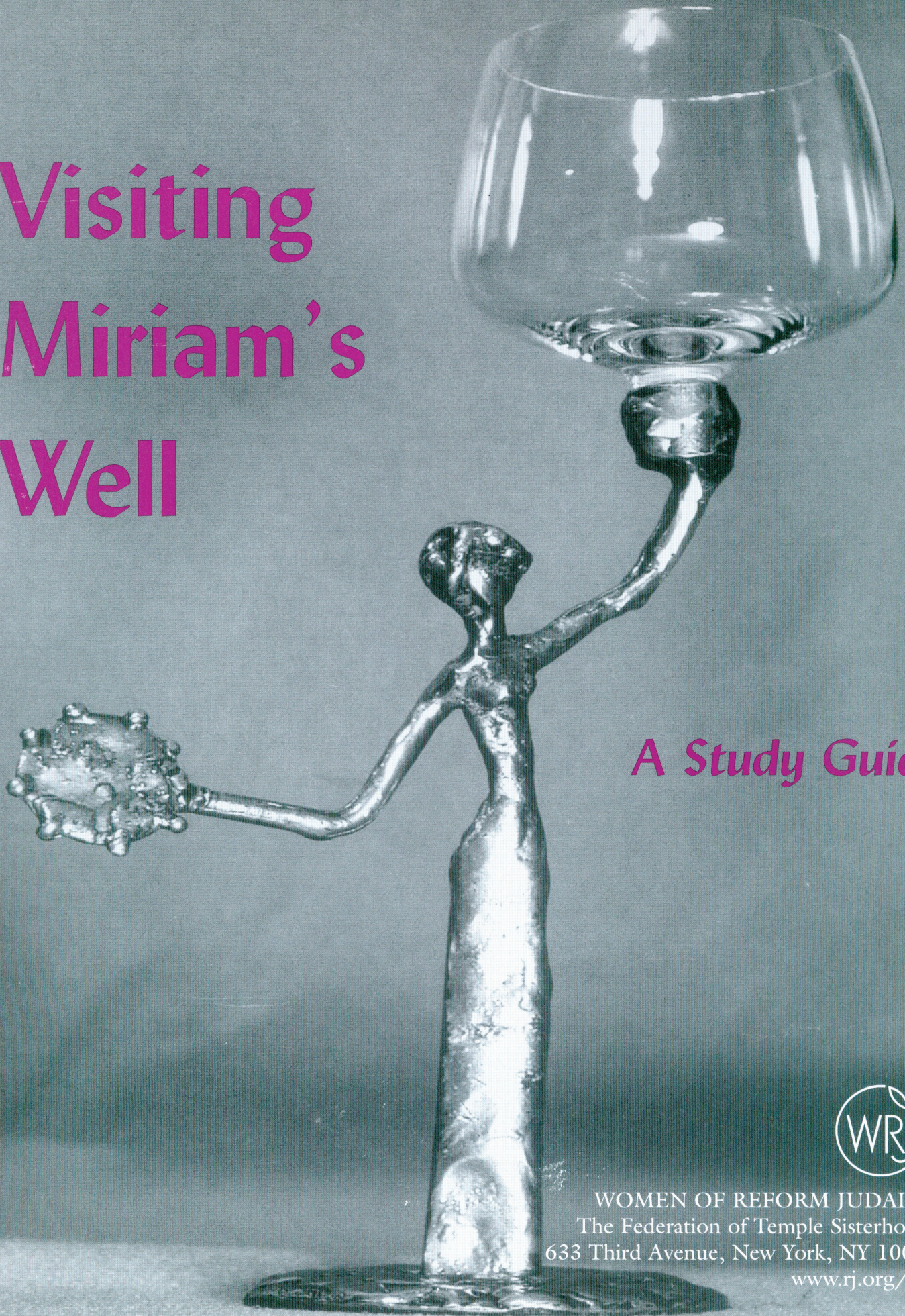


Visiting Miriam's Well



A Study Guide



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM
The Federation of Temple Sisterhoods
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On the cover: "Miriam's Legacy" by Linda Gissen, winner of the WRJ Miriam's Cup Competition

"Just as Miriam led our ancestors in song and dance to celebrate their new freedom, we today continue her legacy. Women throughout the ages have gained strength and courage from the inspiration of Miriam. We today not only delight in our legacy but also understand the obligation to pass on our legacy.

"My design both celebrates our past and mandates our future. The design is figuratively of course of Miriam, but also represents all of the strong women role models who have through their wisdom and courage influenced us to be who we are today. Symbolically as all assembled at the seder add water to the vessel she holds aloft, we add to the legacy we pass on to those who celebrate at our table and to those who will be influenced by our words and deeds.

"The design is of a dancing Miriam leading women in dance and celebration. One arm is holding aloft the vessel to hold water at the seder. The other hand holds Miriam's traditional tambourine, decorated with the WRJ logo. Women of Reform Judaism dancing and singing in celebration lead the way to the future. The piece is hand cast in lead-free pewter, patinaed and lacquered to preserve its finish. The glass insert is permanently affixed."

Boxed artists' statements are from *Miriam's Cups*, catalog of "Drawing from the Source: Miriam, Women's Creativity and New Ritual," © 1997 by Ma'yan: The Jewish Women's Project.

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Preface

I was introduced to the beauty and significance of a Miriam's Cup in 1977, at a magnificent exhibit at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. It was a revelation: Here was a new ritual object that spoke to me and therefore, I believe, speaks to all Jewish women. It connects an individual woman to thousands of other women and links us all to a prominent female in our heritage.

What better way to recognize the ongoing nurturing and leadership of Women of Reform Judaism on our 90th birthday than by creating a symbol of empowerment and caring? As Miriam brought sustenance to her people, WRJ continues this tradition. Enjoy the meaning, sweetness and joy that the WRJ Miriam's Cup represents.

Ellen Y. Rosenberg, Executive Director
Women of Reform Judaism
November 2003

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to:

- Rabbinic interns Alana Wasserman, who researched and wrote the original Guide, and Marci Bellows, who later prepared the study questions, read and researched late drafts of the manuscript;
- Eve F. Roshevsky, WRJ staff executive, who expanded the manuscript and did the final editing;
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- Jill Zimmerman, for her thoughtful comments on midrash;
- Barbara Koppel, who cheerfully multitasked the proofreading and copyediting, again and again; and
- WRJ President Helene Waranch and Executive Director Ellen Y. Rosenberg for their vision, enthusiasm, encouragement and support.

WRJ is grateful to the fine Jewish women artists who submitted designs, prototypes and thoughtful statements to a competition for the WRJ Miriam's Cup commission, especially to the four finalists whose sketches and comments appear beginning on page 24. We congratulate Linda Gissen, whose design was accepted and whose magnificent Miriam's Cup appears on the cover of the Guide. She has captured, in Miriam's dance, the spirit of Sisterhood on the cusp of the 21st century.

Introduction

In recent years, a new ceremonial object has been adapted from the traditional Seder ritual of the Elijah's Cup left on the table awaiting the Prophet's visit. Jewish women adopted the custom of placing on the Seder table a Miriam's Cup, named for the prophetess, judge and sister of Moses, Miriam. *Visiting Miriam's Well* is the first guide to its use and significance for Jewish women.

The unprecedented exhibit of Miriam's Cups held at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, "Drawing from the Source: Miriam, Women's Creativity and New Ritual," brought to the attention of the art world and the Jewish community the creative potential of Jewish women artists interpreting the Miriam's Cup in every conceivable style and medium. The exhibit's organizer, Ma'yan: the Jewish Women's Project, produced a magnificent catalog, *Miriam's Cups*, in which each artist wrote of the materials, the techniques and her experience of Judaism while creating these Miriam's cups.

Many of these artists' statements are highlighted in *Visiting Miriam's Well: A Study Guide*, with permission from HUC-JIR and Ma'yan. Jean Bloch Rosensaft of HUC-JIR and Ruth Silverman of Ma'yan were especially encouraging and helpful with research materials and advice for this study guide.

Visiting Miriam's Well was prepared to accompany an original Miriam's Cup commissioned to honor the 90th birthday of Women of Reform Judaism, founded in 1913 as the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. Artists were invited to submit plans and prototypes, and the winner, "Miriam's Legacy" by Linda Gissen, will be introduced and available for sale at the WRJ 44th. Assembly in Minneapolis, MN, November 5-9, 2003. Statements and sketches from the three finalists have been included in an appendix to the *Guide*.

With the WRJ Miriam's Cup, 100,000 members in 600 Sisterhoods of the women's affiliate of the UAHC can take pride in the history and heritage of women's service and the empowerment they share.

“ . . . from the very beginning of her life in the text, Miriam is associated with water, with bridging women across lines of difference, and with furthering the survival of the Jewish people.” – *Miriam’s Cups*

A Prophetic Dream

The Miriam’s Cup is a ceremonial object created to commemorate the role of the prophetess Miriam, the older sister of Moses, in the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. She is honored with a cup because of her frequent association with water.

There is a midrash* about a prophetic dream that Miriam had before Moses was born. In it, a man told her to tell her parents that they would have a son who would be thrown into the water. The waters would become dry, and wonders and miracles would be performed through him. This child would save the People Israel and be their eternal leader.

Miriam’s prophecy was fulfilled, as we can clearly see in the Torah. In Exodus 2:1-10, after Moses (who had not yet been named) is born, his mother, Yocheved, puts him in a basket in what is believed to have been the Nile River. Unbeknown to her parents, young Miriam (then about six years old) has followed Moses as he traveled along the river and has watched over her baby brother to make sure he has arrived. Pharaoh’s daughter finds Moses in the river and decides to keep him as her own. So that mother and son will not be separated, Miriam suggests to the Egyptian princess that an Israelite woman, Yocheved, be Moses’ caregiver, and Pharaoh’s daughter agrees. She does not know that this Israelite woman is in fact Moses’ real mother.

A Song of the Sea

The prophecy in Miriam’s dream, that the waters will “become dry,” is fulfilled when the Red Sea is parted and the people walk on dry land to freedom instead of drowning in the sea. When the Israelites escape through the parted Israelite waters, Miriam leads the women in song and dance (Exodus 15:20-21), praising God and God’s power over the waters. Although the passage is only half a verse and a repetition of Exodus 15:1, scholars have long believed that either the Song of the Sea was originally Miriam’s Song and later attributed to Moses, or that the rest of the song was lost. A translation of fragment 4Q365 of the Dead Sea Scrolls suggests that Miriam had her own song, different from the Song of the Sea.

* A story or explication of the biblical text, often part of rabbinic “oral history.”

“As a Jewish woman, I am inspired by the ‘Living Waters’ drawn from Miriam’s Well. For me, they represent abundance, creativity, renewal, and redemption.” –Meg Levine, artist

Miriam’s “Well”

Another midrash (*Avot* 5:6; *Ta’anit* 9a) teaches that God gave Miriam a well as a result of her devotion to the Israelite people and her words of comfort in their times of distress. Created on the first Sabbath eve on which the Israelites were in the desert, the well accompanied them during their wanderings. Just as Miriam’s words of comfort nourished the souls of the Israelite people, the water from her well sustained their bodies. This nourishment of both body and soul ensured their survival.

Midrash suggests that Miriam’s “well” was actually a rock. When the Israelites set up camp, the well would always face the Tent of Meeting. The leader of each of the twelve tribes would touch the rock with his staff, and water would flow from the rock to the campsite of that tribe. Some commentators believe that when God told Moses to speak to the rock (*Exodus* 20:8), and Moses struck it instead (*Exodus* 20:11), the rock referred to is the rock of Miriam’s Well.

Some midrashim express the idea that Miriam’s Well settled into the Sea of Tiberias and that every *motza’ei Shabbat* (Saturday evening just after Shabbat) water is drawn from the combined waters. This newly drawn water is believed to have curative powers. Numbers 20:1 ends with the death of Miriam, and the following verse opens with a drought in the land: “The community was without water.” It is as if the well departed with Miriam when she died. Every time the Israelite community needed water, the well was there as long as Miriam was alive. From these two verses, the rabbis surmised that the well only existed because of Miriam and her devotion to the Israelite people.

Two Cups at the Seder Table

Why have both a Miriam’s Cup and an Elijah’s Cup? In modern times, the Haggadah read at the Seder tells the story of the Exodus, yet Miriam, the heroine of the story, is not there. The two cups now represent the difference between the two prophets. Elijah, who is associated with the coming of the Messianic Era, spent most of his life alone, whereas Miriam lived among the people and concentrated on the present, comforting the Israelites when they lost faith. While Elijah’s Cup represents our future redemption, Miriam’s Cup represents the hope of the present.

Miriam's Fish?

In some households and synagogues, there is something else on the Passover seder table that honors Miriam: a cooked fish. Since Miriam and her role in the Exodus were neglected for so long, scholars have concluded that the fish must represent her. A bone, representing meat, and an egg honor Moses and Aaron, respectively, for leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The seder plate then contains a total of three cooked foods, traditionally fish, meat, and eggs, representing the foods that Israel will eat in “the Time to Come.”

The custom of eating fish at Passover is supported in the Babylonian Talmud (see *Sotah* 11b) and in Exodus *Rabbah* chapter 1, which refers to the righteous women in Egypt. According to a midrash, when the women drew water from the well, God put fish in their pitchers, the fish they would then cook for their husbands to eat. By virtue of the fish, they were freed from Egypt, and therefore we should eat fish at Passover. Perhaps Miriam is also honored with the cooked fish because God put the fish in her well.

From Pesach to Earth Day

Beyond the Passover Seder, the use and significance of the Miriam's Cup now extends to many occasions. In addition to its use on the Rosh Chodesh and Shabbat tables, you may find one at Bat Mitzvah celebrations, weddings, naming ceremonies, even on Earth Day! The cup represents the connectedness of Jewish women everywhere. For some, Miriam's Cup and *mayim chayim* (living waters) symbolize healing. Miriam's Cup reminds us all of the opportunities for renewal and inspiration to be found within Jewish tradition and of our own special abilities to celebrate, struggle, change and grow.

“When I stand on a sandy beach contemplating the overwhelming power of the sea before me, I often think of Miriam, the first female prophet, who surely may have had similar emotions as she led the women of Israel to freedom.” –*Ina Golub, artist*

The Miriam’s Cup: Where Did It Come From—How Is It Used?

In Boston in the 1980’s, a group of Jewish women gathered together on what happened to be Rosh Chodesh (the ancient festival of the New Moon that has been revived and is today celebrated as a women’s holiday). The group had been trying out new rituals for some time. On this day, one of the women led a meditation on Miriam’s Well, symbolically “visiting” there to gain inspiration and renewal from its *mayim chayim*. The following week, another woman was so deeply affected by this experience that she created the first *Kos Miryam* (Miriam’s Cup). She put a crystal goblet in the middle of her Shabbat table, filled it with spring water, and had all the members of her family take a sip of the water.

Since then, interest in the Miriam’s Cup has grown among Jewish women’s groups of many kinds. It is especially significant for WRJ as we honor the women of the Torah and the women scholars of our own day by creating the WRJ Women’s Commentary on the Torah, a work currently in progress.

The first original liturgies for using *Kos Miryam*, written by Matia Angelou, are reproduced here with the author’s kind permission. There are certain guidelines for using this material, and it is suggested that they be followed.

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Note: Ms. Angelou's transliterations have been retained in the spelling of Miriam's name and in some of the Hebrew.

KOS MIRYAM—THE CUP OF MIRIAM

God gave us many gifts when we left Egypt. We were fed with Manna every morning to satiate our hunger. Clouds of Glory protected us and led our way through the desert. Manna was given in honor of Moses and Clouds of Glory in honor of Aaron.

One other special gift was given in honor of the Prophetess Miriam. Because of Miriam's righteousness, God gave us a wandering well filled with *mayim khayyim*, living waters.

This sparkling well was known as "Miriam's Well," and it traveled with us on our journey through the desert as a constant source of pure water, as a source of spiritual nourishment, healing, and redemption.

Midrash tells us that when Miriam died, the miraculous well disappeared, leaving the Israelites without a source of water in the desert. In our generation, Miriam's Well has become a symbol of our thirst for spiritual nourishment. As we search for Miriam's Well with its healing waters, let us remember the lessons of Miriam and all of our women ancestors. May their voices be heard loudly to guide us on our journey from slavery to freedom.

Lift Cup

Reader: *Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayim khayyim.
Khazak Khazak V'nit-khazak.*

All: *Khazak Khazak V'nit-khazak.*

This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters.
Strength, Strength, and may we be Strengthened.

N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim she-natnah lanu Mayim khayyim.
Let us bless the Source of Life, Who has given us living waters.

(BLESSING FOR DRINKING WATER)

Barukh Atta Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo.

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, by Whose word everything is created.

Drink

KOS MIRYAM FOR PASSOVER

(A meditation before the Seder)

We begin our seder with *Kos Miryam*, The Cup of Miriam, a cup of pure spring water to remind us of *mayim khayyim*, the living waters from Miriam's Well. Elijah's Cup represents our future redemption in the time of the Messiah, when peace will fill the world. Miriam's Cup represents our past redemption, when our people were brought out of slavery in Egypt.

Miriam's Well was said to hold Divine power to heal, sustain, and renew. It became a special source of transformation for a people leaving slavery to form a new identity. Throughout our journey as a people, we have sought to rediscover these living waters for ourselves. With this cup of clear spring water, we remember God's gift of living waters from Miriam's Well.

Tonight at our seder, we continue this journey. Just as the Holy One delivered Miriam and her people, just as they were sustained in the desert and transformed into a new people, so may we be delivered, sustained and transformed on our own journey to a stronger sense of ourselves as individuals and as one community. May the living waters of Miriam's Well nourish us and give us inspiration as we embark on our journey through the Haggadah.

Lift Cup

Reader: *Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayim khayyim.*
Zakheir P'tzi-at Mitzrayim.

This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters.
Let us remember the Exodus from Egypt.

All: These are the living waters, God's gift to Miriam, which gave new life to Israel as we struggled with ourselves in the wilderness.

Blessed are You, God, Who brings us from the narrows into the wilderness, sustains us with endless possibilities, and enables us to reach a new place.

N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim she-natnah lanu mayim khayyim.
Let us bless the Source of Life, Who has given us living waters.

(BLESSING FOR DRINKING WATER)

Barukh Atta Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo.
Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, by Whose word everything is created.

Drink

KOS MIRYAM FOR SHABBAT

(Meditation before Candle Lighting)

We welcome the Sabbath Queen, and ask that *Shekbinah*, God's Holy Presence, be with us tonight. On this Shabbat eve, we remember the gift of Miriam's Well, created at twilight on the evening of the Seventh Day. Miriam's Well was filled with *mayim khayyim*, living waters, pure sparkling waters through which God gave spiritual nourishment, healing, and renewal.

Thank You, *Mikor ha-Khayyim*, Source of Life, for giving us the Waters of Life. Let us drink deeply from the living waters of Miriam's Well and remember *Adonai*, our God, Who brought us out of Egypt, provided for us in the desert, and created Sabbath Peace. On this Shabbat, may we find peace in our heart, renewal for our soul, and joy with our family and friends.

Lift Cup

Reader: *Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayim khayyim.
Zakheir L'ma-asei V'reishit.*

All: *Zakheir L'ma-asei V'reishit.*

This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters.
Let us remember the Wonders of Creation.

N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim she-natnah lanu Mayim khayyim.
Let us bless the Source of Life, Who has given us living waters.

(BLESSING FOR DRINKING WATER)

Barukh Atta Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo.
Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, by Whose word every-thing is created.

Drink

KOS MIRYAM FOR HAVDALAH

(After the Havdalah Ceremony)

There is a custom among the women of Israel to draw water from a well at the end of Shabbat, for at this time the water of Miriam's Well fills all other wells in the world. Those who drink this water with an open heart and an open mind are brought to a place of healing. Remember us with healing, God, for when You sweetened the water at Marah You told us, "*Ani Adonai Rofeh-khab*—I am God, your healer."

Let us drink deeply from the *mayim khayyim*, the living waters of Miriam's Well. As we drink, may we find sustenance from God's healing powers and strength for the coming week.

LIFT CUP

Reader: *Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayim khayyim.*
Khazak Khazak V'nit-khazak.

All: *Khazak Khazak V'nit-khazak.*

This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters.
Strength, Strength, and may we be Strengthened.

Barukh Atta Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, rofeh kol basar u'mafli la-asot.
Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Life-Source of the Universe, Who heals all flesh and performs wonders.

N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim she-natnah lanu Mayim khayyim.
Let us bless the Source of Life, Who has given us living waters.

(BLESSING FOR DRINKING WATER)

Barukh Atta Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam, she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo.

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, by Whose word everything is created.

Drink

A Glass Goblet for *Kos Miryam*?

Originally, *Kos Miryam* was a clear crystal glass, used so that the water inside could be seen. As the custom has spread, artists have created beautiful interpretations for the Cup of Miriam. Today there are various styles of goblets used, made from many different materials.

The WRJ Miriam's Cup commission was a challenge to choose a cup that will bring beauty and meaning into the home of every member. This [will be designated as the] WRJ *Kos Miryam* to commemorate the role of Miriam in the liberation of the Jewish people.

NOTE ON BLESSINGS USED FOR *KOS MIRYAM*

1. "*N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim...*"
This form for blessing was written by Marcia Falk. We have adopted it for use with *Kos Miryam* ceremonies.
2. "*Barukh Atta...she-ha-kol nih'ye bi-d'varo.*" This is the traditional blessing used before drinking water.
3. We use "*N'varekh et Eyn ha-Khayyim*" as a feminine image of the Divine. The "*She-ha-kol*" is in the masculine form to balance masculine and feminine usage in the blessings.
4. Other blessings may be added as appropriate to the situation in which *Kos Miryam* will be used.

NOTE ON THE REFRAIN

All versions of *Kos Miryam* contain two constant elements which we hope that you will choose to preserve in your own adaptations of the ceremony. All contain the phrase "*Zot Kos Miryam, Kos Mayim Khayyim*—This is the Cup of Miriam, the Cup of Living Waters." A refrain is added which all participants repeat. The refrain as originally written is "*Khazak Khazak V'nit-khazak*—Strength, strength, and may we be strengthened." Other refrains have been used in its place as appropriate to the holiday or occasion on which *Kos Miryam* is used. The intention is to have some phrase that everyone repeats as part of the ceremony. This responsive element can help everyone feel more involved and more connected.

"Miriam's cup is a restless vessel, like her ancient well dancing with the people Israel along their journey. It is heard as well as seen, responding to the slightest vibration, quieting the seder to hear a new voice at the table."

-Amy Klein Reichert, artist

From Miriam to Us

Adapted, with permission, from a Sisterhood Shabbat sermon by Shoshana Dweck. The entire sermon, and many scripts and services for Sisterhood programming and worship, may be ordered from WRJ online at www.rj.org/wrj/catalog.html.

The first real stirring of resistance among our ancestors came from the women. In the Torah, Pharaoh ordered the midwives, Pu'a and Shifra, to kill the male babies. They refused and told Pharaoh that the women gave birth too quickly for the midwives to get there. Their successful civil disobedience against Pharaoh gave the community hope for redemption. [Then,] Pharaoh decreed that all male Hebrew children were to be put to death. [In a midrash,] Amram, Moses' father, determined that it was futile to have any more children, and the other men followed his lead. Miriam, his daughter and Moses' sister, is the one who pointed out that Amram's approach was harsher than Pharaoh's, as it ensured no daughters as well as no sons. Without Miriam's wisdom, her mother would not have given birth to her baby brother Moses, and then where would we all be?

Surely the women, if not the men, were acutely aware of Miriam's importance in building, strengthening, and sustaining the community, and in empowering all of the women to do the same. In a midrash structured as a eulogy for Miriam, the Israelite women cry out: "Without you, we would still be in Egypt, nameless, less than slaves, the wives and daughters of slaves. With you, we have been proud women, the support of our families, the conscience of our people." The women ask: "And who will carry on?" The answer: "All of us, as you taught us, Miriam. All of us. Every woman has arms to carry and to hug. Every woman has hands to build and to cook, to craft and to shape. Every woman has ears to hear the needs and worries, fears and hopes of the people. Eyes to see the past and envision the future. Voices to lift in song, feet to dance in celebration. We are the inheritors of your gift, beloved Miriam. We, the daughters of Israel."

A Miriam's Cup for You

The Miriam's Cup has been created in many forms and used in many ways. The first "cup" was a glass, passed around the seder table, from which everyone drank. One can also use a small ceramic cup to which each participant adds a drop of water from her glass.

You will want to choose a concept with which to identify:

- Sipping from the same cup of water, sharing our heritage and customs, or
- Contributing a drop from each woman to a communal well—thereby giving back something so that others may benefit.
- Whether the water goes into the vessel or comes out from it, the cup establishes a connection among all participants. The WRJ cup will symbolize the community of Sisterhood, 100,000 strong in 600 affiliates around the world.

The Miriam's cup is not a formal ceremonial item whose use is subject to rules and traditions. Feel free to create your own rituals and traditions, and send your scripts to:

Women of Reform Judaism
633 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017
Att: Department on Religious Living

Your service scripts will be made available to other Sisterhoods and will help expand the collection of Sisterhood creative services [www.rj.org/wrj/scripts.html] with those that honor Miriam and the bond of Sisterhood.

Resources

ON THE WEB

www.jewishtoronto.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=31197

www.miriamscup.com

www.ritualwell.org

www.rrc.edu/journal/recon63_1/goldstein.htm

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Appendix I: Creating a Miriam's Cup for Women of Reform Judaism

SUSAN FULLENBAUM

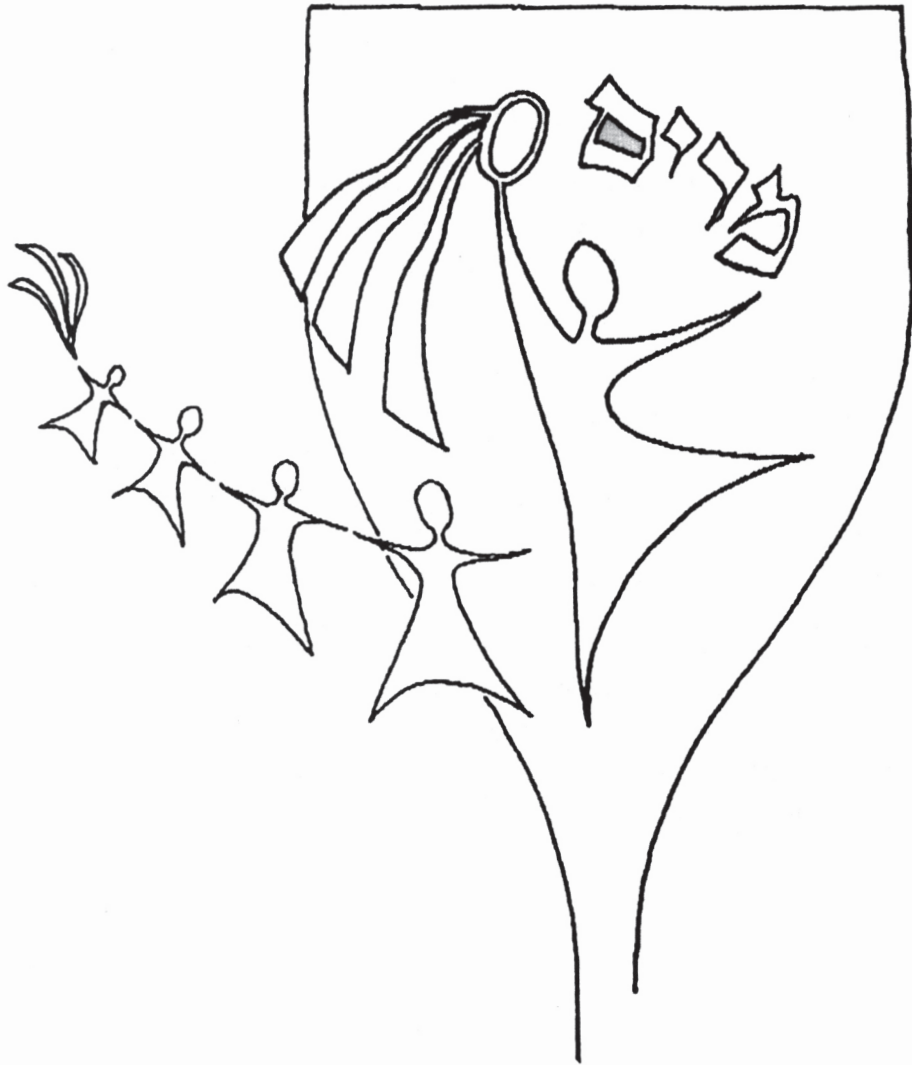
"For Women of Reform Judaism I propose that I sandblast Miriam with a stream of dancers following her on the goblet. The WRJ logo will be sandblasted on the base.

Julie Pentelnick and I are Debbie Friedman fans. In fact, Julie introduced me to her music. The first time I heard 'Miriam's Song' by Debbie Friedman, I knew I had to make a seder plate representing the spirit of this song. I visualize Miriam dancing joyously with all the women, timbrels in hand, with flowing ribbons of bright colors as described in the song. I see the women separately from the men, dancing and delighting in their new freedom. The words of the first chorus ring in my ears...

'And the women dancing with their timbrels
Followed Miriam as she sang her song
Sing a song to the One whom we've exalted.
Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole night long.'

"Miriam's spirit and the way that she must have inspired the other women is depicted in my Miriam seder plate, with the brilliant colors of the ribbon from the timbrel flowing in the air. In Miriam's Cup, Julie has taken my images and used them to show the spirit of Miriam leading the women in dance.

"Most of my ceremonial work uses traditional stained glass techniques. Each piece of glass is cut separately, ground, foiled in copper, pieced together as a puzzle, and soldered to complete the process. The images on the WRJ goblet are deeply carved with micro particles of sand. For the design to emerge, a template has been cut, applied to the goblet, and the image starts to develop and dance."



© April 30, 2003

IRENE HELITZER

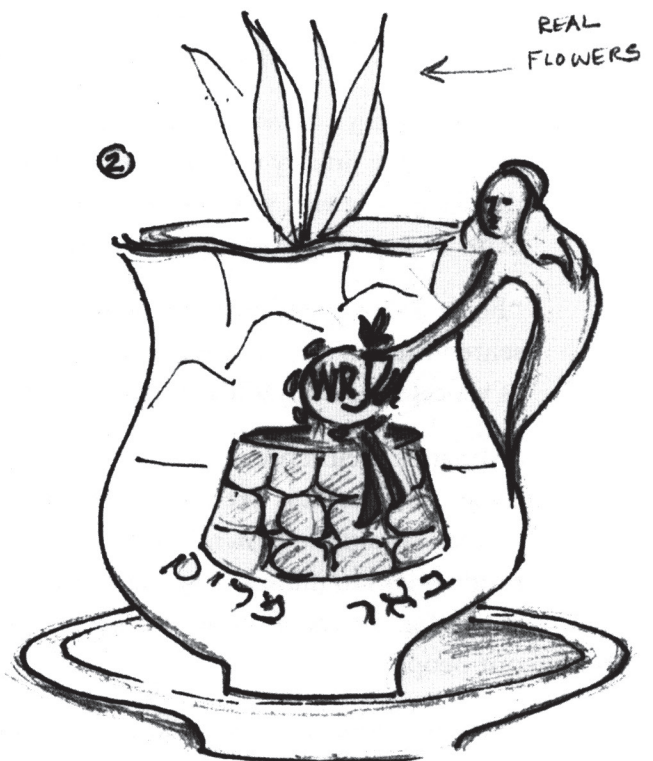
“I am submitting as my idea for the Miriam’s Cup a teacup: [not] a goblet that would remind one of Elijah’s Cup, as the two have no common purpose other than use at the Passover Seder. Miriam’s Cup could be used whenever women gather to study or worship. It need not be a ritual object for Passover only.

“The teacup shape was selected [because] women are nurturers and the water from Miriam’s Well was a healing and nurturing water. Also the feminine shape of the cup seemed appropriate for a vessel that celebrates women. . . . Both cups proposed would have a ceramic holder for flower stems within the cup. Miriam’s Well was believed to be the original well in the Garden of Eden, the source from which all life flowed. Flowers symbolize life, beauty and well-being and certainly would enhance any centerpiece.

“The WRJ logo in the center is superimposed over the form of a tambourine. It is meant to be the saucer for the delicately fluted porcelain cup. Miriam forms the handle; she is wearing a *kippah* and carrying a tambourine. The cup shows a graphic of Miriam’s Well in the desert and, beneath it, in Hebrew, ‘Miriam’s Well.’ If desired, a small cup that can be easily passed around the table can be included.”



6" X 6"



6" W x 7" H



flower stem holder
within cup.

COREY RUBIN

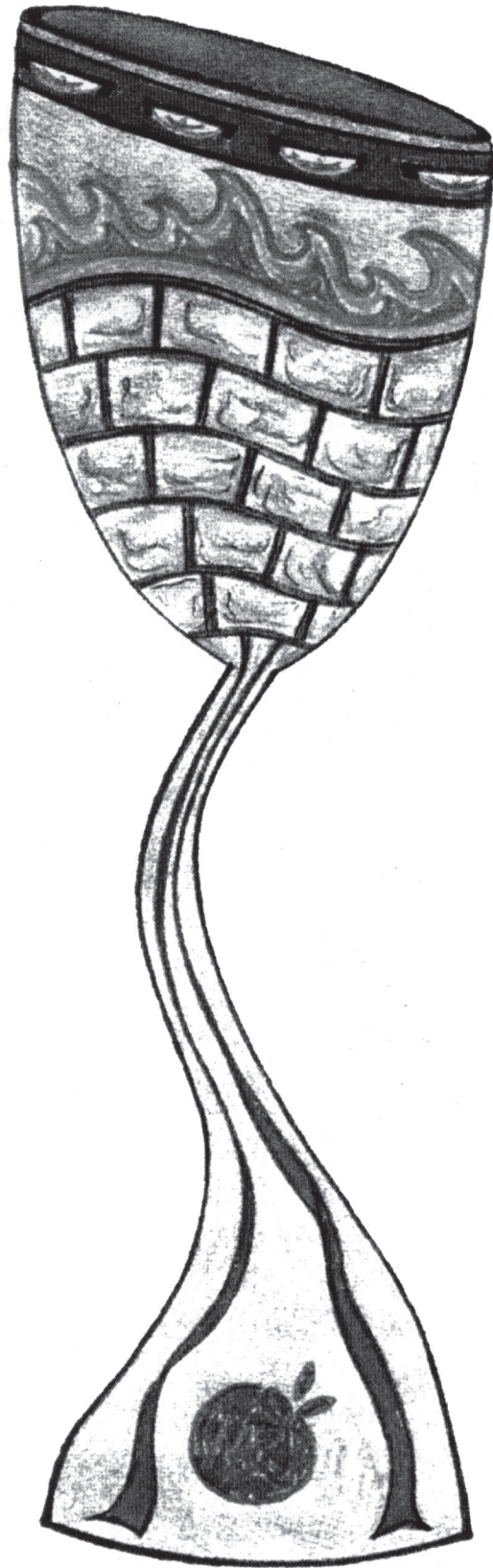
“The prophetess Miriam has a vital role in the story of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Miriam is best known for leading the women in singing and dancing as they celebrated the crossing of the Red Sea with timbrels in hand and voices on high. However, it is the idea of the waters from Miriam’s sustaining well that we commemorate at Passover each year. The modern tradition of placing a Miriam’s Cup/*Kos Miryam* on the Passover table emphasizes the idea that Reform Judaism is a living and evolving religion that gives importance to using symbols and traditions that unite our past, present and future.

“In designing a Miriam’s Cup, the most important emphasis is the form. Here, it represents not only the fluidity of biblical women dancing with timbrel in hand, but also the fluidity of the Reform Jewish woman today. The cup leans slightly forward, inviting the seder participants to experience the miracle of the nourishing waters that sprang up in the desert.

“Form is closely followed by symbolism in imagery. Along the rim of the cup, I have represented Miriam’s tambourine— symbol of the rejoicing of our people both in the Exodus and as we celebrate this 90th birthday of Women of Reform Judaism.

“Miriam’s Well represents all of the generations of Jewish women, from ancient times until today. Each brick is like a single woman, and each row of bricks a generation of these same women coming together. For 90 years, Women of Reform Judaism has been a force enabling single bricks to unite as rows, enabling the walls of Miriam’s Well to rise higher, enabling the sustaining waters of the Jewish people to increase, and assuring the continued sustenance of our people.

“It is an honor to design a Miriam’s Cup that truly links our past with our present and our future, further strengthening the foundation of Women of Reform Judaism.”



Miriam's Cup
Corey Rubin

"To be a contemporary artist bringing Judaica into the times is a responsibility. To create a new ceremonial object is an honor."

-Elee Koplou, artist

Appendix II: Questions for Study and Discussion

1. Miriam's Well provided sustenance for all those around her, and its waters flowed only during her lifetime. How do you uniquely sustain those around you?
2. Upon finding themselves at the shore of the sea, the women were led by Miriam in a song and dance of freedom and exaltation. What might inspire you to lead others in celebration?
3. It seems natural that water would be associated with such a strong female ancestor. What qualities, inherent in water, feel distinctly feminine?
4. Although many men throughout the text are called "prophets," Miriam is one of the few women given this title. In today's society, women are often believed to have special insight, or "woman's intuition." How have you relied on your intuition to guide you throughout your life? Are there any special instances that come to mind?
5. Miriam's role in the Torah did not end with the exodus from Egypt. An interesting event in her life takes place in Numbers 12. Does her behavior and punishment in this chapter alter your image of Miriam? If so, how?
6. The new tradition of adding a Miriam's Cup to our Seder tables is a prime example of Judaism's continuous evolution. What are other examples of how Jewish custom and ritual has changed over the centuries? Are there other new rituals that you would like to create?
7. It is stated in this guide that cooked fish on the Seder table may serve as an additional representation of Miriam. What foods might you suggest as appropriate symbols of Miriam in particular and of women in general?
8. This guide provides different prayer suggestions for use of the Miriam's Cup. What imagery or words are meaningful for you? Perhaps, as individuals or as a group, this imagery can be formed into new liturgy.
9. Miriam is noteworthy for myriad reasons, one of which is her commitment to family. What are some textual examples of this commitment? How does her dedication to family motivate you?

10. Some midrashim believe that Miriam's Well was actually a rock, which conveys a very different metaphorical image. How does this image affect your understanding of Miriam's Well? How are you a "rock" in various areas of your life?
11. The inclusion of Miriam's cup in our rituals reflects Reform Judaism's continued commitment to women's inclusion and equality in text, ritual, and tradition. How has the role of the Jewish woman changed in your lifetime, and how has this change affected you personally? How would you like to see the role of women continue to change?
12. Miriam is but one of the strong women portrayed in the Bible. Other examples include Sarah, Ruth, Naomi, Deborah, and more. Are there ways of creating new rituals to include these women? What would these rituals celebrate or commemorate? What new rituals or ceremonial objects might be introduced?

**"Wise Miriam, keeper of the living waters, nourishing growth,
transformation, renewal, I honor you as I drink this water. Your breath,
your song, our voice. Women are like water. Flowing together,
heads covered in prayer, and rejoicing at our ability to honor the
difficult path of life. Keepers of the heart, soul, and mind."**

-Patricia Weill, artist
