

Miriam's Cup

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Miriam's Cup (Kos Miryam)

A relatively new Passover tradition is that of Miriam's cup (Kos Miryam in Hebrew). Not every household includes Miriam's Cup at the Seder table, but when it is used the cup is filled with water and placed next to Elijah's cup.

Miriam was the sister of Moses and a prophetess in her own right. When the Israelites are freed from bondage in Egypt, Miriam leads the women in dance after they have crossed the sea and escaped their pursuers. The Bible even records a line of the poem she chants while the women dance: "Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and driver has he hurled into the sea" (Exodus 15:21). (See: The Passover Story.)

Later when the Israelites are wandering through the desert, legend says that a well of water followed Miriam. "Water...did not abandon them in all their forty years' wandering, but accompanied them on all their marches," writes Louis Ginzberg in *The Legends of the Jews*. "God wrought this great miracle for the merits of the prophetess Miriam, wherefore also it was called 'Miriam's Well.'"

The tradition of Miriam's cup stems from the legendary well that followed her and the Israelites in the desert and also the way in which she spiritually supported her people. The cup is meant to honor Miriam's story and the spirit of all women, who nurture their families just as Miriam helped sustain the Israelites. The Bible tells us she died and was buried in Kadesh. Upon her death, there was no water for the Israelites until Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before God.

The way Miriam's cup is used varies from family to family. Sometimes, after the second cup of wine is consumed, the seder leader will ask everyone at the table to pour some of the water from their glasses into Miriam's Cup.