

CHILDREN

Two Cups - Elijah's and Miram's

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Everybody knows that we place a cup of wine for the prophet Eliah at the center of the Seder table. At a dramatic moment in the Seder, the door is opened to welcome this usually unseen guest into our homes in the hope that the final, messianic, redemption of all people is at hand. Our ancient traditions tell us that final redemption will come at the season of Israel's redemption from Egyptian bondage - on some Passover to come.

We sing Eliah's song, and watch expectantly and hopefully for the wine in the cup to diminish, a sure sign that Elijah has visited and the dawn of a new redemption is near.

Less known, and of more recent origin, is the custom of placing a second cup, this one filled with water, on the Seder table for a second unseen but deserving guest - the prophetess, Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron.

Why Miriam?

Well, who was it who watched wistfully as her baby brother was whisked away in a basket floating on the waters of the Nile? Who was it who, disregarding her own safety, dared to approach the Pharaoh's daughter, Princess of Egypt, and offer to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for her? Who was it who led the redeemed Israelite women and men in song and dance to celebrate their salvation at the Sea? Who was it, according to tradition, for whose sake a well of fresh water followed the wandering Israelites through the wilderness so they might survive the perilous journey?

It was Miriam, the Prophetess, symbol of all the courageous and worthy women who kept the home fires burning, even when the men became discouraged and despaired of redemption.

Who then is more deserving to be "toasted" with water, (a theme running through her life as a stream) and saluted for service "above and beyond" than she?

If the Cup of Elijah is one symbolizing hope for future redemption, Miriam's Cup symbolizes redemption realized through the tireless efforts of Israel's women. Let us honor her for her heroism, and through her, all the brave, capable, devoted, faithful and loyal women of Israel who have been, and continue to be, the ongoing source of Israel's strength.

Biglal nashim tzidkaniyot nig'alu avoteynu miMitzrayim. For the sake of our righteous women were our ancestors redeemed from Egypt.

L'Hayim!