

## When We Imagine Ourselves Allies

Contributed by [Jews for Racial and Economic Justice](#)

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*Having now told the story of Jews' Exodus from Mitzrayim we have come to know Miriam, Moses, Pharaoh, Tziporah and the role each of them played. Sarah Barasch-Hagans & Graie Barasch-Hagans use these roles to help us understand our roles in the fight against oppression – when we are strong allies and when we still struggle to be our best selves.*

**Author Note:** *In most discussions of racial justice, interracial families are often made completely invisible. This is ironic, as these families constantly deal in a microcosm with the larger issues of white supremacy and thus have much to teach us. This piece began as a way of addressing the complexities of oppression within interracial families and pushing against how abstract and disconnected most conceptions of “allyship” can feel for white members of interracial families. The language of fighting for family may make more sense for everyone to acknowledge the experiences of an interracial family unit and of a larger multiracial human family.*

*The Exodus story is filled with allies and oppressors, with many of the characters inhabited both roles at different points. The Exodus story, and particularly the story of wandering afterwards, is populated by family members wrestling with what it means to be allied with each other. Since our current struggles can feel like we too are in a desert, let us pause in the desert this Passover to listen for justice, just as the After the Maggid When We Imagine Ourselves Allies by Sarah Barasch-Hagans and Graie Barasch-Hagans 6 Midrash tells us that entire Jewish family did at Sinai. If everywhere is a desert then the sand we stand is always shifting, and so is our relationship to each other. Let us take a moment to imagine ourselves thus...*

### Sometimes we are Bat Pharaoh...

...Pharaoh's daughter, choosing “compassion” without hesitation, pulling the baby out of the river and giving him a home. But when we pull him from the river, he is taken from his people and forced to pretend to be someone else in order to survive. And we know that **he is family and we love him as our son, but we ask impossible things of him.** We ask him to pass for Egyptian, we cut him off from his heritage in the hopes of keeping him safe. We do not recognize the futility, that safety is always an illusion. We do not use our proximity to power to try to change the situation for other babies like him. We can sleep at night because **we tell ourselves we are good people living in a cruel system,** but we do not admit that we could change things if only we would convince our synagogue to support the protests, or to at least stop hiring police officers to protect High Holiday services without questioning whether they make all of our community feel safe.

### Sometimes we are Moses...

...conditionally white with Cossack eyes and a quick sunburn, passing but keeping a suitcase by the door just in case. Feeling mostly safe in the palace walls, guilty but not knowing why, until one day everything changes. Until one day we see the Egyptian striking the Israelite and know he is hurting our family—**and this time we do not run away.** We know that Moses killed the taskmaster, but we do not do not strike anyone, knowing that violence will not lead to greater justice for our families because violence by those of us who ‘pass’ would be met with greater violence and retaliation against those who cannot hide behind conditional whiteness. So sometimes we are standing next to our our Black husband at the protest, and we are both chanting peacefully but the policeman strikes him and all we can do is choose not to run away, to stand firmly with our hands raised so that we both get hit. **Because family means if you hit him then you hit me.**

### Sometimes we are Miriam...

...hoping our brother Moses survives the river, knowing danger and feeling unsafe in our Jewish skin, knowing what it means to be hated because of who we are. And then we are Miriam who, given time, a few chapters later mocks Moses' Black wife Tziporah. **She confounds us because she is us** Ashkenazim with conditional whiteness and generations distanced from legal discrimination, not seeing the contradictions in our own character. We are white-skinned Jews celebrating Fifty Years of Freedom Summer and putting on commemorative panels but escorting out anyone who yells #BlackLivesMatter. Or, acknowledging Tziporah but refusing to defend her interracial, interfaith family when Jewish talking heads warn that families like hers are the end of Judaism. **We are descendants of slaves who do not yell back** that Moses had a Black wife and Black children and that #BlackLivesMatter to our people whether or not we acknowledge it.

### **Sometimes we are Tziporah...**

...fully capable of defending ourselves but **in need of a few more allies**. Ready to be an ally when it means leaving our family, circumcising our children, and wandering in the desert for decades. And some of us are still Tziporah. Marveling at how quickly you forget this when our children are killed by the police. Wondering if you will claim us as family when the news paints our children as deserving of their deaths. We wonder why we stand in community to say Kaddish for those we've lost and stand on street corners shouting for justice for those who have been stolen from us. **We wonder why our many parts cannot become whole and why our children cannot be a blessing**. Picking up a sign because we have no choice, hoping to see you at the protests even though you do.

### **Sometimes something miraculous happens...**

...an event out of time, an act of God who comes with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and leads us out of Egypt. And in the desert we become a people, shedding the divisions and mentality of slavery so that we become whole—none of us palace people, all of us desert people. **Wandering together towards wholeness**. So that Miriam, a prophet who is human, can choose to change. When she is struck with illness as punishment for her slander of Tziporah, she can heal and choose new words. And her healing prayer spoken by her brother Moses- *El Na Refa Na La*-becomes liturgy that 1 Exodus 2:6 2 Numbers 12:1 7 can inspire us to overcome the disease of our own racism. We can choose to challenge the narrative, write an editorial or interrupt a General Assembly, *tell the pundits that we have always been an Erev Rav, a mixed multitude* and if you do not embrace all of our family, then you cannot love any of us. We can choose to pick up our sign and join them in the street, to face the tear gas and the rubber bullets because they are killing our family.

Sometimes, we are all in the street, and the street becomes Sinai...

...but only if everyone shows up, Moses and Miriam and Bat Pharaoh and Tziporah and all the rest, wrestling with the commandments and trying to hear God. Maybe we are Tziporah and Bat Pharaoh meeting at a Mother's March. And maybe we talk about being there because **we are both mothers and Mike Brown could have been our son**. Or maybe we talk about having ensured the survival of the Jewish people, yet isn't it ironic that now our community will not march for anyone that looks like us? Or maybe we have nothing to talk about, but **a look passes between us and God is there**.

*And maybe our imagining their conversation is a holy act that we desperately need. Because sometimes, if we imagine the rally as Sinai then we listen for God, and when we do we get **one step further through the desert and one step closer to redemption**.*