

IDENTITY

Miriam and Elijah – Two Cups for Your Seder

Contributed by [Moving Traditions](#)

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By Rabbi Sara Brandes

Rabbi Sara Brandes specializes in experiential education for children and adolescents. A certified yoga instructor, Brandes was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary where she was awarded the Bernard and Sydell Citron Scholastic prize, recognizing her as the most outstanding student in her graduating class.

Passover is the holiday of redemption, and the Passover seder is meant to fill us with hope.

Although we begin by recalling the bitterness we endured as slaves in Egypt, by the seder's end we are ready to welcome to our tables the prophet Elijah, *Eliyahu HaNavi*, harbinger of the messiah, hopeful that a redeemed world is just around the bend.

We open our doors and sing, "Elijah the prophet...may you come to us speedily in our days, with the messiah, the son of David."

While the Jewish people's notions of the messiah have certainly evolved over the years, for most of us, these words remain unchanged.*

At Moving Traditions we know the power of Jewish ritual and we also understand the power of the song's gendered message.

Sons and Daughters Redeem Us

Very different expectations are set for boys than for girls when only boys hear that our communal hopes rest with them – after all, it is David's son and not his daughter that we are expecting to redeem us.

That is why Moving Traditions encourages the teens in our *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* and *Shevet Achim: The Brotherhood* programs to add a Miriam's cup to their seder table alongside that of Elijah.

While Elijah's cup is filled with wine, Miriam's cup is filled with water, symbolizing the prophet Miriam's connection to rivers, seas, and wellsprings.

Miriam was a leader and a risk-taker, boldly approaching Pharaoh's daughter to save her baby brother, leading Jewish women in song during the Exodus, and questioning the authority of her brother, Moses.

As such, Miriam is a powerful role model for teen girls today, who hear "Be good" far more often than they hear "Learn from your mistakes" and "Don't be afraid to fail."

This month during *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* gatherings, girls will read and discuss the beautiful poem below, *I Shall Sing to the Lord a New Song* by Rabbi Ruth Sohn, which celebrates Miriam's courage.

Two Cups This Year

The Elijah's cup that traditionally adorns our seder tables is a symbol of hope that the world now broken will one day be redeemed, and that agents of change, modern day messiahs, can and will walk among us.

This is the potential we see in all of our teens.

This year, place a Miriam's cup by the side of the Elijah cup, affirming that our hopes rest equally with all of our children, regardless of gender.

We know that our teens are building a world that is more open and more just than ever before. They are singing new songs with new voices, and we celebrate each of them.

I Shall Sing to the Lord a New Song

By Ruth H. Sohn

I, Miriam, stand at the sea and turn
to face the desert stretching endless and still.
My eyes are dazzled
The sky brilliant blue
Sunburnt sands unyielding white.
My hands turn to dove wings.
My arms
reach
for the sky
and I want to sing
the song rising inside me.
My mouth open
I stop.
Where are the words?
Where the melody?
In a moment of panic
My eyes go blind.
Can I take a step
Without knowing a
Destination?
Will I falter
Will I fall
Will the ground sink away from under me?
The song still unformed— How can I sing?
To take the first step—
To sing a new song—
Is to close one's eyes
and dive
into unknown waters,
For a moment knowing nothing risking all— But then to discover
The waters are friendly
The ground is firm.
And the song—
the song rises again.
Out of my mouth
come words lifting the wind. And I hear
for the first
the song
that has been in my heart silent
unknown
even to me.

Miriam Ha-Neviah(Miriam the Prophet)*

When your family sings "Elihu HaNavi" at the seder, try adding these words about Miriam, sung to the same melody, written by Rabbi Leila Gal Berner.

*Miriam HaNeviah
Oz v'zimra b'yadah
Miriam tirkod itanu l'hagdil zimrat olam
Miriam tirkod itanu l'taken et ha-olam
Bimherah v'yameynu hi tevi-eynu
el mey ha-yeshua, el mey ha-yeshua.*

Miriam, the prophet, strength and song are in her hands,
Miriam will dance with us to strengthen the world's song,
Miriam will dance with us to heal the world.
Soon, and in our time, she will bring us
To the waters of redemption.