

Tifereth  Israel

Pesach 5784

# SEDER SPARKS



*A Passover companion of reflections from our community about timeless traditions in our modern times.*



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Pesach 5784

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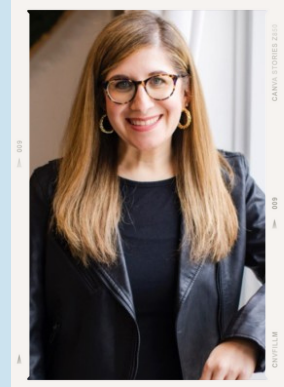
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## Ha Lachma Anya: This is the Bread of Affliction

BY NAOMI LAMB



“Let all who are hungry, come and eat.”

A simple concept that is reflective of who we are as Jews – not only on Pesach, but year-round. We are a “big tent” community. We open our doors and our hearts to anyone who wants to learn with us, to pray with us – and especially, to eat with us.

At OSU Hillel, we take this seriously. As a pluralistic organization, we first and foremost reflect on how we are creating an inclusive community for all Jewish students. We meet students where they are on their respective Jewish journeys and enable them to deepen their unique Jewish identity.

OSU Hillel has historically been intentional about opening its doors not only to Jewish students – but to everyone who wants to join us. Non-Jewish students and members of the Columbus community come to our building often to participate in our events and initiatives, to enjoy a delicious kosher meal at our Bagel Café or to workout in our fitness center. Through Interfaith meals, Black/Jewish dialogue, LGBTQ+ programming and more, we have worked hard to develop strong partnerships throughout the community and welcomed all who want to join us.

But post-October 7, this simple concept has suddenly become very complicated. We have realized we can no longer let all who are hungry come and eat without checking their photo ID and with a special duty officer present. After our building was vandalized, and more recently with students registering for our events with the intention of protest and disruption, we are saddened to come to terms with the fact that we can no longer take the big tent approach we’ve embraced and enjoyed for so long.

This Pesach, we will welcome many students and community members for seder. We will provide a joyous, festive holiday and delicious meals for those who are there with positive intentions. And we will pray for the day when we can once again fully embrace letting “all who are hungry, come and eat.”



*Naomi Lamb is the CEO of The Ohio State University Hillel. Prior to this role, she served as Interim CEO at JewishColumbus and Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer. Naomi has a Master of Labor and Human Resources and a Bachelor of Arts in Jewish Studies from Ohio State. Originally from Cleveland, she is a proud member of Tifereth Israel and lives in Bexley, Ohio with her husband Paul, two sons Simon and Emmett and their dog, Kugel.*

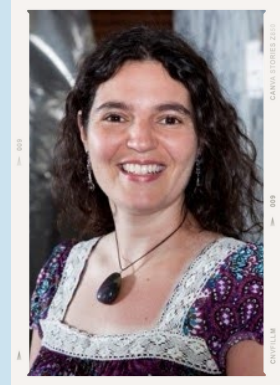


## Mah Nishatanah: The Four Questions

**BY RABBI DR. TALİ ZELKOWICZ**

### Are the Four Questions Truly Questions?

The only thing that a question must have in order to be a true question, is no answer. Or at least not a single discrete answer with known facts.



At the same time, we do use questions in a variety of ways. Sometimes, we ask even when we already have an answer, or don't expect one, as with rhetorical questions.

It turns out that at least pedagogically, there are – fitting for Pesach – four main types of questions. I got curious this year about which kind of questions the Haggadah's "Four Questions" are, and what that might suggest about how we lead our seder as a whole.

### 4 Types of Questions used in Teaching

#### [1] There are questions that lead.

These questions have definitive, correct answers and the asker knows the answer in advance, such as: Who led the Jews out of Egypt? Moses/Moshe.

#### [2] There are questions that guide.

These are not just about recall, they require some inference, but still steer learners toward discrete, known facts, such as: What can the meaning of Moshe's name tell us about his role? Moshe means, "to draw out." He drew the People of Israel out of Egypt and slavery and took them on a journey towards freedom; and we could also say it took him years to draw them out of the slavery mindset.

#### [3] There are questions that hook.

This unique and often playful type of question is used to capture attention and spark interest, and grab our curiosity and pull us as learners/participants into a deeper discussion or activity, such as: What do you notice on the table this year that wasn't there last year? or Which character in the Pesach story would you most want to invite to Shabbat dinner? Least? or Should matzah balls be sinkers or floaters?

There are endless examples of questions that hook, but the key is to use the responses to ease participants into the leader's deeper content and learning. Sometimes they are called "set inductions" because they induce a learning mindset. Moreover, since the answers to questions that hook require participants to reflect upon and use their own personal experiences and abilities, it's important to design these questions inclusively, in a way that ensures everyone in the room has the knowledge, experience, and ability..





## Mah Nishatanah: The Four Questions [continued]

**BY RABBI DR. TALI ZELKOWICZ**

...to respond, because the whole point is to engage full group participation.

[4] And then there are...essential questions.

These are the questions that do lack single correct responses. Because they are authentic inquiry, striving to respond to them helps us build new understanding, such as: When should we, as Jews, be a part of, and apart from, American norms? or How can telling stories about ourselves liberate us? or Under what conditions might hiding serve as a healthy act of privacy, a painful act of shame, or something else altogether?

Essential questions are genuinely open-ended, intellectually engaging, require higher order thinking, raise many more questions, require support and justification, point to vital, transferable ideas, and they endure over time, often asked in each generation.<sup>1</sup> They have no single correct answers, and as long as they are compelling, relevant, and grounded in content that scholars and experts of all kinds in any field engage in, they are therefore able to promote authentic, sustained inquiry over time, ineluctably engaging learners in the creation of new knowledge. Because of their depth, and the way they invite further research and exploration, Essential questions can anchor hours, days, months, or even a lifetime of learning on a topic.

So, nu? which type(s) of question are we asking when we ask the Four Questions in the Haggadah?

How is this night different from all other nights?

On all other nights, we eat chametz (leavened foods) and matzah. Why on this night, only matzah?

On all other nights, we eat all vegetables. Why, on this night, maror (bitter herbs)?

On all other nights, we don't dip even once. Why on this night do we dip twice?

On all other nights, we eat either sitting upright or reclining. Why on this night do we all recline?

It seems to me that that first framing question – “How is this night different from all other nights?” – is a kind of 5th question that is separate from the other four and could be serving as a question that hooks.

But the remaining core four all seem to be questions that guide us towards discrete, known facts, while requiring some inference. At their best, all great guiding (and also leading) questions, trigger our memories and scaffold discussion and learning towards ever deeper and more sophisticated understanding ultimately helping to inform the choices we make in our lives and allowing us to create more meaningful, more just...



## **Mah Nishatanah: The Four Questions [continued]**

**BY RABBI DR. TALİ ZELKOWICZ**

...more beautiful Jewish (and I would add, general) communal life.

It is curious to me, then, that the Haggadah's Four Questions do not appear to be essential questions, and therefore not yet capable of building new understanding.

Especially because we ask those same four questions every year, the answers have become quite clear and known. In fact, the Haggadah immediately proceeds to respond to the questions with this one answer: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Adonai, our God, took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm...."

In other words, we enact those four different symbolic practices to remind us in different concrete and sensory ways, that we were once slaves and now we are free.

So, our Four Questions helpfully guide us towards the overarching master narrative of Pesach; but they are not yet essential questions capable of helping us build newer and deeper understandings.

All this leaves me wondering if the pedagogically savvy rabbinic authors of our Haggadah are inviting us to partner with the Haggadah and bring our own timely and relevant essential questions to our seders (see below for one possible way you might try this out at your seder). As we build collectively towards new understanding each year and throughout the generations, we might also find that it is one more way of fulfilling the intriguing charge of first chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Israel, Rav Avraham Kook of "making the old, new, and the new, holy."

Wishing you a Pesach of great questions, whatever kinds you choose to ask! Chag sameach!

### **One Possible Way of Bringing Essential Questions to Your Seder**

Below is a list of just one possible example of an "Essential Question" that each of the 15 part of the seder might pose. You could of course create many – infinite – others. You might place a question under each person's plate – or email them out in advance – and invite a guest to read it aloud and the guest/along with the group can share, a) how that question might be connected to that seder step, and b) anyone who wishes can share an initial response they might have to the question.

Kadesh: How might marking time be a sacrifice?

Rachatz: How much of a good thing is too much?

Karpas: How do we distinguish ourselves from the norm?



## Mah Nishatanah: The Four Questions [continued]

**BY RABBI DR. TALİ ZELKOWICZ**

Yachatz: When do you have to sever to move forward?

Maggid: How can the stories we tell about ourselves enslave or liberate us? What does “Jewish memory” mean to you? What is in your personal Jewish “album?” Collective Jewish album?

Rachtza: How/is “spiritual preparation” possible?

Motzi: In what ways might blessing the food we eat change the experience of eating? Of living?

Matzah: How can matzah serve the symbolic role of “bread of affliction” for those who find it tasty?

Maror: What concrete sensory experiences evoke bitterness for you?

Korech: What unlikely combinations of sweet and bitter memories feature in your own Jewish biography? In your family history?

Shulchan Aruch: What are the main things in life that sustain you?

Tzafun: Under what conditions might hiding serve as a healthy act of privacy, a painful act of shame, or something else altogether?

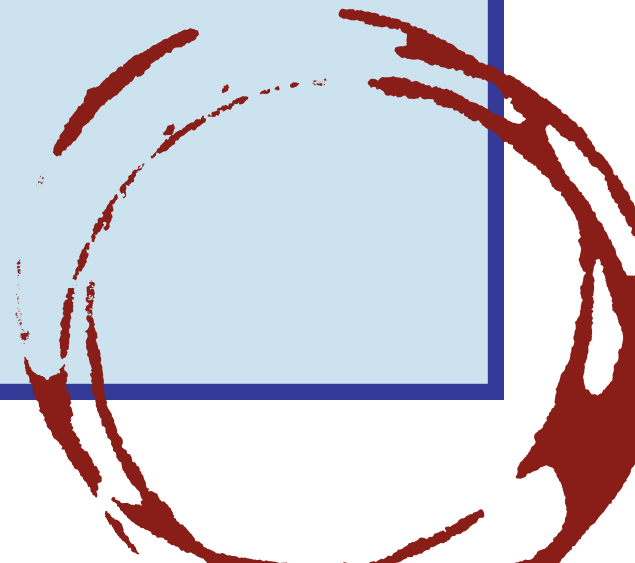
Barech: What’s the relationship between desire and gratitude? How might the connection break down?

Hallel: Why does it mean to you that, “the dead don’t praise God”? (lo ha metim yehalel yah)

Nirtzah: Is peace the end? How so/how not?



*Rabbi Dr. Tali Zelkowitz is a sociologist of Jewish education who serves as the Director of Curriculum & Research at The Wexner Foundation and lives in Bexley with her husband Benny, their two children, Gavi and Asher, and their dog, Harpo Barx.*

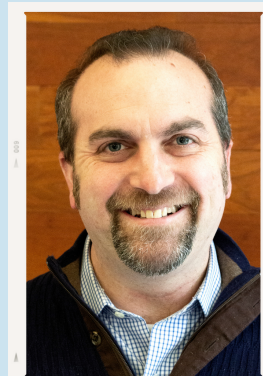




## K'neged Arba Banim: The Four Children

**BY RABBI HILLEL SKOLNIK**

In addition to the regular preparations for Passover, the worries about what Kosher-for-Passover food will be available at which store, inviting guests, and all the other worries that accompany this time of year there is an additional question that is on our minds. How do we note the absence of the chatufim - those still held in captivity for more than six months? How do we include their presence at our Passover Seder?



*Hillel Skolnik is the senior rabbi of Congregation Tifereth Israel.*

Some of us will include a physical place for them at our table by having a chair that remains empty (similar to the set table that continues to be in the atrium of our synagogue). One suggestion I have heard that we will incorporate is to choose a food staple from your seder and simply not include it this year. Another idea was suggested this week by Rabbi Elie Kaunfer in an article on JTA. Rabbi Kaunfer offers the thought of having only two matzas on the table instead of the usual three. Those three matzas represent the priests, levites and Israelites from which comes the entirety of the Jewish people. Not having one of them would be a powerful way of noting that there are those who are missing from our table. In addition, it would be a difference that could not be missed since the afikomen is taken by breaking the middle matza and with only two matzas there would be no middle matza.

As a pre-Passover reflection about the four children, I would like to offer an additional chance to remember the chatufim at our Passover seder this year. We read about and discuss the wise child, wicked child, simple child, and the one who does not know how to ask. We debate if the wicked child is actually all that wicked, and whether or not the wise child's question displays any actual wisdom. Ultimately we come to a place where we understand that each of us is all of these children, sometimes wise, sometimes wicked, sometimes simple, and sometimes not knowing how to ask.

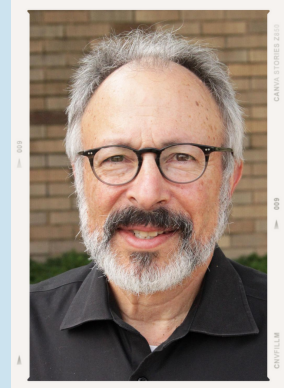
This Passover, I plan to include a fifth child, "וְהָאֵינְנָה" which means "the one who is not there." There is no question to go along with it because they are not given a voice to express the unspeakable pain and suffering they have been subjected to these past six months. As a response to that silence, we will take a moment to remind ourselves of the paramount nature of the mitzvah of pidyon sh'vuyim/redeeming captives and that the Torah instructs us "לֹא תֵעָמָד עַל-דַּם רֵעֶךָ" /Do not stand idly by as the blood of your neighbor is spilled - Leviticus 19:16". Those who are not with us are the children of all of us and while I fear that they will not be physically present at any seder, they will absolutely be present at so many tables, including ours. I hope you will each choose a way to include their presence in your homes with the continued fervent prayer that they should be returned to the loving embrace of their families.

**Tifereth**  **Israel**  
Pesach 5784  
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## **V'hi She'amdah: This is the Promise That Has Stood Up For Us**

**BY CANTOR JACK CHOMSKY**



There it is – just before the giant digression of Midrash on the biblical verse about 'my father the wandering Aramean' – AFTER the Kiddush, washing without blessing, parsley snack, Ma Nishtanah, Avadim Hayinu, the Four Children –

We raise the cup of wine and say 'V'hi Sheamda(h)' – And it was this that stood fast for our ancestors and for us – unwavering. For it was not one alone who stood over us a heel on our necks, bent on our annihilation, but, in generation after generation, they rise up against us, intent on destroying us. And yet Hakadosh Baruch Hu breaks their grip and we are saved.

Was it, in our lifetime, before now, a pivotal passage? A favorite melody? The melody I grew up singing at my Shabbat table is what I sang for my Seder Melodies tape.

Suddenly, though, the recitation of this credo has taken on huge meaning. We feel deeply conscious this year of the desire of many enemies to annihilate us. Pharaoh has been replaced by Hamas and Iran and its proxies and people marching through the streets of many cities around the world who really want to be rid of us.

A version by Yonatan Razel written in 2009 has become extremely well-known and beloved in Israel and throughout the world. I'll return to that a little later – but I want to reflect on an additional melody – and the Haggadah in which it's published. 'The New Haggadah' was published originally in 1941 by Behrman House for the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation – Edited by Mordecai Kaplan, Eugene Kohn and Ira Eisenstein.

This was the Haggadah in my home growing up – (Second Printing, Revised, 1942; Sixteenth Printing, 1959) – used for 2nd Night Seders. 1st Night Seders were in my grandparents' home in Flushing – with possibly as many different small free Haggadahs as people – Maxwell House of course, but also Carmel Wine and pretty much all the 'Pesach vendors.'

But this Reconstructionist Haggadah of 1941 ... what a time. They certainly knew what was happening. But they couldn't know what would happen by 1945 – and then in 1948. (But we do.) The editors wrote 'Times have changed. We live in a new world; we are confronted with new conditions. But the problem is still the same ... That is why the Pesah Haggadah has assumed once again a major role in the lives of Jews.' (This sentence suggests that it had lost that role – hard to believe, but that was the view...





## **V'hi She'amdah: This is the Promise That Has Stood Up For Us [continued]**

**BY CANTOR JACK CHOMSKY**

...of the editors in 1941.)

The music included in the book was selected and edited by Judith Eisenstein, Kaplan's daughter and the wife of Ira Eisenstein. First famous as the first publicly celebrated Bat Mitzvah in the US, and later a prominent author, theologian, musicologist and composer.

To me, V'hi Sheamda has always been a solemnity not to be taken too seriously or too literally. I'm sure you know the refrain 'they tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat.' But this year, I find myself much less certain of many things, and I'm sure you feel that way – perhaps even more than me.

The melody that Eisenstein included is listed as 'traditional.' By the time you read this or Pesach arrives, I'll try to dig more deeply into what that means and what the difference is in source between THIS one and the one cited above that I previously recorded.

It's not a great melody – Razel's V'hi Sheamda IS, and we'll get to that soon ... but I felt that it was important to share the melody this year:

I recorded a video singing it at Kikar Hachatufim – Hostages Square – near my home in Tel Aviv – a constant gathering place of the nation nowadays – on what is the 179th day of their captivity as I write – dating back of course to October 7. In a video I shared, I then went for a walk around elements of the Square. It includes a careful walk down the long table with room for the hostages, hoping for their return (too many of whom we now know are dead). The first part you'll see was a change from the original display. It was designed to give a feel of the kind of table at which a prisoner might eat (if lucky). After walking the length of the table and looking back, I briefly pan to a 'tunnel' that has been created to simulate walking through tunnels, as many of the hostages have surely had to do – though those tunnels are of course underground. For some people, this display is deeply meaningful. For me, it's a peculiar element of what we might call disaster tourism. I haven't gone through it. Then we turn and I give you a brief look at the tables where people are selling ribbons, posters, dog tags, t-shirts, etc., with the money going to relief services provided to the families of the hostages. Then finally I enter a large tent alongside, where a survivor is speaking to a group of young men. These kind of activities go on with some regularity at all times of day and night. You'll perceive that it's a large quiet empty space in this video. But there are times that it is filled with hundreds, sometimes a few thousand, people...



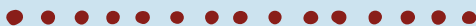
## **V'hi She'amdah: This is the Promise That Has Stood Up For Us [continued]**

**BY CANTOR JACK CHOMSKY**

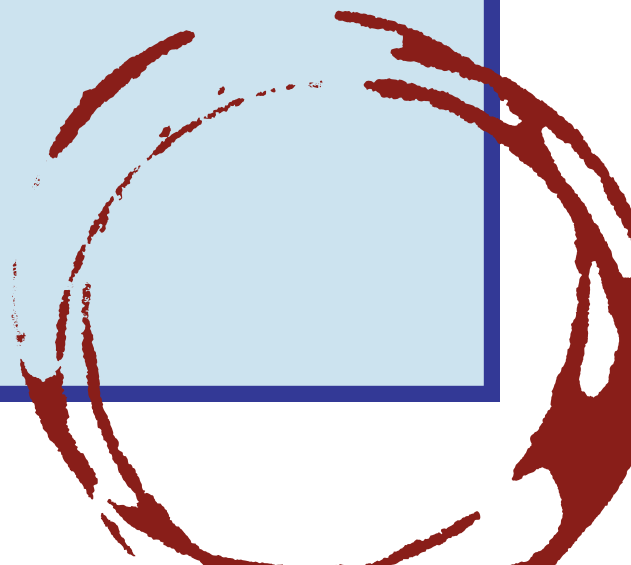
The V'hi Sheamda text tells us that God's faithfulness to Israel has always been with us. We might question whether that has been the case in the most difficult times – and perhaps you feel, as I do, that we find ourselves at the most difficult time of most of our lives. Yet what I have been able to discover here in my home in Israel is that we are with each OTHER in ways that were unimaginable in my life previously. I feel this clearly in the Square – and on Kaplan Street (where the main demonstrations often occur) – and near the Knesset in Jerusalem. And I feel it both between Israelis of different habits and beliefs and between our brothers and sisters across the US and around the world. The way we are bound together WILL surely help us to transcend these difficult times.

Now – on to that beautiful song by Yonatan Razel. When will it be listed as 'traditional?' I found that, even though it's at origin a pop song with great chord progressions, everyone knew it around the table at our in-laws' Seder in Jerusalem the last 2 years – and that's a pretty diverse group in terms of the kinds of corners of Israeli life we come from.

May you be inspired by our history and by the hope we bring each other. May we live long enough to see clearly 'how Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings us through this one.' Hint – it depends on you and me. All of us.



*Jack Chomsky is Cantor Emeritus of Congregation Tifereth Israel. He and Susan Gellman have lived in Tel Aviv since shortly after his retirement in 2020.*





## Dayenu: It Would Have Been Enough

**BY RABBI HAROLD BERMAN**

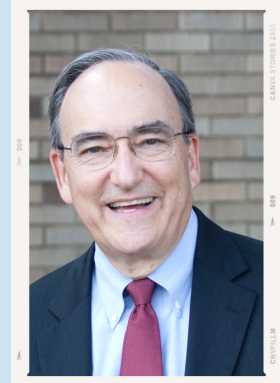
Of all the prayers and songs of the Passover Seder, perhaps the hardest to recite this year will be Dayyenu. Usually we sing about our ancestors' challenges in Egypt and we say, with casual understatement, that if God had done less, if fewer miracles had been part of the experience, it would have been enough.

This year, we can't say that without reflecting on our own challenges and our current experience. What is enough? Release of some more hostages? A cease fire that will end the fighting in Gaza for now but leave Hamas in power, poised to strike again? Finding a way to help more Palestinians of Gaza survive a war despite the reality that their own leaders hide behind them and revel in the numbers of their dead as a propaganda victory?

Beth and I were in Israel on October 7, a day we will never forget. While we and our Israeli family were far away from the murderous attack, we were in Israel, where no one is far away from anything, where a military incident means the likelihood of friends, neighbors and family being called into uniform, and where everyone knows people in the areas of immediate crisis. It was Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, which in Israel are observed on the same day, combining singing and dancing with the Torah and Yizkor, our memorial prayers. Singing and dancing were muted. Yizkor took on new meaning, although numbers were not yet available. We hoped and prayed for whatever fighting to end quickly, with as little loss of life, on either side, as possible. We hoped for miracles.

What is enough? Israel's survival, which we never doubted? Safety and peace for all, the miracle that still eludes us? Unity for people who cannot afford division in time of crisis? Resolve in the face of monstrous assault? What miracles can we hope for? What is enough? How much miracle is yet needed before we can sing and celebrate with our hearts full?

It is, so far, very hard to say Dayyenu. May we only feel that our blessings are sufficient, soon.



*Harold Berman is the rabbi emeritus of Congregation Tifereth Israel.*

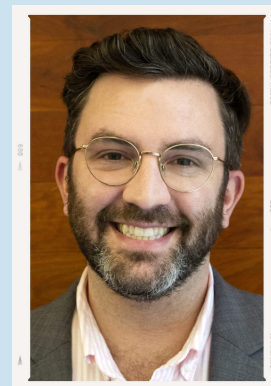


## Kos Eliyahu v'Kos Miryam: Elijah's Cup and Miriam's Cup

**BY RABBI ALEX BRAVER**

So much of Passover is about waiting ... and I'm not just talking about waiting for the food to be served.

There are the generations of Israelites forced to wait for their subjugation to end – who are born into slavery and die as slaves, and whose children suffer the same fate. Once redemption comes, there is the 40-year wait in the wilderness, until the people are finally allowed to enter the Promised Land. And still, even after they cross over, the land must be conquered – yet more waiting for redemption to be realized. The history of the Israelite monarchies are themselves far from descriptions of a perfect, redeemed world – our people suffer not only from foreign enemies, but even under our own rulers! And then there's the ultimate, defining "wait" of Jewish history – the exile from the Land, and our long, two-millennia-long, "wait" for the advent of the messianic era, ushered in, according to legend, by Elijah the prophet.



*Alex Braver is the  
rabbi of  
Congregation  
Tifereth Israel.*

The cup in his honor, with its place of our honor on our seder table, is a testament to our enduring hope for a better world, even after all these years, even after all we've seen and survived. Waiting for Elijah means waiting for redemption.

But there is also a figure who stands for our refusal to wait, and for the noble demand to be redeemed right now: Miriam.

Kalonymous Kalman Epstein, 18th-century Jewish mystic and Hasidic master, imagines her in dialogue with Moses at the crossing of the Sea. Moses leads the people in song, saying, "Az yashir – I will sing," future tense. Even in this moment of dramatic liberation, Moses is still waiting for some greater redemption to arrive. Miriam challenges him:

"This moment, too, is a good one to sing! Why should we use the future tense, 'I will sing?' The present moment is upon us, now! Why wait for the future?"

Miriam knows what it means to live in a not-fully-redeemed world, and to still sing anyway. She makes water appear for the people in the wilderness, is at the heart of Jewish folk-traditions for blessing and healing, and is remembered at seders around the world with a "Miriam's Cup" of water. In our world of pain and brokenheartedness, we place her cup next to Elijah's to remind us that "this moment, too, is a good one to sing," even if the ultimate redemption of Elijah fails to materialize in this world that so desperately needs him. We can write the song together.



## **Kos Eliyahu v'Kos Miryam: Elijah's Cup and Miriam's Cup [continued]**

**BY RABBI ALEX BRAVER**

**Consider one or both of these pieces for Miriam's Cup at your seder this year:**

### **Miriam Ha-Nevi'ah**

*Rabbi Leila Gal Berner,*

*To the tune of Eliyahu Ha-Navi by Debbie Friedman*

Miriam ha-n'vi'ah oz v'zimrah b'yadah.  
Miriam tirkod itanu l'hagdil zimrat olam.  
Miriam tirkod itanu l'taken et ha-olam.  
Bimheyrah v'yameynu hi t'vi'einu  
el mey ha-y'shuah.

מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה עַד וְזִמְרָה בְיָדָהּ  
מִרְיָם תִּרְקֹד אִתָּנוּ לְהַגְדִּיל זִמְרַת עוֹלָם  
מִרְיָם תִּרְקֹד אִתָּנוּ לְתַקֵּן אֶת-הָעוֹלָם  
בְּמַהֲרָה בְיָמֵינוּ הִיא תְבִיאֵנוּ  
אֶל מֵי הַיְשׁוּעָה

Miriam the prophet, strength and song in her hand.  
Miriam dance with us in order to increase the song of the world.  
Miriam dance with us in order to repair the world.  
Soon she will bring us  
to the waters of redemption.

### **Miriam's Well**

*From Siddur Or veShalom, trans. Dr. Gloria Ascher, commentary by Rabbi Adam Zagoria-Moffet*

There is a tradition attested as far back as the Shulkhan Arukh to draw water from wells on Saturday evenings as the waters of Miryam's well are said to flow at that time, and bring healing and good fortune to those who drink it. Today, we don't draw water from wells, but we can still drink water in Miryam's honour, with this traditional Ladino women's meditation.

In the Torah, Miryam's well is an essential source of support for the Jewish people. The Me'am Lo'ez, a Ladino biblical commentary, describes it as the centre of the camp, that stretched out canals and moats as soon as the pillar of fire stopped. Yet this is all accredited to Miryam posthumously. It is when she is gone, and the Bene Yisrael are without water, that we realize the contribution she was making...





## **Kos Eliyahu v'Kos Miryam: Elijah's Cup and Miriam's Cup [continued]**

**BY RABBI ALEX BRAVER**

...a story too common today as well.

Iyo bevo esta agua  
del Pozo de la Sinyorah  
de Miryam la Nevia,  
ke sana mi melezina,  
y todos los males los kora  
y mos de parnasa sin sar.

יין ביבו איסטא אגואה  
דיל פוזו די לה סיניורה  
די מרים לה נביאה  
קי סאנה מי מיליזינה  
אי טודוס לוס מאליס לוס קורה  
אי מוס דה פרנסה סין סאר

I will drink this water  
from the Well of the Sinyorah,  
Miryam the Prophet,  
who heals from medical ills,  
and ills of the heart,  
and gives us support with no catch.