

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

National Webinar Transcript

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Presented by:



SHARSHERET[®]
The Jewish Breast & Ovarian Cancer Community

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

Melissa Rosen:

Good morning or good afternoon, depending on where you're calling in from. Thank you for joining us and welcome to Sharsheret's second annual Un-Seder and inspiring time to help prepare us, to help center us for the upcoming Passover holiday. For those of you who are new to Sharsheret, we have been providing telehealth services to the breast and ovarian cancer communities for 20 years. In addition to our many formal programs to help women and their families navigate the cancer experience, our clinical social workers are available for one-on-one support. As always, our support services are 100% confidential and 100% free. I recently heard someone describe this time we're in as a time of creative connection, and I really do believe that's true as we continue at Sharsheret to provide the necessary support that we always have. We've found meaning in the creative ways that we've connected with all of you during the past year. We've truly become a community.

Melissa Rosen:

I'll be your moderator today. My name is Melissa Rosen and I serve as the director of training and education at Sharsheret, but so many wonderful colleagues worked to create this innovative program and are joining us today.

Melissa Rosen:

Although it was the start of the pandemic that led us to create the Un-Seder, the focus today is really about celebrating Passover while living alongside cancer, whether currently or years ago. And today's program includes several brief features, including a session called Crossing the Sea, Celebrating the Other Side, some culinary memories and a special gift for everyone, some beautiful music with Cantor Beth Garden and a sharing of meaningful Passover traditions, both ours and yours. So throughout this program, I want to encourage you to give some thought to those traditions and if you are comfortable, type them into the chat box so we can share them as a way to share ideas and inspire them toward the end of the program. As I'm sure all of you know a year into the pandemic, you can access the chat box simply by hovering over the bottom of your screen and clicking the word chat. Again, the traditions we're talking about are what's special to you, what's unique to, with regard to the Passover holiday or spring time in general, and we'd love to hear what makes this time of year special for you.

Melissa Rosen:

So I have the honor of beginning today by talking about crossing the sea. When we explore the Pesach story, we begin with generations of enslavement of the Jews in the land of Egypt, and we finish our story, or at least the Seder with entering the land of Israel. But today it's actually the middle I want to speak about. There's so much that can enslave us, whether it's actual task masters, as in the story of Passover, pandemic restrictions, or even a cancer diagnosis. And these things can take over our lives, seemingly in every way, from the day-to-day minutia to the ways we begin to think about and define ourselves. They can truly impact the direction that our lives take. Even once we are physically free, even once the plague or pandemic has passed. And even once treatment for cancer itself is behind us.

Melissa Rosen:

So how do we move beyond that feeling of that enslaved mentality, that sense of limitation and restriction that doesn't allow us to enjoy our lives? I've been actually thinking a lot lately about those the in-between times. So for COVID, we actually hope that we're in it now, as people have begun to receive vaccinations and the restrictions are beginning to ease, but we're still very cautious and fearful. For cancer, maybe it's after the end of treatment and before the next scan, or at a time when we count

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

five years after the doctor tells us we're all clear, or a time when we're taking a break between treatments. For the Jews in the Passover story, that in-between time is clear. It was the crossing of the sea and the 40 years spent in the desert. During that time, they transformed. They became free people. The interesting thing to note is that the journey from slaves to free people may have even been scarier than slavery for some.

Melissa Rosen:

As slaves, their lives were very difficult, but they knew what to expect. No one wants to become a cancer patient, but at least while we're active patients, we have healthcare providers and support programs like Sharsheret to answer our questions and provide comfort. We know we're doing all we can to keep the cancer at bay. Crossing the sea must have been terrifying. It required real faith and life in the desert was hard. Where would food come from? When would this journey end? It took a different type of bravery than dealing with slavery, or in our case, dealing with cancer. The in-between time, the time we heal, we transform, we become, is often more terrifying than the thing we want to put behind us. But the closer we get to after, the more we realize each one of us needs that transitional period to return to who we were and also to accept the new person that we've become.

Melissa Rosen:

This time is not just transitional it's transformative. And there is so much power and so much promise in that time. The sea, the desert, they're metaphorical palette cleansers to remind us that cancer is not our primary identity, just as slavery was not our primary identity. So it makes sense to use the downtime or the lead up to momentous events or annual celebrations to explore our emotions, to embrace who we're becoming, and to feel gratitude for what our experiences have taught us. I hope that sharing some of my thoughts has given you a different way to view the Pesach story and perhaps even a different perspective on our cancer experiences. And hopefully one that will offer comfort and inspiration. And now you are in for a real treat. I am so very excited to welcome Cantor Beth Garden to share some musical inspiration as Passover approaches.

Melissa Rosen:

Cantor Beth Garden is completing her 12th year as the Cantor and B'nai mitzvah program coordinator at Congregation Tikvat Jacob in Manhattan Beach, California. She actually began her career as a classical flutist, but was drawn to Jewish communal life through what she perceived as a side hustle to stay involved with her synagogue while raising two kids. I love that that's how she found her way here. Cantor Beth finds great spiritual fulfillment in working with vocal and instrumental music volunteers to enhance religious services and share eclectic musical styles throughout the year. She herself is a nine year breast cancer survivor and Ashkenazi mutation carrier. She also serves as a peer advisor for, or a lean, for a Sharsheret. Cantor, the screen is yours.

Cantor Beth Garden:

[music].

Cantor Beth Garden:

Many nights we've prayed with no proof anyone could hear. In our hearts, a hope for some we barely understood. No we are not afraid, although we know there's much to fear. We were moving mountains long before we knew we could. There can be miracles when you believe. Though hope is frail, it's hard to

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

kill. Who knows what miracles you can achieve? When you believe. Somehow you will. You will when you believe.

Cantor Beth Garden:

In this time of fear, when prayer so often proved in vain, hope seemed like the summer birds too swiftly flown away. Yet now I'm standing here with heart so full I can't explain. Seeking faith and speaking words I never thought I'd say.

Cantor Beth Garden:

There can be miracles when you believe. Though hope is frail, it's hard to kill. Who knows what miracles you can achieve? When you believe. Somehow you will. You will when you believe.

Cantor Beth Garden:

[foreign language 00:11:51].

Cantor Beth Garden:

There can be miracles when you believe. Though hope is frail, it's hard to kill. Who knows what miracles you can achieve? When you believe. Somehow you will. Now you will. You will when you believe. You will when you believe.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. That song is beautiful and brought back such amazing memories. Now I have to go watch The Prince of Egypt. So I really appreciate that. Okay, next, my amazing colleague, Jessica Jiblan and is Sharsheret's valley outreach program coordinator. And she will be sharing some thoughts on the foods we associate with the holiday of Passover. Jessica.

Jessica:

Thank you. In a typical year, Passover is one of my favorite holidays, a great holiday for the senses. I love seeing family and family friends. I love the sounds of chatting with extended family, the laughter of my children playing with their cousins, the clanging of the silverware and glasses as the table's being set. I love the feeling, the knowing that there are people all over the world, celebrating simultaneously, participating in a Seder, reciting the four questions, singing [inaudible 00:14:42]. The kids are searching for the Afikoman like little detectives and reading the Passover story from their Haggadot. I love the amazing aromas that fill the house in anticipation of the Passover meal. As we go around the table, reading passages from the Haggadah. And most of all, I love the taste of the delicious food. All year, I look forward to the special foods my in-laws make for Passover, my mother-in-law's perfect brisket. The sweet Charoset my father-in-law makes, the yummy Gefeilte fish and the surprisingly enjoyable desserts. Even my picky eaters will eat.

Jessica:

I usually get to help serve my favorite Passover food, the Matzah ball soup. Until I was married, I didn't realize that there were so many ways to request a bowl of soup. One person wants a Matzah ball with chicken soup, with extra chicken and vegetables. Someone else requests a Matzah ball with only carrots. Someone will request a bowl with just broth and two Matzah balls. And of course, someone else is watching carbs and just wants broth. Although I've never met someone who doesn't like Matzah ball

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

soup, people have strong feelings about their Passover foods. They're definitely partial to either the fluffy Matzah ball or the cannon ball. You know, the kind where it sinks to the bottom of the bowl. Personally, I like them both.

Jessica:

And during the week, people have strong opinions about the right way to make Matzah Bri. Should it be like pieces of French toast or a scramble or even an omelet? Our preferences are often based on how we grew up celebrating and bring memories of celebrating when we were younger. And when we invite new people to our tables, sometimes they introduce us to their favorite elements, which enhance the Passover experience. These foods have become tradition, just like the Passover story we tell every year. Just walking into a house that's ready for Passover and getting a whiff of the wonderful scents coming out of the oven, whether it's brisket or roast chicken or potato kugel or macaroons, we feel comforted. And that's the wonderful thing about Passover. No matter how you celebrate it provides nourishment in different ways, literally, emotionally, intellectually.

Jessica:

But let's be honest, holidays can also be incredibly draining between expectations, family dynamics and in today's world, even the conversations leading up to the holiday about in-person or virtual can be exhausting. Not to mention the holiday itself with all it can encompass, cleaning, shopping, cooking, baking, prepping, decorating, et cetera. Our social workers hear all the time from callers who are in treatment, how holidays are simply so much work, but there is a feeling of obligation and pressure to make them like they have always been. Also, thinking about the food limitations can feel overwhelming. At our recent Sharsheret in the kitchen webinar, registered dietician, Alana Malstein, shared how we shouldn't look at the week of Passover by what we can't eat, but by what we can eat. I'm not sure why, but this was an aha moment for me. It made me think about how, instead of feeling deprived, maybe I would be better served by focusing on the blessings.

Jessica:

I mean, sure. We can't eat certain foods that we enjoy throughout the year, but there are so many wonderful choices for Passover sustenance. Many that are healthy year round options that are already kosher for Passover, or can easily be modified. This year, I hope you give yourself the freedom to meet Passover on your terms. And no matter what Passover looks like for you this year, whether you are celebrating alone or with family, whether you are meeting in person or over Zoom, whether you are having the meal catered or getting a box of Matzah and a jar of Gefilte fish delivered to you from Amazon. That's okay.

Jessica:

We're all doing the best we can and trying to keep traditions and maintain the holiday spirit, whatever that means to you. So with that, I'm happy to share that as part of this program, Sharsheret staff members have compiled a cookbook of some of our favorite Passover dishes, and we will be sending it out to you in the follow-up email. We really hope that you will enjoy them. And I wish you a happy Passover.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much, Jessica. I love your memories of Matzah ball soup. It's same way in my house. It must be the same way in everybody's house. So thank you for that. And I've seen that, that cookbook

Crossing the Sea: A Sharsheret Un-Seder

that we're sending and it's lovely. Okay. Cantor Beth, I'm excited to welcome you back to sing [inaudible 00:19:21]. Once again, the lyrics will be on the screen.

Cantor Beth Garden:

[music] [foreign 00:19:25]

Cantor Beth Garden:

Comfort us. Comfort us in our wilderness. Comfort us as we struggle to take care of one another.
Comfort us. Comfort us in our wilderness. Comfort us as we struggle with this world.

Cantor Beth Garden:

[foreign 00:21:05]

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. Those lyrics are so incredibly meaningful. And I think that some of the words we can all relate to, and wonderful. So thank you. Okay. Each holiday, whether Pesach, Thanksgiving, or birthdays have their own traditions. Now my incredible colleague, Rachel Teisher, who serves as support program coordinator at Sharsheret joins us to share some special traditions of her own. And if you haven't entered a tradition that you do that's unique or special or meaningful to you, please consider doing that right now, because when Rachel finishes, we're going to share some of your traditions and memories. So thank you very much. And Rachel, it's all you now.

Rachel :

Okay. Hi everyone. I'm so happy to see you all here. And so glad to be a part of this. It's funny. I started laughing because Jessica spoke so amazingly and got me so nice and hungry, and I realized we're talking about traditions now. And my tradition speech has to do with food as well. So I guess it's just the most comforting thing that brings us all happiness. So it's true that one of my favorite parts of all the Jewish holidays is that although ... Is the traditions themselves, because although we're all taught the basic same basic ideas and similarities and what the holidays mean, there's really so much room for interpretation and meaningfulness. So, and I'm sure as many of you know, a big piece of where many of our traditions come from, it actually stems from based on where you or your family is from.

Rachel :

And part of what makes things exciting in my family comes from just that. So I have half my family, my grandfather's family comes from Aiden now known as Southern Yemen and my grandmother's family comes from Russia. So we have both Ashkenazi and Yemenite or Sephardic Jews in my family. And it's really nice because over the years, they've made such incredible traditions and happy things to share that we've created as a blended family, as many people say that we share, which is really nice. And that brings me to one of my favorite Passover traditions, which is the Charoset at the Seder. In fact, I get made fun of for how much I eat and my family makes extra because I eat it the whole week and I'm obsessed with it. So it truly is my favorite thing.

Rachel :

So in my tradition that I wanted to share that I feel is so special, although simple, is that my family eats two different types of Charoset at our Seder. And one of them is a date Charoset. And one is the more

traditionally known one, the apple one. So the date one it's beets that are soaked and cooked and there's chopped nuts and honey, and it's all blended together. And the Apple one is, as many of you know, chopped apples, nuts, either grape juice or wine, some add honey as well. Both, like I said, equally delicious. And the truth is why do we have both of those? From what I was always taught was it just really comes from what we had. My grandfather was like, "We had dates. So that's what we used." And my grandma said, well, they had apples and so that's what they use. And it just stemmed from that and is a longstanding tradition.

Rachel :

So what's my point in sharing all of this with you besides for making you hungry and making me super excited for the Seder? It's really just because it's overall the meaning of why we're eating this. And I was thinking about it and I said, you know, it kind of just fits so nicely with what we're trying to do here today and talk about crossing the sea and feeling like we're overcoming challenges and reminding ourselves of how strong we are as people, as communities, just as a family, so many different things. So when you think about when you eat this Charoset, the point of it is because we are reminding ourselves and diving into the Passover story, we're reminding ourselves of when the Jews were enslaved in Egypt and the fact that they had to build pyramids and they used brick and mortar, and that's what this Charoset symbolizes.

Rachel :

So both the color of it and the texture like the mortar. So it's really important that you think about that while you eat it. But then I said, "Oh my gosh, it's a sad thing that we're remembering." It's not a happy thing to be a slave. It was a tough time and something that was a huge struggle in our history. But then right now, the way we remember it is by eating something sweet. And that made me say, "You know what? It's so important to think about the fact that although we do need to really think about the hard times, remember them and dive into them fully and understand it." Our lives right now, reflecting on the last year, whether it be just craziness because of the pandemic or going through a cancer diagnosis or any other struggle that everybody does face in their life, it's important to reflect on it.

Rachel :

But remember that there is always sweetness because it always comes down to reminding yourself of your strength and perseverance. And that the goal is to get to the other side, right? To cross that sea, to feel, "Okay, I can do this," and remind yourself of that. And I think that that's something that's so important for everybody with the last year we've experienced. But like I said, also with a cancer diagnosis or any other struggle. And so reflecting is important. And I wanted to say that it's not just about looking to the future or, crossing the sea and being done with something that's hard, but even while you're going through something hard, or even going through a challenge that you may have faced your whole life or continue facing for the rest of your life, it's important to remember to find your inner strength and remember your inner sweetness and that there's always a piece of you that's there and important to celebrate and be happy about and put those pieces together.

Rachel :

So on that note, I'm going to look in the chat here, because I see you guys are sharing some of your really wonderful traditions and memories. Oh, I see I have another Charoset lover, I love that. And someone sharing that when their kids were younger, that they decorated the entire home and made the entire Seder to be like a homemade tent on the floor. That sounds amazing. And then travel through the

sea with fish mobiles hanging from the ceiling blue streamers representing waves and finished the Seder meal in Israel. Okay. That sounds so much fun. I want to go to that person's house. Okay. So then, oh, I got lots of requests for the recipes. I'm excited to share with you guys. Let's see, I also got another one that ... Let me see, I'm going to keep looking through all these wonderful comments.

Rachel :

Let's see, let's see. Who else? Anyone else have any other things to share that they want any traditions or anything? Oh. Each person using a different Haggadah so that they have different ideas to share. I love that. That's really nice too. In fact, that also reminds me another thing we do, my family does is my grandfather sing some of his tunes and shares his songs and memories, and we do stuff from my grandma's family as well. So it's really nice to combine those things. So I hope that you guys can take this with you. Oh, saying [inaudible 00:29:19] as many languages as you can love that, love that. So please take these thoughts with you and to your Seder and beyond. And remember that you're currently crossing the sea. You can cross that sea and we're here to help you do it.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. I was watching the comments come in as well. And so many comments about your Charoset. So yes, that is And other foods. I saw other foods mentioned too. So clearly this group that we have with us today, their traditions are very much food-based and that's so much fun. So I love that. And Rachel, thank you for sharing your traditions. And I love how you brought ... The message you take away is that it doesn't matter what your situation is. There is sweetness in this world, whatever your situation.

Melissa Rosen:

So thank you very much. Okay. So I'm going to ask my colleagues to unmute and unpin. I'm going to share the lyrics to Dayenu and Cantor Beth is going to lead us in that song. But because almost everybody does know Dayenu, we would like for all of us to sing ... Oh, there it goes. We would like for all of us to sing along. I see. There we go. Okay. So the lyrics are in front of you. Please take a deep breath and join us in singing. It'll get you into the spirit and we'll have a great way to conclude this program with just a couple of notes afterwards. Cantor, will you begin?

Cantor Beth Garden:

[music] [foreign language 00:31:21].

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. Okay. So normally we actually keep everybody muted and ask them to sing along to themselves, but we felt like today to have everybody join us is a great representation of how it must've been crossing the sea with so many people. And yet, even though it was everybody was marching to their own beat, they all had the same common goal in mind and the same beautiful way to be together. And it was great to hear everybody in different chords and in different timing, but just absolutely beautiful. So thank you for that. And I want to thank each and every one of you for joining us here today. I hope that as we get ready to usher in Passover, you each found something meaningful from today's program to share and inspire you over the holiday.

Melissa Rosen:

And of course, I want to thank Cantor Beth for adding music and joy to our program and my colleagues for sharing their experiences and insights both before and during the program. Please take a moment. We're about to put a link for an evaluation survey into the chat box. You can actually click that link now and still hear our final few moments. It's right there right now. Evaluations really do inform future programming. So please take a second to do that. And as we come to a close, please remember that Sharsheret is here for you and your loved ones. Our one-on-one support and other programs designed to help you navigate through your cancer experience are all free and completely confidential. And you can connect with us at clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org, which we will also put into the chat box. As a final wish, I hope that the stressors we face today, no matter where they come pass over you, and you feel peace, contentment and joy for the holiday and beyond. Thank you for joining us and have a wonderful, safe weekend. Bye bye.

About Sharsheret

Sharsheret, Hebrew for “chain”, is a national non-profit organization, improves the lives of Jewish women and families living with or at increased genetic risk for breast or ovarian cancer through personalized support and saves lives through educational outreach.

With four offices (California, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey), Sharsheret serves 150,000 women, families, health care professionals, community leaders, and students, in all 50 states. Sharsheret creates a safe community for women facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer and their families at every stage of life and at every stage of cancer - from before diagnosis, during treatment and into the survivorship years. While our expertise is focused on young women and Jewish families, more than 15% of those we serve are not Jewish. All Sharsheret programs serve all women and men.

As a premier organization for psychosocial support, Sharsheret’s Executive Director chairs the Federal Advisory Committee on Breast Cancer in Young Women, Sharsheret works closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and participates in psychosocial research studies and evaluations with major cancer centers, including Georgetown University Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. Sharsheret is accredited by the Better Business Bureau and has earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for four consecutive years.

Sharsheret offers the following national programs:

The Link Program

- Peer Support Network, connecting women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer one-on-one with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences
- Embrace™, supporting women living with advanced breast cancer • Genetics for Life®, addressing hereditary breast and ovarian cancer
- Thriving Again®, providing individualized support, education, and survivorship plans for young breast cancer survivors • Busy Box®, for young parents facing breast cancer
- Best Face Forward®, addressing the cosmetic side effects of treatment
- Family Focus®, providing resources and support for caregivers and family members
- Ovarian Cancer Program, tailored resources and support for young Jewish women and families facing ovarian cancer • Sharsheret Supports™, developing local support groups and programs

Education and Outreach Programs

- Health Care Symposia, on issues unique to younger women facing breast cancer
- Sharsheret on Campus, outreach and education to students on campus

- Sharsheret Educational Resource Booklet Series, culturally-relevant publications for Jewish women and their families and healthcare Professionals

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