

Special Guest Teaching

July 6, 2018

This week's teaching is provided by Rabbi Chaya Bender.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Mitch

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Who Tells Our Story by Rabbi Chaya Bender

Hamilton, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda, (if you haven't heard about it yet) can simply be described as a story of the birth of America through the eyes of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton. While Hamilton and the critical role he played during the formation of this country is part of the typical U.S. History curriculum, I personally never felt an emotional connection with this historical figure. The musical, however, allowed me to connect to him in a profound way through the narrative of his personal struggles and triumphs. While I, or others before me, may not have grown up thinking Hamilton was an all-American hero, many of my young students at the Temple Sholom Learning Center will because his narrative has been made accessible to them.

As Jews, we have our own traditions for sharing our foundational narratives. One impactful example is how we evoke the narrative of our ancestors three times a day during the *Amidah*, our silent devotion.

In the beginning of the *Amidah*, we remind God about our relationship and the relationship that God had with our most ancient ancestors: "Blessed are You, our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham (Elohei Avraham)."

Those two words, Elohei Avraham, are an intertextual link to how God introduces God's-self to Moses at the burning bush. This narrative reminder in the text serves as a point of connection—I should be humble and present to serve God as Moses did at the burning bush.

At the end of the first blessing it was customary to say, "Blessed are You, God, Shield of Abraham." This too is an intertextual link to the first time that Abraham speaks to God. Abraham, having just received God's promise that he will be made into a great nation and God will be his protector, responds to God with fear, pain and skepticism about the fulfillment of God's promise. He was childless at the time—how would he become a great nation? In the *Amidah*, this narrative reminder serves as a point of connection: authentic prayer comes from a variety of feelings, some of which are doubt, frustration and lack of faith.

Two weeks ago, Temple Sholom, joined with the majority of Conservative synagogues in adding mention of the Matriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—into the *Amidah* and ultimately our narrative as a community to allow for even more points of connection for our congregation and future generations.

At the end of the first blessing we now say: "Blessed are You, God, Shield of Abraham and Guardian of Sarah." "Guardian of Sarah" is an intertextual link to the conception of Isaac, when God remembers Sarah in her barrenness. The act of remembering Sarah is actually the beginning of our story as Jews. When Sarah gives birth to Isaac, a birth that is nothing short of miraculous because of her advanced age, God's promise is finally fulfilled. This narrative reminder serves as a crucial point of connection—we are all here today as living testimony of God's promise to both Abraham and Sarah.

While we might not know for certain how our own legacy will be remembered generations from now, we do have it within our power to write our Matriarchs back into our present narrative. Acknowledging the Matriarchs each day during the *Amidah* bestows current and future generations at Temple Sholom with more points of connection to Judaism through the powerful stories of the women who played a critical role in its formation.

Shabbat Shalom!

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