

Meet the Matriarchs

from a script by Zelda Wolf Jacobs

Adapted and updated by Norma Hyman

Congregation Brith Shalom Sisterhood, Bellaire, Texas



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CAST:

The Matriarchs. Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah
The Modern Matriarchs. Questioners
Moderator (MOD)

SCENERY:

Moderator can be on stage or in front of stage.
Table at which sit the Matriarchs, covered by a colorful cloth. Each Matriarch has a name card.
A microphone is in audience for "Questioners"

COSTUMES:

Matriarchs in colored burlap robes or caftans.
Modern women in modern dress.

MUSIC

"Yankee Doodle Boy" by George M. Cohan
"Reviewing the Situation" from "Oliver" by Lionel Bart
"Begin the Beguine" by Cole Porter
"Girl From Ipanema" by Antonio Jobin
"Aquarius" from "Hair" by Galt McDermot
"Who Can I Turn To from "The Smell Of The Greasepaint" by Anthony Newley
"You're The Top by Cole" Porter

MEET THE MATRIARCHS

MOD: Ladies and gentlemen, I am and I would like to welcome you all to our annual Torah Fund Program. Today, we have an unprecedented opportunity to find out how our ancestors really lived; were their lives as difficult as we imagine, and what do they think of us, their descendants and the way we live. It gives me great pleasure to introduce our illustrious panel—or perhaps it would be better if they introduced themselves. Ladies, if you please

[Tune: “Yankee Doodle Dandy”]

SARAH: I am Sarah, wife of Abram, later changed to Abraham,
A true blue beauty in my younger days,
Some say I’m “shane” as I am,
My Isaac came when I was ninety
Quite a feat you must admit,
Changing diapers when your 90 isn’t very easy,
But Matriarchs must do their bit.

REBECCA: I’m Rebecca, wife of Isaac,
Jacob and Esau were my sons,
Twins born later when we gave up hope,
Who said that twins would be fun?
Jacob farmed, while Esau hunted,
Esau, Isaac’s pride and joy,
Isaac wanted to bless Esau, but I sneaked in Jacob,
Jacob was mama’s fav’rite boy.

LEAH: I am Leah, Laban’s daughter,
Wife of Jacob, a dirty trick,
I had six sons, the heads of tribes,
So handsome you could never pick.
Reuben, Simon, Levi, Judah, Zebulon and Issachar,
Priests and kings were their descendants,
Aaron and King David,
Can’t you see how proud we are?

RACHEL: I am known as Mother Rachel
Jacob’s first love—do or die,
For 14 years he worked to marry me,
Wasn’t be some sort of guy?
I had two sons, Joseph and Benjy,
What transpired was such a mess.
Colored coats and trips to Egypt, dreams, interpretations,
And then much later Exodus.

MOD: I would like to introduce four Sisterhood members who have been studying the issues that we wish to address this evening. I will call upon each of you to tell us something about yourself and to present your question to the panel. our first questioner will be [insert name of questioner].

QUEST. I: [Tune: “Reviewing the Situation”]

I am [insert name] ,a modern mother,
I’m a housewife, and I work from morn till night.
I will tell you about the trials
That go into making up a housewife’s life.

I'm a wife who cooks and cleans a lot,
Wear painted shirts and jeans a lot,
Schlep kids a lot, shop sales a lot,
Have lunch out with the girls a lot,

I hoped my life would be a lot,
Though life is not like Camelot,
I think that I would do it all again.

My question is for Matriarch Sarah. I am so happy to meet you. We read about you in the Bible all the time, but I always thought those were just, you know, Bible stories. Did things really happen as we read them? Were you really ninety when you had Isaac? I mean, really?

SARAH: You bet I was! And it wasn't easy. Abraham was a hundred, I was ninety. Can you imagine how it felt chasing a toddler. When Isaac finally went to school everyone in the Canaan P.T.A. thought we were his grandparents!

QUEST. 1: You can't possibly be over fifty. You look so young!

SARAH: What can I tell you. Our biological time clocks were kept in excellent repair in those days.

MOD: Well, I don't think any of us would argue with that, Sarah. Let me just say that I, Sadie Judy Raphael, and I think—I speak for my audience also, applaud you. What you went through was not easy. Agreed? (Not to audience) our next questioner is [insert name of the questioner].

QUEST. 2: [Tune: "Reviewing the Situation"]

I am [insert name], a modern mother,
I'm employed and work each day from nine to five,
I will tell you about the problems
That go into making up a worker's live.

I'm a woman who can earn a lot,
For leisure time I yearn a lot,
Don't cook a lot, eat out a lot,
Domestic skills don't tout a lot.

Don't rest a lot,
I'm stressed a lot,
For time, I am hard-pressed a lot,
I think that I would do it all again.

My question is directed to all the Matriarchs. In the Bible, there are so many names. How do you remember them and who's related to whom? You know Adam begat Seth, Seth begat Enosh, and so on and so on. How did you make up a Bar Mitzvah list with all those begats?

REBECCA: I'll answer that. You just get used to it after a while.

[Tune: "Begin the Beguine"]

When they began the begat,
It started a chain of names to remember,
It started some names male and feminine gender,
Such wonderful family names like that,
Such marvelous names you've never heard,
And these names bring fame descendants are saying,
With glorious thought; the foundations laying,
When they began the begat.

'Twas Adam and Eve begat Cain and Abel,
Noah had just three sons, Shem, Japeth, Ham
But after the flood they began to begat more
Then Terah had Nahor, Haran, Abram,
Haran begat Lot, others begat, too,
The Lord said to Abram disperse, I'll make you a nation,
And if I should hear you be cursed, their end I will hast
An offer like this who'd refuse,
And begats soon began, could they lose?
There are names I can't recall, do you remember?
It was hard to pronounce them all, each family member,
When they began the begat.

Oh yes, when they began the begat, we would say,
Here's Rebecca, born to Bethuel, son of Milcah,
Wife of Nahor, you know it's true, that's some *mishpahah*,
And we know how it goes, and that's where it's at,
When they began the begat,
When they began the begat.

MOD: Imagine what a task it was putting together a synagogue list in those days. They could really have used a pictorial directory! Our third questioner is [insert name of questioner]

QUEST. 3: [Tune: "Reviewing The Situation"]

I am [insert name] a modern mother,
As a volunteer I work from morn till night,
I will tell you about the trials
That a volunteer encounters in her life,
I'm a woman who must plead a lot,
I try to make hearts bleed a lot,
I talk a lot, persuade a lot,
So pledges I can raise a lot,
Most days I'm not at home a. lot,
Unless I'm on the phone a lot,
I know that I would do it all again.

I have such a problem getting my kids to do their homework and then their Hebrew school homework on top of it.

SARAH: What you need is a positive attitude.

QUEST. 3: I try, I really do. I tell them how smart they. are, that they can do it, and anyway I went to Hebrew school, now they have to go! .

SARAH: No, no, no! That's not being positive. Why don't you use some psychology!

QUEST. 3: You can use psychology all you want, but you Matriarchs didn't have nearly the problems we have today the drug problem, the traffic problem, intermarriage, job transfers

REBECCA: What are you talking about? Don't you read your *Humash*? Why do you think I sent Jacob away to Padan-aram, to my brother? I sent him back home to find a nice Jewish girl, but the problems he ran into, with his father-in-law, poor thing. If I knew then what I know now. Working seven years, being deceived, and then working seven more years.

LEAH: Don't complain, mother-in-law. He had two good wives and two concubines. And we certainly saw to it that he had enough children. And illustrious descendants.

RACHEL: You talk about job transfers! We were all over the desert, and believe me, a camel is not the most comfortable way to travel. No sweet smell of fine leather interiors on the recreational vehicles of our day. And they certainly didn't come equipped with air-conditioning, radio, cruise control and luggage rack. We would have been happy with shock absorbers!

LEAH: And traveling with thirteen kids—no Stucky's, no Dairy Queen's, no billboards or license plates to look at. How were we supposed to keep the kids occupied?

REBECCA: I'll answer that. We played the "Bogat Game". You know: "Who remembers who bogat Japeth? Jacob, do you know who bogat Nahor?"

MOD: Aha! Now me understand how you remembered everybody. You were trained from childhood!

QUEST. 4: Some of us were wondering how you chose your husbands, or were they chosen for you? The kids today seem to have such a difficult time I think they are expecting too much.

[Tune: "MATCHMAKER"]

We had no matchmaker make us a match,
we went on a date to find us a catch,
To drive-ins and sock hops and concerts we'd go,
To find our ideal beau.

We'd find a guy who we thought was our type,
Then we'd insist it was love at first sight,
For marriage and family we hoped and we prayed,
In heaven our match was made!

Today girls are seeking perfection,
They're anxious to find life's perfect mate,
On TV, we have "Love Connection,"
and matches are made by "Computer-Date!"

These days young girls who are seeking a match,
Use personal ads, and their C.V.'s they fax,
Claim that they face an impossible plight in finding Mr. Right.

RACHEL: We had different problems when we were young and marriageable.

MATRIARCHS: [Tune: "MATCHMAKER"]

We girls from Canaan were young and naive,
With slightly more knowledge than Adam and Eve,
In our day we never went out on a date,
A date was a fruit we ate.

To marry in our time, a *shiddach* was made,
We had no choice, we complied and obeyed,
Not till the *hupah* did we meet our mate,
The wedding was our first date!

You speak of seeking perfection,
Of striving to find life's perfect mate,
At least you have some recollection,
Of courtship before you would propagate!

I wonder if Abram, the first Jewish Dad,
Would he have answered a personal ad?
Cute SJF seeking nice SJM,
Which was better, now or then?

REBECCA: You modern women don't know how good you've got it.

QUEST. 4: In light of all you had to put up with in ancient times, how were you able to express yourselves? How did you find fulfillment?

RACHEL: Well, of course, we each had to find fulfillment in our own way. My way of life is certainly not yours, but it did earn me the title of Matriarch. We didn't have Ph.D.'s or Nobel Peace Prizes, but I was one of the charter members of the Women's League of the Mid-East and I was often called upon to give a blessing at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, etc. Maybe you need to think about doing more for others. The woman who gives of herself gains more than she gives.

REBECCA: (Interrupts, to audience) It's statements like that, that got her the title Matriarch.

LEAH: It is well documented that we Matriarchs contributed to future generations. my question of you is: What are you doing for future generations? We had wise people in our time and we made certain that each succeeding generation was prepared to pass on our Torah, customs and traditions.

SARAH: It wasn't always easy. In fact we were often sorely tried for adhering to our beliefs, but we persevered.

QUEST. 3: Without trying to sound smug, we feel we're at least trying to do our fair share in our Synagogue and Religious School. We educate our children and adults. We stress Judaism in our homes. And one of the most important things we do is support the Jewish Theological Seminary which is the foundation of the Conservative Movement.

SARAH: Admirable, very admirable. (All Matriarchs nod & repeat)

MOD: I have been waiting this entire show to tell you about the Jewish Theological Seminary. It began in 1886 with 10 students. Its purpose was the preservation in America of the knowledge and practice of historical Judaism. At the turn of the century, a group of prominent Jewish philanthropists persuaded Dr. Solomon Schechter to lead the new school. He assembled a distinguished faculty from Europe, Israel and this country. In 1940, Dr. Louis Finkelstein became Chancellor, and under his leadership, the Institute for Religious and Social studies, and the Eternal Light radio and television programs were established. In 1972, Dr. Gerson Cohen became Chancellor.

The Seminary has grown from a rabbinical training school with 10 students to a university complex with collegiate and graduate schools, interfaith seminars, and a pastoral psychiatry department. Its graduates serve as our rabbis, cantors and teachers.

In 1976 the Mathilde Schechter Residence Hall, a special project of Women's League, was opened. Seven years later, the Goldsmith Hall, providing housing for married and graduate students was completed.

In Jerusalem, the American Student Center is home for a year to rabbinical students and to college students participating in the seminary study program. The Jewish Museum and the Seminary library are known world-wide for their collections of Judaica. The present Chancellor, Dr. Ismar Schorch continues to lead the seminary in its pattern of phenomenal growth.

QUEST. 1: We feel the seminary is very important. Without it, our lives would be sorely lacking. Where would we get our rabbis? Where would we get our *hazzanim*? Where would we get our Jewish leaders?

QUESTIONERS: [Tune: "MY FAVORITE THINGS"]

CHORUS:

It's the Jewish Seminary, we rely upon,
This is the place where our leaders are taught,
A place where our past lives on.

Who do we turn to when we need a Rabbi,
To guide us and teach us the laws that we live by,
And when on Friday night the *Hazzan* sings,
Who can we thank for the joy that he brings,

CHORUS:

It's the Jewish Seminary, where our future lies,
This is the place where our Jewish ideas,
Throughout the years, survive.

Where is the place that we find inspiration,
Pass on the torch to the next generation,
Where is the place where our knowledge abounds,
Where is the place where our leaders are found?

CHORUS:

It's the Jewish Seminary, our religion's heart,
This is the place where our heritage lives,
We must pledge our support.

SARAH: Now that is truly impressive. Of course we Matriarchs don't miss a thing, so we know about the Seminary, but it's very difficult to keep up with all the new advances in society. So much is going on. I'm still trying to adjust to the changeover from scribes to printing presses. What a revolution that was in the Bible industry!

REBECCA: I can't wait to tell Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about this wonderful Jewish Theological Seminary and how successful their progeny turned out to be. They'll "*kleib*" such "*naches*".

QUEST. 2: The growth of the Jewish Theological Seminary is dependent upon Sisterhood for financial support.

RACHEL: I am so impressed. We came here to teach you and we are learning.

QUEST.3: We Jews are famous for being teachers. (To the audience) Do you think that's a good Matriarchal statement?

MOD: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, we want to thank you all for joining us here this evening. This has truly been an enlightening experiencing, and we want you to know that we think you are absolutely the top!