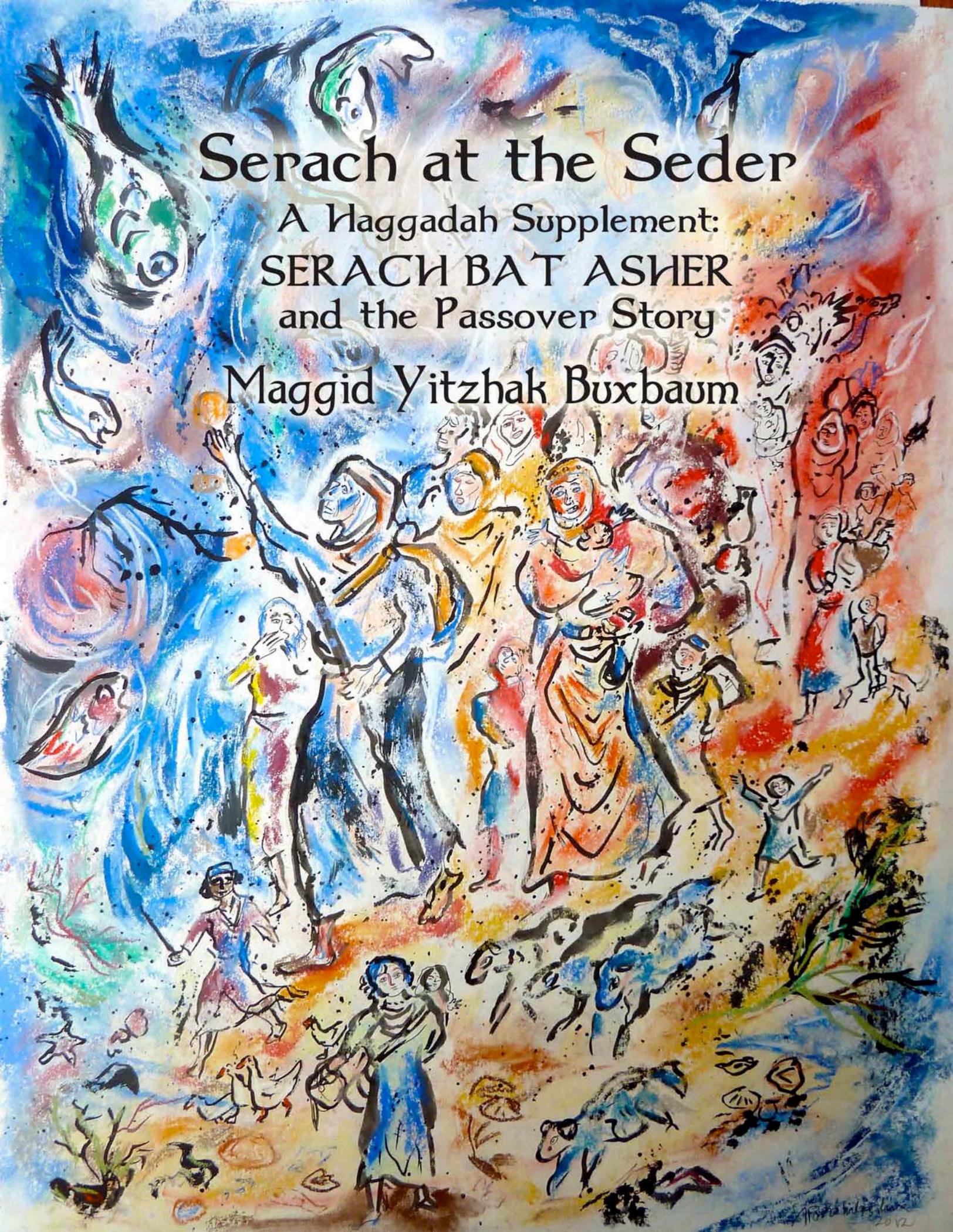


# Serach at the Seder

A Haggadah Supplement:  
**SERACH BAT ASHER**  
and the Passover Story

Maggid Yitzhak Buxbaum



# Serach at the Seder

A Haggadah Supplement  
Serach bat Asher and the Passover Story

Maggid Yitzhak Buxbaum

Friends, I've discovered something about Serach bat Asher that will cause Jews around the world, especially women, to dance for joy. Here is the dynamite revelation: Many of us know about Serach bat Asher, but her incredible relevance to Passover hasn't been fully appreciated. Read and enjoy.

## ***Suggestions for using this supplement***

You can read it aloud at the beginning of the seder or before Maggid (telling the story). There are three kinds of recitations, labeled **Reader, SERACH, & ALL**.

1. **READER:** Going around the table each person reads from the Serach story.
2. **SERACH:** A recitation by an individual who is "representing" Serach bat Asher and speaking in her voice. Each of these ends with her saying: **"I was there!"**
3. **ALL:** A general litany recited in response to SERACH'S **"I was there!"** Everyone at the table together answers: **"We were there too!"**

**Maggid Yitzhak Buxbaum** is the author of ten books, including *Jewish Spiritual Practices*, *The Light and Fire of the Baal Shem Tov*, and *Jewish Tales of Holy Women*. Next year he will publish *A Haggadah for Mystics and Drunks*. Reb Yitzhak directs the Jewish Spirit Maggid Training Program and has so far ordained 33 men and women for this holy work. To find out more about studying with Reb Yitzhak, visit [www.jewishspirit.com](http://www.jewishspirit.com) or contact him directly: [yitzhak@jewishspirit.com](mailto:yitzhak@jewishspirit.com); 718 858-4058.

---

**[yitzhak@jewishspirit.com](mailto:yitzhak@jewishspirit.com) • 718 858-4058 • [www.jewishspirit.com](http://www.jewishspirit.com)**

Serach Project Coordinator: Alissa Thomas

Layout/Design by Maggid Sender Klaper

Artwork by Maggidah Shoshannah Brombacher

© 2012 Yitzhak Buxbaum



# Serach at the Seder

A Haggadah Supplement

Serach bat Asher and the Passover Story

Maggid Yitzhak Buxbaum

**Seder Leader 1:** The Rabbis say that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women.<sup>1</sup> Tonight, we will hear about one of the greatest women of that generation and a woman for all generations-- Serach bat Asher. Although Serach bat Asher is mentioned in the Torah, hardly anything is told of her other than her lineage. But many amazing stories are told about her in the Midrash..

**Reader 1:** Serach bat Asher, Jacob's granddaughter, is mentioned by name in the Torah among the seventy souls who went down to Egypt with Jacob.<sup>2</sup> She is also named in the census of those who left Egypt with Moses.<sup>3</sup>

*Serach was the only person who witnessed the whole Passover story from beginning to end. She went down to Egypt with Jacob and she left Egypt with Moses!<sup>4</sup>*

But these two events were hundreds of years apart! The Rabbis explain that Serach lived for centuries and then entered paradise alive like Elijah the Prophet.<sup>5</sup>

**Reader 2:** When Serach was at a Passover seder, as she was many times, she would tell a story of those days and conclude "I was there!" If someone said something that was inaccurate, she was not shy about correcting him, and would say "I was there!" (See the story later in this supplement where Serach corrects Rabbi Yochanan and uses those very words.)

**Reader 3:**

The Rabbis say that all the Jewish souls that will ever exist—in the past, present, and future—were at the Exodus from Egypt, and that is the reason we can fulfill the Passover seder obligation to see oneself as having personally left Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Serach bat Asher alone can say “I was there!” bodily, for the whole Passover story. But our souls were present, and we can say: “We were there too!”

**Serach 1:**

Serach bat Asher said: I witnessed the whole story. I lived through everything that happened. ***I was there!***

**ALL:**

***We were there too!***

**Seder Leader 2:**

***In the Midrash, Serach is a key figure in the Passover events, second only to Moses!*** Let’s briefly recount the main stories told about Serach, in chronological order.

**Reader 4:**

When Joseph sent his brothers back to their father in Canaan, they worried that Jacob would die from shock on hearing that Joseph was alive. So they asked Jacob’s favorite granddaughter, seven-year-old Serach, who was a great soul and wise beyond her years, to gently break the news to him.<sup>7</sup> She sat near her grandfather and played her harp, singing: “Joseph is alive and rules over Egypt.” She repeated her song until Jacob heard what she was saying, and realizing that it was true, exulted. And the holy spirit, which had left him all the years of his mourning for Joseph, returned to him. In a state of exaltation and joy, Jacob blessed Serach, saying, “Because you brought me back to



life by telling me that Joseph is alive, I bless you that you never taste the bitterness of death.”<sup>8</sup> In the merit of Jacob’s blessing, Serach never died; she lived hundreds of years and then was taken up into heaven alive, like Elijah the Prophet.

**Reader 5:**

***A seven-year-old girl kept Jacob alive and restored his communion with God—Jacob, who is called the “chosen one” of the Patriarchs! That was worth a blessing!***<sup>9</sup>

**Serach 2:**

Serach bat Asher said: I prayed to the God of my grandfather Israel to guide me how to tell him that my Uncle Joseph was alive in Egypt. I played my harp and sang sitting at my Saba’s feet, but inwardly I made a soul ascent and was singing before the Throne of glory. I sang a melody I heard the angels singing, and I prayed with all my heart for my grandfather; and the sound of my voice and my harp revived his holy spirit. The spirit of prophecy had left him long before I was born. Now, on our way to Egypt, God spoke to him in a night vision, in a dream.<sup>10</sup> I went down to Egypt with my father, my grandfather, and our whole family—seventy souls. ***I was there!***<sup>11</sup>

**ALL:**

***We were there too!***

**Reader 6:**

Many years passed. Along with many other Hebrews, Serach bat Asher was made a slave in Egypt. She worked kneeling, bent over a hand-mill, grinding grain for bread. She endured the curses and taunts of Egyptian female slaves who hated the Hebrews and would loudly say in their hearing things like, “We’re willing to remain slaves as long as the filthy Hebrews stay as slaves!”<sup>12</sup>



**Serach 3:**

Serach bat Asher said: “Woe to the ears that hear such words! And woe to the mouth that utters them! ***I was there!***”<sup>13</sup>

**ALL:**

**Woe! We were there too!**

**Reader 7:**

Time passed. Moses came and did miracles before the elders, and said he was the Redeemer. They went to the eldest among them, Serach—who was ancient, more than 200 years old-- and told her about Moses. She said, “Miracles by themselves mean nothing.” When they told her that he had said in God’s name, “I have surely remembered you,” she said, “He is the Redeemer.” And they believed in Moses.<sup>14</sup>

**Reader 8:**

God had given to Abraham secret code words to identify the Redeemer. Abraham passed the secret to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, Jacob to Joseph, Joseph to his brothers, and Asher told his daughter Serach. The Redeemer would use the words *pakod pakaditi* “I have surely remembered you.”

***Serach certified to the people that Moses was the Redeemer.***<sup>15</sup>

**Serach 7:**

Serach bat Asher said: “My father’s generation passed away and many years went by. When Moses came, I was the only one alive who knew the code words and could identify him.

***I was there!***”

**ALL:**

***We were there too!***



**Reader 9:**

When the Jews were preparing to leave Egypt, Moses searched for Joseph's bones, to fulfill the oath the Israelites made to Joseph on his deathbed -- to take his bones with them when God took them out of Egypt.<sup>16</sup> Moses searched for three days to find Joseph's remains without success. The Israelites could not leave Egypt if they did not fulfill their oath to Joseph! Moses went and asked for Serach's help. She told him that the Egyptians had put Joseph's body in an iron coffin and sank it in the Nile. She took Moses to the place, wrote the four-letter

Name of God on a shard that she handed to Moses, and said, "Cast it in the river and call out to Joseph." Moses called: "Joseph, Joseph, the time has come. We are waiting for you!" Immediately the heavy iron coffin floated to the surface as if it were as light as a single reed.<sup>17</sup>



**Serach 4:**

Serach bat Asher said: I hid behind some reeds and watched the Egyptians sink Joseph's coffin in the Nile-- so the Jews wouldn't be able to leave. When Moses came, I was the only one who knew where the coffin was, and I told him. ***I was there!***

**ALL:**

***We were there too!***

**Seder Leader 3:**

***Serach made it possible for the people to fulfill their oath to Joseph and leave Egypt!***

**Reader 10:**

The Midrash says that a Jewish female slave at the Red Sea saw greater visions than the visions seen by Ezekiel the prophet, who saw the Divine Chariot.<sup>18</sup> That female slave was Serach bat Asher.<sup>19</sup>

**Serach 5:**

Serach bat Asher said: The waters of the Red Sea split open, and the heavens opened, and I saw visions of God. I saw the Holy One above and the Shechinah below and myriads upon myriads of angels gathering to watch as we walked through the sea on dry land and the Egyptians drowned. ***I was there!***

**ALL:**

***We were there too!***

**Reader 11:**

More than a thousand years later, Rabbi Yochanan was teaching in the House of Study, expounding the Torah verses that tell how the waters of the Red Sea stood up like walls. He said that the water looked like lattices. Suddenly, Serach bat Asher-- who long before this had entered paradise alive and could return to this world-- appeared. She said to Rabbi Yochanan ...

**Serach 6:**

"That's not the way it was. I saw it, and I tell you, the Shechinah was shining through the water, like from many windows. ***I was there!***"<sup>20</sup>

**Seder Leader 4:**

These final words of Serach "I was there!" are the very purpose of the Passover seder -- that we should experience the story as if we were there! "In every generation one should see oneself as if he or she personally left Egypt."<sup>21</sup> ***Serach can visit our seders-- like she visited Rabbi Yochanan's study hall-- if we invoke her!***



Isn't it incredible how Serach fits into the Passover story this way?

Serach can teach us how to receive the awesome mystic lights of Passover, so that the Shechinah shines into us and we experience the story so deeply that we will say: "We were there too!" and mean it.

**Reader 12:**

The Midrash says that when the Jews were passing through the Red Sea, a daughter of Israel who had a crying baby on her arm, had only to reach into the wall of water and pluck out an apple or pomegranate.<sup>22</sup> We can say that Serach-- who saw the greatest visions at the Red Sea and who told Rabbi Yochanan what the water walls looked like-- told the mother, "Just reach in and get your baby some fruit!" This midrash may speak to the custom of some people to put a piece of fruit on the seder plate.

**Seder Leader 5:**

The name Serach means "overlap." Serach spans the generations and joins them together. These stories about Serach are traditional stories; no one is making them up to give a woman prominence. They are in the Midrash and will be accepted by Jews of all denominations. Serach can unite all Jews, and she can connect us with our ancestors and descendants too. Elijah visits every seder and as the "Day of the Lord" approaches he will repair the breach between parents and children, turning "the heart of parents to their children and the heart of children to their parents."<sup>23</sup> Serach will repair the breach between men and women, if we invoke her presence at our seder and listen to her teaching!



**ALL:**



Serach bat Asher! Serach bat Asher! We believe that you can visit our seder and invite you to come. We are not too clever to close the door to mystic vision. We know that we do not have to open the door for you; we have to open our mind and our heart. May we be aware of your presence among us. Teach us! You saw great visions. May we see visions too, of the presence of God and of a restored world, as it was in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve sinned. Heal the breach between men and women. May we merit seeing and greeting you. And if you appear as a seven-year old girl or an ancient woman or an old man with a long white beard ... may we be able to recognize you.

**Seder Leader 6:**

The Rabbis teach that the redemption from the Egyptian exile is the model for the final redemption, as it says, "As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt I will show you wonders."<sup>24</sup> The deeds that will bring the final redemption will be similar to those that brought the redemption from Egypt, about which it was said: The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women. The final redemption will also be in the merit of the righteous women.<sup>25</sup> May they follow your lead, Serach, and rise to the task!



# Notes

1 B. Sota 11b.

2 Genesis 46:17

3 Numbers 26:46

4 Seder Olam Rabba, chap. 9: "Serach bat Asher was among those who went down to Egypt (with Jacob), and also among those who left Egypt (with Moses). She was among those who went down to Egypt as is written, 'and Serach their sister,' (Genesis 46:17) and among those went to the Land of Israel, as is said, 'and the name of the daughter of Asher was Serach' (Numbers 26:46).

5 Derech Eretz Zutta 1; Alphabet of Ben Sira 28a

6 Rebbe Shalom Noach of Slonim-Jerusalem said: "The Rabbis tell us that all the Jewish souls that will ever exist-- of the past, present, and future—were present at Mount Sinai for the Giving of the Torah. But all Jewish souls were also present at the Exodus and at the Red Sea, etc. That is the reason a person can see himself as if he personally left Egypt. Netivot Shalom, vol. 2, p.251.

7 The Midrash Says, vol. 1, Bereshit, p. 426, quoting the Rokeach, says that Serach was "an extraordinary girl, spiritually greater than all the children of the other tribes."

8 Sefer HaYashar 109b - 110a; Midrash HaGadol on Genesis 45:26; Otzar HaMidrashim (Eisenstein) p. 35

9 My added comment.

10 Genesis 46: 2 - 4.

11 Most of the paragraph is an expansion I have added to the text to explain why Serach's deed merited this blessing of long life and entering paradise alive.

12 Pesikta Rabbati 17:5; Exodus 11:5 says that the death of the first-born included "the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the first-born of the female slave who is behind the mill ..." The Rabbis asked why the Egyptian slaves were held responsible for the persecution of the Hebrews and were punished in their first-born. They answered that it was because they sympathized with the policy and added insult to injury in the scenario of their loud tormenting of the Hebrew women slaves. "So said Rabbi Judah ben Pazzi citing a traditional aggadah transmitted from generation to generation." Pesikta de-Rab Kahana (English) 7:9, p. 148; Pesikta de-Rab Kahana 17:5, 78b, p. 156.

13 My added comment.

14 Exodus Rabba 5:13 (See Genesis 50:24, 25, Exodus 3: 16, 13:19); Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer (English), chap. 48, pp. 383 - 384; Yalkut Shimoni, Genesis 12:64.

15 See the previous note.

16 Genesis 50:25.

17 Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael, Beshallah 24a - 24b; B. Sota 13 a - b, based on Exodus 14:19. Pesikta de-Rav Kahana 11:12. Yalkut Shimoni, Deuteronomy 34, #965.

18 Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (English) 7:9, p. 148.

19 The comment of the Rabbis really means that even someone of the lowest status, a female slave, saw greater visions than the greatest prophet. But taking this as referring to a single female slave, she is identified with Serach in the 12th century Persian-Jewish "Chronicles of Serah bat Asher," quoted in Gabriel's Palace, p. 48. What were the great visions she saw? Midrashim tell of God splitting the sea, the Haggadah refers to "gilui Shechinah, Serach speaks of the Shechinah shining through the walls of water, other midrashim tell of angels gathering to watch and celebrating or criticizing or "commenting on the action," it would be supposed that that was meant.

20 Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (English) 11:13, p. 212.

21 Haggadah.

22 Malachi 4: 5, 6 (very end).

23 Micah 7:15.

24 Up to this point in the paragraph is from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in Likkutei Sichot (English) Vol. 2, Shmot.

25 Exodus Rabba 21:10.

26 Exodus Rabba 21:10.

Netivot Shalom  
2017