

## **Broken Matzah**

**By Merle Feld**

On the New Jersey transit train  
I pulled my particularity  
out of a brown paper bag:  
one of four broken pieces of  
buttered matzah.  
Slowly, delicately  
I proceeded with my dinner.

The young man across the aisle  
in his dark business suit  
pale skin, wavy black hair  
looked to me Italian  
but I admit I'm not good at that.

He seemed uncomfortable,  
not so much with the chremzel  
I carefully dipped into  
a little puddle of sour cream,  
nor even with my public  
consumption of food--  
probably I was brought up  
to know better, but I was brought up  
so long ago I've misplaced  
some of my mother's niceties--

No, I think it was the matzah  
that did it, it was the matzah  
that singled me out,  
the unmistakable display  
of my particularity:  
four broken pieces of buttered matzah.

Or maybe he didn't care at all  
didn't notice  
maybe his breathing didn't  
become slightly irregular  
maybe it was all  
my imagination  
or my breathing  
becoming slightly irregular.

How like my mother I am, after all,  
who trained us in our largely  
Jewish Brooklyn neighborhood  
not to wear our old playclothes  
outside on Sundays  
so as not to offend our Christian  
neighbors on their way home from church.

In those days I took her at her word;  
now I wonder as the train  
pulls into Penn Station  
if Marie Brady who lived across the street  
ever noticed us in our Sunday finery,  
ever thought it curious  
that we dressed up on her Sabbath,  
ever questioned our carefully guarded  
particularity, ever saw close up  
a buttered piece of matzah.

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*(on Merle Feld's blog, and on p. 412 in Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat and Festivals)*

**Merle Feld's Bio** - [www.merlefeld.com](http://www.merlefeld.com)

Merle Feld is a widely published poet, award-winning playwright, peace activist and educator. She is the author of a volume of poetry, *Finding Words*, (URJ Press, 2011) and a highly acclaimed memoir, *A Spiritual Life: Exploring the Heart and Jewish Tradition* (State University of New York Press, revised edition 2007).

Merle's award-winning play, *The Gates are Closing*, has offered hundreds of synagogue communities and university groups from Brooklyn to Beijing a powerful and moving introduction to the themes of the High Holidays.

In another play, *Across the Jordan* (published by Syracuse University Press in the anthology *Making a Scene*), Biblical characters share the stage with contemporary Israelis and Palestinians struggling for recognition and rapprochement.

Merle is a popular scholar-in-residence nationally. Abroad, she has facilitated Israeli-Palestinian dialogue on the West Bank and at Seeds of Peace, and has traveled to collaborate with and support Jewish women activists in the former Soviet Union through Project Keshet. Both her experiences facilitating dialogue on the West Bank and traveling across the FSU are detailed in the revised edition of *A Spiritual Life*.

Since 2005 Merle has served as Founding Director of the Albin Rabbinic Writing

Institute. Her prose and poetry (including her signature poem "We All Stood Together" about women and men receiving the Torah at Sinai) can be found in numerous anthologies and prayer books. Merle and her husband Rabbi Edward Feld teach and mentor rabbis and seekers across the country and around the world through their nonprofit institute, [www.DEREKH.org](http://www.DEREKH.org).

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