

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Finding Strength From Women in the Bible

In the early 1990s, Dr. Shera M. Aranoff began studying the Hebrew Bible and became struck by how often she read about the instrumental role of women in the history of the Jewish people.

"Most people think of the Bible as very patriarchal and that women didn't have much of a say or much of a place," said Dr. Aranoff, a dermatologist who practices in New York 3 days a week. "But if you read the stories, the men were busy fighting with their neighbors and talking to God. The women really determined the course of their nation's history."

For example, she said, the great law-maker and prophet Moses was constantly being saved by women—when a pharaoh demanded that all newborn Hebrew males be killed, Moses' mother, Jochebed, weaved a basket that transported him to safety down the Nile River. An Egyptian princess, Batya, rescued the infant downstream.

Later in life, God became angry at Moses for not having circumcised his youngest son. His wife, Zipporah, stepped in and performed the circumcision.

The impact of these and other women are the subject of a weekly "Women in the



Dermatologist Shera M. Aranoff teaches a weekly "Women in the Bible" class.

Bible" class that Dr. Aranoff teaches every Thursday morning during the academic school year at Kehilath Jeshurun, a synagogue in New York. Dr. Aranoff spends 10-15 hours every week preparing for each hour-long class, including reading the Bible chapter being studied and reading commentaries from ancient biblical and

Talmudic texts about the relevant chapter, as well as outlining her own thoughts.

About 35-40 women attend the class. "It's a way of looking at life and a way of living your life, because you can identify with these women in what they've gone through and what the really important things in life are," said Dr. Aranoff, who has conducted the class free of charge for more than 15 years.

"The superficial things fade away; they just seem meaningless. It helps you keep your priorities straight."

Four years ago, her scholarship for the class resulted in "The Passions of the Matriarchs" (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 2004), a book that describes the women of Genesis—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—based on traditional Jewish sources.

Her more recent book, "Moses' Women" (Ktav, 2008), is a commentary based on traditional sources about the women in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Hebrew Bible.

In these books and in her classes, the women of the Bible "come alive in their commentaries as we enter their private

lives to understand their innermost emotions," Dr. Aranoff explained.

Dr. Aranoff sets the tone for a friendly atmosphere that pairs intellectual rigor with a quest for spiritual meaning.

She said that all of the work she has poured into the class has led her to conclude that many things in life "are predetermined—if you're a religious person you'll say by God, if not you'll say by your DNA. [But] the only attribute that makes us truly human are the choices that we make." ■

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

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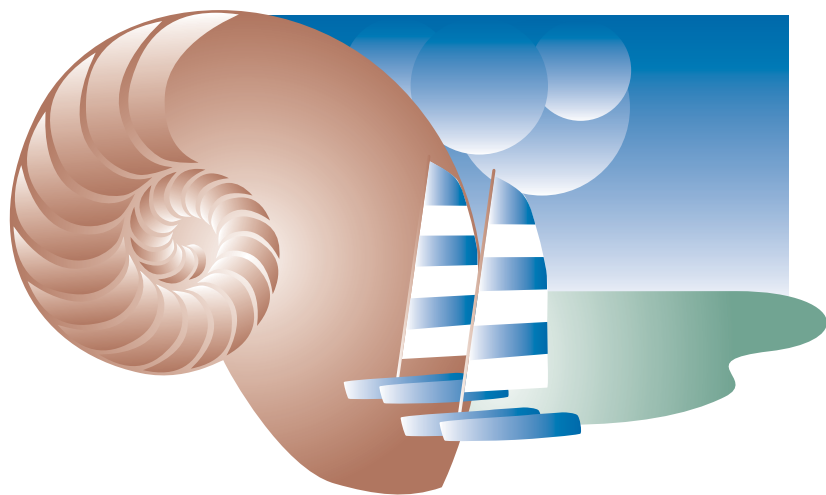
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