

On Account of the Righteous Women

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Source: Aviva Cantor, The Egalitarian Hagada

As we remember this struggle, we honor the midwives who were the first Jews to resist the Pharaoh. Our legends tell us that Pharaoh, behaving in a way common to oppressors, tried to get Jews to collaborate in murdering their own people. He summoned the two chief midwives, Shifra and Pu'ah, and commanded them to kill newborn Jewish males at birth. He threatened the midwives with death by fire if they failed to follow his commands.

But the midwives did not follow orders. Instead of murdering the infants, they took special care of them and their mothers. When Pharaoh asked them to account for all the living children, they made up the excuse that Jewish women gave birth too fast to summon midwives in time.

The midwives' acts of civil disobedience were the first stirrings of resistance among the Jewish slaves. The actions of the midwives gave the people courage both to withstand their oppression and to envision how to overcome it. It became the forerunner of the later resistance. Thus Shifra and Pu'ah were not only midwives to the children they delivered, but also to the entire Jewish nation, in its deliverance from slavery.