

# Red Tent

by Anita Diamant

## About the book...

*The Red Tent* is the place where women gathered during their cycles of birthing, menses, and even illness. Like the conversations and mysteries held within this feminine tent, this sweeping piece of fiction offers an insider's look at the daily life of a biblical sorority of mothers and wives and their one and only daughter, Dinah. Told in the voice of Jacob's daughter Dinah (who only received a glimpse of recognition in the Book of Genesis), we are privy to the fascinating feminine characters who bled within the red tent. In a confiding and poetic voice, Dinah whispers stories of her four mothers, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, and Bilhah -- all wives to Jacob, and each one embodying unique feminine traits. As she reveals these sensual and emotionally charged stories we learn of birthing miracles, slaves, artisans, household gods, and sisterhood secrets. Eventually Dinah delves into her own saga of betrayals, grief, and a call to midwifery.



## About the author...

Anita Diamant is a prize-winning journalist whose work has appeared regularly in the Boston Globe Magazine and Parenting magazine. She is the author of five books about contemporary Jewish practice: *Choosing a Jewish Life*, *Bible Baby Names*, *The New Jewish Baby Book*, *The New Jewish Wedding*, and *Living a Jewish Life* (with H. Cooper). Diamant's early childhood was spent in Newark, New Jersey, but her family moved to Denver, Colorado when she was 12 years old. She received a bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, as well as a master's degree in English from the State University of New York at Binghamton. Diamant now lives in West Newton, MA, with her husband and daughter Emilia, to whom the book is dedicated.



## Discussion Questions:

1. Read Genesis 34 and discuss how *The Red Tent* changes your perspective on Dinah's story and also on the story of Joseph that follows. Does *The Red Tent* raise questions about other women in the Bible?
2. Discuss the marital dynamics of Jacob's family. He has four wives; compare his relationship with each woman?
3. What do you make of the relationships among the four wives?

# Red Tent

by Anita Diamant

4. Dinah is rich in "mothers." Discuss the differences or similarities in her relationship with each woman. Do you think Diamant accurately portrays the relationships among women?
5. Childbearing and childbirth are central to *The Red Tent*. How do the fertility childbearing and birthing practices differ from contemporary life? How are they similar?
6. Discuss Jacob's role as a father. Does he treat Dinah differently from his sons? Does he feel differently about her? If so, how?
7. Female relationships figure largely in *The Red Tent*. Discuss the importance of Inna, Tabea, Werenro, and Meryt.
8. Dinah's point of view is often one of an outsider, an observer. What effect does this have on the narrative? What effect does this have on the reader?
9. The book travels from Haran (contemporary Iraq/Syria), through Canaan and into Shechem (Israel), and into Egypt. What strikes you about the cultural differences Dinah encounters vis-à-vis food, clothing, work, and male-female relationships.
10. This is a patriarchal society. Does the author deal fairly with both the male and female points of view?
11. Each month the women go to the red tent. What is the significance of the red tent? What activities take place there? "Every woman is a creature of the red tent ... we are all born of the same mother." Is the women's isolation in the tent a positive experience?
12. What occupations did the women have? Do these seem well researched and authentic as described in the book? What is the purpose of daughters?
13. The women worship many goddesses, including the moon goddess, Innana, who seems to encompass everything feminine. How do they view Jacob's god?
14. Rebecca is portrayed as an oracle. How does she regard the women of each of her son's families? What traditions does she seek to carry on?
15. Why do you think Diamant changed the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 to a love affair in *The Red Tent*?
16. Would it alter your feelings about the story, if you knew the red tent was not used during this time period in the Middle East?