality. [***NOTE:*** Peter Yarrow was convicted and served for three months in 1970 for child molestation of a 14-year old girl when he answered his hotel room unclothed. Because he was pardoned by President Jimmy Carter and known by friends and family to have done *teshuvah* ("repentance"), we feel that this should not be presented by the instructor, but responded to if a class participant raises this.]
- Their self-titled debut album (1962) included such protest songs as "If I Had a Hammer" (which they also sang at the 1963 March on Washington) and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and sold millions of copies, going double platinum.
- The group broke up in 1970 to pursue solo careers. Yet they continued to perform "reunion concerts" sporadically through the years and performed until Travers' death in 2009.
- They were the 1990 recipients of the Peace Abbey Courage of Conscience award.

SONG: Blowin' in the Wind

- "Blowin' in the Wind" was written by Bob Dylan in 10 minutes at a cafe in 1962 and appeared on his 1963 album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. (We'll explore Bob Dylan later in this lesson).
- The song poses nine questions, three questions each concerning peace, war, and freedom. [***NOTE:*** The prophets often asked searing questions, and asking questions is often seen as both a Jewish and social justice value.]
- The song raises its concerns not through listing micro problems, but by lifting up macro concerns, giving the song a timelessness that could apply to many social issues.
- Nonetheless, the song has been described and understood as a civil rights anthem. Gospel singer Mavis Staples could not understand how a young white man could write something that captured the frustration and aspirations of black people so powerfully.
- This is supported by the large number of African American artists who recorded the song in the era of the CRM, including (but not limited to), Odetta (1963), Lena Horne (1963), and Stevie Wonder (1966).
- Peter, Paul and Mary's version (June, 1963) sold over 300,000 copies during the first week of its release. On August 17, 1963 — just 11 days before they would perform the song at the March on Washington — the song reached #2 on Billboard's pop chart.

PLAY: Play one of the following versions of "Blowin' in the Wind" by Peter, Paul and Mary

1) Excerpts of PP&M's performance at the March on Washington with interviews contextualizing the importance of the moment
2) Their recorded version

DISCUSS:

- **What does the refrain "The answer is blowin' in the wind" mean to you? [*NOTE:* Does it mean that the answer is in front of our faces and thus obvious? Or does it signify that the answer is as elusive as the wind? However we interpret, the song clearly asserts that these important concerns do have answers somewhere.]**
- **How do you understand the use of "Yes, and"? [*NOTE:* Perhaps, it's another person who is rising up, joining with the original questioner in the song in solidarity, and extending the conversation. If so, what are the implications of this interpretation? Should we all rise up in solidarity and raise our questions? Will answers to such questions become more tangible if we reach for answers together?]**
- **Notice the verse "How many years can some people exist before they're allowed to be free?" Does "people" refer to "individuals" or an actual unspecified "people"? If it refers to a people, it's interesting that two groups commonly referred to as a people within American culture are Jews and African Americans.**

EXTENSION IDEA: Comparing two versions
The instructor may wish to play one of the other recordings linked above, and have the class compare and contrast musical styles and effects.

DISCUSS:

- **What differences did you notice, considering instrumentation, tempo, phrasing, et al?**
- **Why might these different artistic choices have been made?**

SUMMARY:

Our time for this session is running out. When we return next time, we'll talk more about the March on Washington, particularly Bob Dylan's participation there, as well as exploring the role of ritual in social justice. Music, of course, often plays a major role. [***NOTE:*** Instructor may wish to invite the cohort to bring in next session, send to the instructor, or place on a prepared class Google doc (or similar form) their favorite social justice song, perhaps accompanied by a short 2–3 sentence explanation of why they chose that song (i.e. what it means to them). The instructor could then display and discuss these next time. Alternatively, class participants could do this as a pair share.]

Now, let's take a few moments to reflect. [***NOTE:*** The instructor should catalog responses to the following in a place where all can see, and then add to those responses from the following bullet points,

particularly when it was a focus of the instructor. Instructor may wish to have students take a few minutes to write down their thoughts before having students offer responses.]

What is something you have learned today about the power of protest, particularly marches?

What is something you may have learned about Judaism or Jewish involvement in social justice?

- *Tzedek* is a mitzvah, something we should all be active in doing and promoting. (Deuteronomy 16:20)
- Judaism wants each of us to build a more kind and loving world, and each of us has to do our part. ("*Olam Chesed Yibaneh*")
- The prophetic voice is a strong anchor for promoting social justice, particularly through the ritual reading of the haftarah. (Isaiah 58, *The Gates of Justice*)
- Even the solemn day of Yom Kippur reminds us of the responsibility toward social justice.
- Women's suffrage in the United States was an important movement of which the Jewish community was supportive and in which Jews robustly participated. ("She's Good Enough to Be Your Baby's Mother and She's Good Enough to Vote with You")
- The women's suffrage movement, and the women's movement in general, were intertwined with the rights of workers, and with concerns for economic justice. The Jewish community supported all of these concerns, and Jews participated in them.
- Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe brought with them a rich Yiddish culture that yearned for a better world, motivating Jews to involvement in social justice movements, including the labor movement and women's suffrage.
- Jews were involved in many aspects of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, including the planning. (Arnie Aronson)
- A number of Jews spoke at or performed at the March on Washington. (Rabbi Joachim Prinz, Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary, Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind")

Pair Share:

What was the most powerful, important, relevant, and/or surprising thing you learned or experienced today? Why do you think you chose this?

OUTRO: SLIDE 12

Thank you for your presence and engagement today. We conclude with a classic song about the land of Israel. The age-old yearning for Zion had its analogue in the African American spiritual tradition, which in the United States centers on the Hebrew Scriptures. Many African Americans wondered about their homes in Africa, and learned the indignities of being a stranger in a strange land, as we did in Egypt. Zion for African Americans, as well as Jews, also became a symbol and a hope for a place of peace, freedom, and living in harmony and mutual respect and dignity.

This background may help explain why Nina Simone (1933–2003) chose to cover the popular Hebrew song "*Eretz Zavat Chalav*," "Land of Milk and Honey." The music is often credited to Israeli choreographer Eliyahu Gamliel (1926–2013). The phrase "*Eretz Zavat Chalav*" is found 12 times in Tanakh (Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3; Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 16:13; Deuteronomy 26:9, 15; Deuteronomy 27:3; Joshua 5:6; Jeremiah 11:5; Jeremiah 32:22).

Few renditions better capture the longing of a people for dignity and freedom, something they carry in their distant memories of home.

PLAY: "*Eretz Zavat Chalav*" by Nina Simone

BREAK

SLIDE 13

PLAY: As people enter, play Sam Cooke's version of "Blowin' in the Wind."

The song you heard as you settled in was, of course, Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," which was immediately interpreted in light of the CRM. As we learned last session, many African American artists covered the song.

The singer here is Sam Cooke (1931–1964), a pioneer in soul music and who was also active in the CRM.

- Cooke's refusal to sing at a segregated audience was an early act of civil rights disobedience in the arts.
- He formed a friendship with activist Malcolm X, boxer Muhammad Ali, and football star James Brown, all of whom worked for civil rights.
- In October, 1963, he and his entourage were refused rooms at the Shreveport Holiday Inn (Louisiana), although they had reservations. Because Cooke objected, they were all arrested for disturbing the peace. After being released, his brother Charles was arrested the next day for speaking to a white sales clerk without being spoken to first. The city of Shreveport formally apologized to Cooke's daughter in 2019 for the racism displayed.

While the Shreveport incident was the catalyst, "Blowin' in the Wind" was the inspiration behind Cooke's 1964 classic song, "A Change Is Gonna Come," which became the unofficial anthem of the CRM. [***NOTE:*** For more on "A Change Is Gonna Come," see here.] With the inspiration of Sam Cooke's rendition, we return to our exploration of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Rabbi's Prayer at the March

SLIDE 14

Last session we learned about Rabbi Joachim Prinz, who escaped Nazi Europe and became a civil rights ally and activist. Rabbi Prinz, you may recall, spoke at the march just before MLK gave his momentous "I Have a Dream Speech." Yet Rabbi Prinz was not the only rabbi at the microphone that day.

Earlier during the March, Rabbi Uri Miller (1906–1972), President of the Synagogue Council of America, offered a prayer. The following is an excerpt. [***NOTE:*** For the full text of Rabbi Miller's prayer, see here. For the video of Rabbi Miller speaking at the March on Washington, see here.]

READ: Read, or have a student read, the excerpt of Rabbi Miller's prayer (in the Resource Guide). [***NOTE:*** Instructor may wish to give either or both discussion questions ahead of time for participants to keep in mind as the prayer excerpt is read.]

DISCUSS:

- **What is compelling to you about this prayer?**
- **Rabbi Miller uses many allusions to other texts. At the beginning of this excerpt you may recognize the U.S. Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal"), President George Washington's Letter to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island ("give to bigotry, no sanction..."), and the biblical prophet Micah ("to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God"). Why might he have chosen these specific references? Do you feel he used these references well? Are there other references you might have expected him to include?**

Bob Dylan (b. 1941) at the March on Washington — SLIDE 15

- Born Robert Allen Zimmerman (Shabtai Zisl ben Avraham), Dylan was raised in a home that kept kosher in Hibbing, Minnesota. He attended a religious Zionist camp (and later sent his son to that camp). In college he joined Sigma Alpha Mu, founded as a Jewish fraternity in 1909.
- While he associated with Evangelical Christianity from 1979–1981, he has since maintained his Jewish moorings, visiting Israel (laying tefillin at the Western Wall and, in 1983, celebrating his son's bar mitzvah). He's maintained a relationship with Chabad. (***NOTE:*** For more on Dylan's Jewishness, see here.)
- Dylan was unsatisfied with rock music and shifted to folk music around 1959.
- He was influenced by Buddy Holly, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Ramblin' Jack Elliott and Pete Seeger.
- In 1962, he signed a management contract with Albert Grossman (1926–1986) who helped him with his second album, *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. They were all originals (his eponymous debut album only contained two original songs), many of them protest songs.
- Dylan's profile rose when he walked out of *The Ed Sullivan Show* in May, 1963, rather than comply with the demand not to perform his song criticizing the John Birch Society.
- Coming into the March on Washington in 1963, Dylan was already admired not only for his songwriting, but for his moral authority, nonconformity, sense of humor, and distinctive singing voice (of which writer Joyce Carol Oates described "if sandpaper could sing").

Dylan performed two songs at the March on Washington (he played backup on other songs, such as "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize").

Song: "When the Ship Comes In"

- Written in August, 1963, the immediate impetus for the song was the refusal of a hotel clerk to give Dylan a room because of his "unkempt" appearance until Joan Baez vouched for his character.
- The song, an allegory about vanquishing the oppressive "powers that be," was inspired by "Pirate Jenny," a song from *The Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht.
- At the March on Washington, Joan Baez provided backing vocals.
- The song appears on his 1964 album, *The Times They Are a Changin'*.
- Peter, Paul and Mary released an acclaimed version of the song in 1965 (here's a video from the Newport Folk Festival), and Arlo Guthrie also recorded a notable version (here's an audio).

PLAY "When the Ship Comes In"

DISCUSS:

- **How do you understand the largely allegorical words?**
- **How might the words relate to any of the problems to which the March on Washington called attention (the right to vote, segregation in public accommodations and in the public schools, the plight of the unemployed, and discrimination in employment)?**

3. Result of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

After the march, MLK and other civil rights leaders met with President John F. Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House, where they discussed the need for bipartisan support of civil rights legislation. The rising tide of civil rights agitation greatly influenced national opinion and resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The former outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. Further, it prohibits racial segregation in schools, public accommodations, and in employment, and prohibits unequal application of voter registration requirements. The latter piece of legislation prohibits discrimination in virtually every area of voting. The provisions of these two landmark pieces of legislation reflected the demands of the march.

III. RITUAL AND PROTEST

SLIDE 16

A. The Role of Ritual in Doing Social Justice Work

We have spoken of the need for, and the power of, public protest, and we have seen how Jews, doing the work of *tzedek*, supported and participated in these efforts. Yet, as important as public protest might be, it is not the only sector for social justice work. Through ritual, protest can take on another layer of importance, becoming a sacred act.

Rituals can be long or short, traditional or creative, communal or individual. They can include prayer, recitation of classic texts, singing of songs, declaiming poetry, and engaging in prescribed activities. But they are all purposeful. In light of social justice, rituals can:

- allow us to reflect on what we have achieved (a "dayenu" moment), and what work still needs to be done. In a ritual setting, this invites us to see the world in the light of God;
- offer us the chance to live in, or relive, a heroic moment, whether of yesteryear or more recently;
- goad us to reflect on our goals and values, and ask ultimate questions;
- help us to convey messages to ourselves and others about who we are and what we are experiencing. These may be both motivational and aspirational;
- encourage us to continue to dream, and to discover the deeper wisdom that results;
- seek the harmony and well-being of the community; and
- align our justice work with God's will.

SLIDE 17

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), a key figure in the CRM, described celebration (a form of ritual) as promoting an active state, one which keeps us away from passivity. "Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions" (*Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press, 1965)

On prayer, so associated with rituals, Rabbi Heschel wrote:

> *"Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, falsehoods. The liturgical movement must become a revolutionary movement seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, the vision."*
>
> ("On Prayer" in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity:* Essays, ed. Susannah Heschel; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996, 263)

DISCUSS:

- **Do you agree that "celebrations are confrontations"? If so, how so?**
- **What do you think it means for a prayer to be "subversive"?**
- **Do you agree with Rabbi Heschel that "prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive"?**
- **What forces "continue to destroy the promise, the hope, the vision"?**
- **What role can/does subversive prayer and ritual play in the arena of protest?**

Pair Share:

- **Think of a celebration you were a part of. What concerns did the celebration help "confront"?**
- **Have you ever uttered a "subversive" prayer? [This could be in the way you interpreted the prayer, and not necessarily one with subversive language.] If so, please recount a time when you uttered such a "subversive" prayer. How did reciting the prayer affect you? If not, is there a "subversive" prayer you might wish to offer that would promote some aspect of social justice?**

Example: The Role of the Passover Seder in Social Justice Work

SLIDE 18

In discussing the intersection of ritual, social justice, and music, we will focus on the Passover seder as one exemplar. Pew Research reported on May 5, 2021 that 62% of American Jews attended a Passover seder in 2020, the most widely observed ritual. It is an occasion that brings together family, sacred history, rich symbolism, unique foods, significant table discussions, singing, and, not least important, a theme of the journey from oppression to liberation that is very elastic. The story of our ancestors getting out of Egypt to freedom to chart their own future is every generation's story and every person's story. It is also the story of every social justice movement, the story that people whose rights and dignity are not currently fully honored will be in a place of coequal power and opportunity.

To honor the role of the Passover Seder in promoting social justice we will examine two seminal moments in modern seder history. In the first unique Seder known as the "Freedom Seder," (now Rabbi) Arthur Waskow used the traditional Haggadah (seder text) as a means to declaim such subversive prayers in response to the assassination of MLK. He linked our Jewish tradition to the struggle for civil equality of African Americans. In our second example, a group of women worked similarly to construct a seder experience to explore and advocate for the dignity and equality of women's experience.

III. B. The Freedom Seder

SLIDE 19

MLK was assassinated on April 4, 1968. This set off riots in over 100 cities, known today as the Holy Week Uprising, and subsequent military occupation in many of these cities. [***NOTE:*** The riots and subsequent military occupation lasted up to a full year. For more on the riots, see here.] Passover began on Friday night, April 12. Arthur Waskow (b. 1933) was working in the peace and CRM's at the time and recalls.

> *"I walked home, to get ready for the Seder, and that meant walking past the army, with a machine gun pointed at the block I lived on," [Arthur Waskow] says. "And my kishkes, my guts, began to say, this is Pharaoh's army!"*

Waskow came up with a new haggadah for Passover, one that spoke to the moment. "I wove the story of the liberation of ancient Hebrews from Pharaoh with the liberation struggles of Black America, of the Vietnamese people, passages from Dr. King, from Gandhi."

In 1969, on the anniversary of MLK's death, 800 people gathered in the basement of Lincoln Temple United Church of Christ, a historic Black church in Washington, D.C. There, Jews and Christians, rabbis and ministers, Black and white, used Waskow's Haggadah to hold this special Freedom Seder. "In the church basement that night, the spirit was high," recalled Topper Carew, one of the readers leading the service.

Famously, the seder ended with all 800 individuals singing "We Shall Overcome" while arm-in-arm with their neighbors. While other protest/civil rights songs have been composed by members of the Jewish community (i.e. the songs of Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Arlo Guthrie, et al), "We Shall Overcome" at the Freedom Seder stands out as an example of how music can play a role in breaking down boundaries and unifying peoples.

DISCUSS:

- **Arthur Waskow stated that he felt a connection between the struggles of our Israelite ancestors in Egypt under Pharaoh, and the civil rights struggles of African Americans. What similarities and/or differences do you find between the two struggles?**
- **Why might "We Shall Overcome" have been (and still is) "unifying"?**

Pair Share:

Share a time in your experience when music played a role "in breaking down boundaries and unifying peoples."

The Freedom Seder boldly told the story of the Exodus as it was and as the unfolding story of African Americans. It used the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (which began on the first night of Passover, 1943) as a parallel to both struggles. It included passages from Rabbi (Henry David) Thoreau,

Rabbi (Hannah) Arendt, Prophet (Bob) Dylan, and Eldridge Cleaver, among others. [***NOTE:*** Waskow employed honorific titles for some of the people presented in his Haggadah.] The seder reordered many of the traditional passages, and it included transliteration of all Hebrew passages used.

To give a sense of the flavor of the Freedom Seder, here is a passage from the end of the *Dayenu* section, where the traditional text recapitulates all 15 verses of *Dayenu* in one paragraph.

READ: Read, or have a student read, Excerpt #1 from *The Freedom Seder* (in the Resource Guide, Study Texts and Additional Material).

The last paragraph of this reading is taken from the prophet Micah (4:3–4), and this is followed by the singing of "*Lo Yisa Goy*," a well-known song composed by Shalom Altman (1911–1986), which uses the last half of Micah 4:3. The passage and song are not found in the traditional Haggadah; this was a brilliant addition by Waskow, to attach the struggle for civil rights to the prophetic voice directly.

DISCUSS:

To what degree does this amending of the text detract from the memory of the biblical Exodus story, and to what degree does such a modernizing tendency enhance the Exodus story?

Pair Share:

Have you ever attended a Passover seder that was dedicated to raising awareness of a particular issue or concern? If so, what was your experience like? If not, what particular issue today might you like to see addressed deeply at a Passover seder? Why?

SONG: We Shall Overcome (M & L: Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Buy Carawan, Pete Seeger) **SLIDE 20**

- The melody may date back to several eighteenth-century European songs. The lyrics mostly hail from the 1901 hymn, "I'll Overcome Someday," by Charles Albert Tindley (1851–1933).
- It first appeared as a protest song in 1945, during the strike against American Tobacco in Charleston, South Carolina. African American women were striking in the hopes of getting their pay raised to 30 cents an hour (equivalent to just under $4.97 an hour today).
- One of the striking women, Lucille Simmons, changed the lyrics from "I" to "We."
- Pete Seeger (1919–2014) learned the song in 1947. It became part of his repertoire, and other performers also adopted it (especially Joan Baez).
- Its association with the CRM dates back to at least 1959.

In the Freedom Seder, "We Shall Overcome" is preceded by a new reading.

READ: Read, or have a student read, excerpt #2 from *The Freedom Seder* that precedes the singing of "We Shall Overcome" (in the Resource Guide, Study Texts and Additional Material).

Let's listen now to "We Shall Overcome," performed by The Freedom Singers. The group was formed at Albany State College in 1962, fusing their Black Baptist backgrounds with protest songs and chants. Pete Seeger recommended them to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Music

became a powerful tool to educate about the CRM and to empower others to support or join the cause, or to remain resolute and determined in the civil rights struggle.

PLAY "We Shall Overcome" [If time is a consideration, the instructor might begin at 0:34.]

DISCUSS:

- **The refrain here is "We shall overcome." When Jews think of the Exodus story, we often think of the motto, "Let my people go." What is the difference between the two?**
- **What gives this song its potency? Please think in terms of both its musicality and lyrics. [*NOTE:* Pete Seeger explained its power as "the genius of simplicity...any fool can get complicated." One might note, among other things, that this protest song does not protest — it promises and asserts that the work of social justice will usher in the world we all want.]**

[***NOTE:*** Instructor may wish to compare "We Shall Overcome" with "When the Ship Comes In," used above in connection with the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.]

Pair Share:

- **Have you, or anyone you know, sung "We Shall Overcome"? In what context? What does it mean to you (generally, or from any of your specific identities)?**

Legacy of the The Freedom Seder

The Freedom Seder drew a lot of attention. The traditional Passover Haggadah had previously been used to focus on social justice concerns. Indeed, one week before The Freedom Seder, The Movement for Soviet Jewry used the name "Freedom Seder" and held a "Symbolic Seder of Redemption."

Nonetheless, Waskow's Freedom Seder spoke of a (mostly) non-Jewish people's need for liberation, and held their need for dignity alongside the Jewish people's need. While some pushed back against some of Waskow's choices (both in terms of including non-Jewish voices, some of whom were deemed "radical," and his reordering of the Haggadah), the Freedom seder created a new model, and there would be no turning back. The American Passover seder could, moving forward, tell both the Exodus story and a story-in-progress of a people's need for liberation today. The seder could, and would, include ideas about liberation and freedom from non-Jews and Jews alike. These kinds of *s'darim* (plural of seder) were not focused solely or primarily on honoring an ancient rabbinic tradition, but in teaching about and advocating for an oppressed group today, and motivating those present to honor the Torah's imperative of *"tzedek, tzedek, tirdof,"* "Justice, justice, shall you pursue" (Deuteronomy 16:20).

The Freedom Seder inspired a wide variety of *s'darim* and *haggadot*, including feminist (women's) *s'darim* and *haggadot* and, later, those for LGBTQ+ liberation. We look now at the earliest known women's seder. [***NOTE:*** For more on the background of the Freedom Seder, see here. For a copy of the 40th anniversary revised edition, see here.]

[***NOTE:*** If the instructor asked the class to share a favorite social justice song, this might be a good place to show the list, or have a pair share, and/or sing one of the songs together.]

III. C. Seder Sisters: The Story of the Women's Seder

SLIDE 21

[***NOTE:*** For those who wish to explore the Liberation Seder of the LGBTQ+ movement, whether in addition to or instead of the Women's Seder, please see our Resource Guide.]

In 1976, 27 women gathered in a downtown New York City loft for a Passover seder. When they asked the Four Questions usually posed by the youngest son, they asked them as daughters. Instead of the traditional Haggadah's telling of four sons, they spoke of four daughters. When they recited the 10 plagues, they were not the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians, but those endured by women through the ages. When they opened the door, it was to welcome not Elijah, but Miriam, the prophet (and sister of Moses).

They called themselves Seder Sisters. Included among them were writer Letty Cottin Pogrebin; writer and psychologist Phyllis Chesler; columnist Michele Landsberg; writer E. M. Broner; and filmmaker Lilly Rivlin. Regular guests included Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Grace Paley, whom they call their spiritual leaders.

Like Waskow's Freedom Seder, the Seder Sisters celebrated the Exodus from Egypt as a paradigm for the ongoing struggle of women to achieve full equality and dignity. The mothers of Jewish history, from biblical times until today, were honored. In addition, they thought of God in distinct ways:

> *To whom do we sing?*
> *The Holy One is* Gaol-tanu, Ima-ha-olam, *our redeemer, Mother of the World.*
> *She is* Ha-raham-aima, *Compassionate Giver of Life.*
> *She is* Makor hahaiim [sic], *Source of life.*
> *She is our neighborly spirit, the Shekhinah.*
>
> [***NOTE:*** from Broner, E.M. with Naomi Nimrod. *The Women's Haggadah.* HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, p. 12.]

Pair Share:

- **How do you feel about these feminine images of God?**
- **Which of these images most resonate with you? Which images challenge you? Why?**

For music, some of the traditional songs were sung, although sometimes the gender of the Hebrew was changed. For example, the traditional haggadah has a key passage in the masculine which speaks of a man's obligation to see themselves as having gone out of Egypt. Some today understand — and some translators render — the sentence in a more universal way (e.g. "each person"), yet the Hebrew's masculine wording is usually left intact. The Seder Sisters sang a revised Hebrew:

> *B'chol dor v'dor / Hayava isha lirot*
> *Lirot et atzma ki'ilu hi / Ki'ilu hi yatza-a mi'mitzrayim.*
>
> *In every generation, each woman is obliged to see herself*
> *as though she went out of Egypt.*
>
> [***NOTE:*** From Broner, *op cit.*, pp. 12–13.]

The Seder Sisters continued to meet, and passed on the tradition to their daughters. Meanwhile, women's seders started to arise in other places. For example, the Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education was formed in San Diego, California in 1978. They held their first women's seder in 1979.

In 1990, the Jewish Community Center of Manhattan (now the Marlene Meyerson JCC) was formed. In part it would "welcome and respect the pluralistic nature of our community." In 1993 the JCC established Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project, and in 1994 they held their first women's seder, with 150 in attendance and another 100 on a waiting list. Within several years, Ma'yan was holding their seder four nights in a row at a catering space, with 500 in attendance each night. Women's seders started incorporating the music of modern Jewish songwriters, especially Debbie Friedman.

SONG: Miriam's Song by Debbie Friedman (1951–2011) **SLIDE 22**

Written in 1989, this song, based on Exodus 15:20, is a modern *midrash* about Miriam and the women breaking out in song and dance with their timbrels after our people crossed through the Sea to safety, was an immediate hit, and became a Seder favorite, first at women's seders and, later, in many family seders as well.

1) **PLAY:** "Miriam's Song", audio by Debbie Friedman

Legacy of the Seder Sisters

Feminist/Women's *s'darim* became commonplace in the 1990s. Many mainstream *s'darim* now include women's perspectives on the text and/or include a Cup of Miriam. In 2005, Joel B. Wolowelsky, a Modern Orthodox thinker and Dean of Faculty at the Flatbush Yeshivah, published *Women at the Seder: A Passover Haggadah*, a traditional, halakhic seder, with a commentary that focuses on the achievements of women culled from traditional sources and modern Orthodox women's writings.

So much have the voices of women been appreciated in American Jewish life that Ma'yan: The Women's Project recast itself. Now called Ma'yan: Listen for a Change, the organization no longer works on the integration and role of women in Jewish life but, rather, now works with adolescent girls and educators to focus on issues of privilege, social justice, and feminism. [***NOTE:*** For more on the Seder Sisters and their s'darim, see video here. For the history of the feminist seder, see here.]

DISCUSS:

- **What have you experienced in family or communal *s'darim* that either celebrates advances in gender equality or protests remaining injustices?**
- **Where have you seen changes in American Jewish life regarding women? What, do you imagine, is the role that women's *s'darim* may have played in effectuating these changes?**
- **What work remains to be accomplished? On what issue/concern should we focus first?**

EXTENSION IDEA: Brainstorming a Holiday Connection to Social Justice

We have discussed the richness and flexibility of the Passover seder ritual in engaging and galvanizing attendees around matters of social justice. But, as our discussion of Yom Kippur shows, this could be true for every Jewish holiday. On which holiday/s does your synagogue or other Jewish organization highlight social justice? How so? What is it? How is it connected to the holiday?

How might a social justice connection be made to a holiday we do not practice widely or do not observe/celebrate with a social justice emphasis (e.g. Lag B'Omer, Tishah B'Av, Rosh HaShanah, Chanukah)?

Your proposed project could be:

- just for your synagogue or Jewish community
- an interfaith gathering
- something that could become a movement-wide project (Reform, Conservative, etc., to promote your social justice concern in a broader way)

Elaborate: What Jewish values, texts, or symbols connect to your holiday proposal? What piece/s of "Jewish" music connect/s to the idea?

IV. WHAT WE'VE LEARNED TODAY (Weaving Our Learning Threads Together)

SLIDE 23

SLIDE 24

[***NOTE:*** The instructor should catalog responses to the following in a place where all can see (such as a white board), and then add to those responses based upon class experience. If time is a factor, the instructor might simply ask, "What have we learned today?" However, if time, asking these different kinds of questions may open up more reactions. Instructor may wish to have students take a few minutes to write down their thoughts before having students offer responses.]

On the slide is a Venn diagram, showing three pillars of social justice work: protest, ritual, and performance. In the sessions so far, we have highlighted protest and ritual.

What is something you have learned or wish to highlight (as important, interesting, relevant, surprising, et al) from these sessions

- about the power of protest, particularly marches?
- about the power of ritual?
- about the interplay between the Passover Seder and social justice?
- Judaism or Jewish involvement in social justice?

Where have you seen an intersection of at least two of the three pillars of protest, ritual and performance in these past weeks? (Let's list them.)

How might the bringing together of at least two of these three pillars add to the effect on the participant or us who watch/listen today?

V. CODA/CONCLUSIONS

SLIDE 25

In our next sessions of music and social justice, we will focus more fully on the pillar of performance in social justice efforts. [***NOTE:*** As we just finished speaking of the role of ritual, the instructor may wish to invite the class to bring in next session, send to the instructor or place on a class Google doc (or similar form), a prayer or passage from our tradition that speaks to them in some way about social justice, perhaps with a 2–3 sentence explanation of why they picked that text.]

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, composer Michael Hunter Ochs wrote a new setting of "Mi Chamocha" to be used both during Passover and the Shabbat of MLK Day weekend, entitled "Freedom: *Mi Chamocha*." In this reimagining of the song our people sang after crossing the Red Sea to safety and freedom, each verse looks at modern forms of slavery: slavery to hatred, prejudice, the holding of grudges, and the walls that divide people and perpetuate stereotypes. "Freedom: *Mi Chamocha*" is yet another example of a singer-songwriter using music as a means to proclaim a "subversive prayer." Further, Ochs infuses the piece with added weight by quoting the classic, musical phrase "We shall overcome" at the end of the chorus! This is in line with Jewish tradition's understanding that the Exodus and freedom were not the end, but the beginning of the journey. We may still be on that journey, but we know, we do believe, that we shall overcome! [***NOTE:*** Consider singing Hunter Ochs' song with your class/congregation!]

PLAY "Freedom (Mi Chamocha)"

SLIDE 26