

Elijah and Miriam's Cups

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Source:



The biblical prophet, Elijah, is a major figure in the biblical books 1st and 2nd Kings. In Jewish tradition, Elijah is associated with the hope for the arrival of the Messiah and the ushering in of an era of peace, justice and harmony throughout the world. The traditional Jewish belief is that Elijah will reappear one day, and the Messiah will follow soon after. More liberal Jewish theologies look at the idea of Elijah's arrival and the hope for Messianic redemption in a non-literal way. For Jews with these beliefs, the entire tradition of hoping and waiting for the Messiah is a metaphor for the sacred obligation of all people to work for justice and peace and, in so doing, to help bring about a "Messianic era" of a world at one.

In a typical seder, a cup of wine, "Elijah's cup," is filled with wine or grape juice and set before an empty chair that remains empty throughout the seder. Toward the end of the seder, we are instructed to open the door for Elijah, and we collectively imagine his presence (and/or the ideals it represents) entering the room. Adults sometimes humorously challenge young children to inspect Elijah's cup at the end of the seder to see if there's any sign that someone drank some of the wine or juice.

In more recent years, many Jews have added a parallel ritual to Elijah's cup. A cup is filled with water and set on the table near Elijah's cup. This cup, Miriam's cup, represents the biblical figure of Miriam, whom we meet in the book of Exodus and in other parts of the Torah.

Learn more about Elijah and Miriam's Cups and how you can incorporate them into your Passover celebration.