



NISSAN

Miriam's Well Water to Nourish the Body and the Soul

The Legend of Miriam's Well is told in a number of midrashic stories. The Rabbis propose the existence of this well by juxtaposing Miriam's death at the beginning of Numbers 20 and the account of the waters of Meribah that follows immediately.

[1] The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried there. [2] The community was without water and they joined against Moses and Aaron.....

Based upon the relationship of these two consecutive stories, the Rabbis surmise that Miriam's death resulted in the dearth of water; and they accredit to her the existence of the well that accompanied the Israelites on their wanderings in the wilderness and provided them with drinking water.

The importance of Miriam's contribution of the well is equated with those of Moses (the manna) and Aaron (the pillar of cloud) in the Talmud.

BT Ta'anit 9a

*An objection was raised: R. Jose the son of R. Judah says: Three good leaders had arisen for Israel, namely: Moses, Aaron and Miriam and for their sake three good things were conferred upon Israel, namely the well, the pillar of cloud and the manna. **The well, for the merit of Miriam;** the pillar of cloud for the merit of Aaron; the manna for the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is said: And Miriam died there (Num 22:1) and immediately follows the verse: And there was no water for the congregation....*

Passover, which celebrates the salvation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt, is commemorated in one of the most widely dispersed and read of all Jewish texts, the Passover Haggadah. Ironically, the story leading up to the exodus from Egypt contains one of the most female-rich narratives in the entire biblical canon, yet the story recounted in the Haggadah is devoid of a single female personality: not Miriam, Jocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, or Pharaoh's daughter.

To provide women with a place in the Passover ritual, many Jewish households have begun to place a *kos Miryam*, Miriam's cup, on the seder table beside the cup of Elijah. This object was chosen as a reminder of Miriam's well, a midrashic tale of a miraculous source of water for the Israelites in the desert. As a symbol of women's presence at the exodus, the *kos Miryam* reflects the contemporary desire for inclusion of all Jews at the seder table.

As an evolving ritual, the use of Miriam's cup is varied: some fill it at the beginning of the seder; others after the Ten Plagues and before *Dayyenu*. Others use it in conjunction with Elijah's cup at the end of the seder. Some pass it around for everyone to take a drink, others pour water from the cup into individual glasses. Whatever your custom, Miriam's cup provides a thoughtful and meaningful ritual that enhances this celebration of a historic event in our people's history.