

Miriam's Cup - Winona LaDuke, Native American Activist

Contributed by [Jewish Solidarity with Native American People \(JSNAP\)](#)

Source: JSNAP Passover Haggadah Insert

In the Passover story, Miriam the prophetess is a true community organizer, leading her people across the Red Sea in song and dance and helping them to feel the power of liberation! Miriam knows that their power lies in the full diversity of the community. Everyone, man or woman, can be a great leader. Another story is told about Miriam and her brother Aaron challenge Moses' prophetic authority asking: "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Numbers, 12:2). Like women throughout history, Miriam bears the brunt of the penalty for her and Aaron's actions. While Aaron is left unpunished, Miriam suffers leprosy and is sent to live outside of the camp for a week. Though G-d and Moses instruct the community to continue in the wilderness, they refuse and insist on waiting until Miriam returns. This story illustrates the power of fierce women in our communities, demonstrating that gender diversity is critical on our long path to liberation.

The example Miriam sets is reflected in the work that women organizers are doing all over the country, including those in Native American communities. Winona LaDuke is a fiery Anishinaabe Native rights and environmental activist who founded the White Earth Land Recovery Project in Minnesota and the international Indigenous Women's Network. Winona's calls for action against destruction of sacred land have made tremendous impacts on both indigenous people and the world at large. She speaks to women's experience and, like Miriam, maintains a feminist perspective in her work. She writes:

"We, collectively, find that we are often in the role of the prey, to a predator of society, whether for sexual discrimination, exploitation, sterilization, absence of control over our bodies, or being the subjects of repressive laws and legislation in which we have no voice. This occurs on an individual level, but equally, and more significantly on a societal level. It is also critical to point out at this time, that most matrilineal societies, societies in which governance and decision making are largely controlled by women, have been obliterated from the face of the Earth by colonialism, and subsequently industrialism. The only matrilineal societies which exist in the world are those of Indigenous nations. We are the remaining matrilineal societies, yet we also face obliteration."

Like Miriam, Winona and the organizations she helped to form provide spaces for indigenous women to develop political consciousness and a powerful national voice. During Passover, we can all be moved by Miriam and Winona's work and strive to be conscious of creating inclusive communities as we cross from slavery to freedom.