

WRJ CENTENNIAL



*D'var Torah*

Women's Voices Deepen Our Jewish Legacy

Miriam: Celebration and Sacred Connection  
Parashat B'shalach (Exodus 13:17 – 17:16)

Throughout 2013, we are celebrating the legacy of the first 100 years of WRJ. We will mark this special year of centennial celebrations at many gatherings in many ways; from the Fried Leadership Conference to the WRJ Assembly, the Centennial Sisterhood Shabbat to the WRJ Academic Symposium, monthly divrei Torah to weekly Ten Minutes of Torah, to hundreds of local activities. We will remember those who came before us and dream of those who will come next. We will honor our past and move with strength toward our future.

In Parasha B'shalach, when Pharaoh let our people go, our ancestors honored Joseph by carrying his bones to Sinai for proper burial in fulfillment of a promise (Exodus 13:19). Our exodus from Egypt and from Pharaoh, "who does not know Joseph," (Exodus 1:8) reminds us of the importance of honoring our ancestry. We must not forget how Joseph's life in Egypt protected his family, our people, and how all Israel kept the name of Adonai alive during those difficult times.

We become a free people with Moses, Aaron and Miriam as main characters in the story. We proudly claim that it was Miriam who understood that our deliverance from slavery to freedom mandated a time to stop, to praise God who had brought us to this safe place, to this sacred moment. Led by Miriam, the women danced and sang, "*Shir l'Adonai... sing to Adonai, for God has triumphed gloriously*" (Exodus 15:21).

The women who had remembered to pack their hand-drums were prepared to celebrate a *shehecheyanu* moment! No matter how tired everyone was, or what needed to be done personally, the women elevated this moment in our people's history to the sacred. The words we pray daily are found in Parashat B'Shalach, and known as the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15:1-19):

*Mi Chamocha ba-eilim Adonai... who is like You, Adonai, among the celestials; Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in splendor, working wonders!*

"Indeed, it was the women who danced and sang and recognized God's hand in their deliverance. The women also understood that moving forward and changing is never easy. But as women always have known, the only constant in our lives is change. Change can be uncomfortable. WRJ's vision for women and Reform Judaism has the spirit of Miriam at its core. Despite life's changes,

we find ways to elevate everyday moments to the sacred, to raise our voices and to dance and to sing. Our matriarchs who founded NFTS in 1913 had a vision for what we might become. And Miriam, a woman of Torah, provides us with what we are to do at this moment 100 years later. Within our WRJ world on all levels, we celebrate the legacy of 100 years; and we thank God for allowing us to reach this new beginning... the beginning of the next 100 years of Women of Reform Judaism... a new beginning brimming with hope!” wrote Rosanne Selfon, WRJ Past President (2005-2009).

Let us keep our souls alive by remembering and celebrating ancestors like Miriam. Let her fortify our souls. Let the spirit of those who created and nurtured NFTS guide us today. Let us keep the songs sung by Miriam and the women and the voices raised in the earliest days of NFTS with us in our hearts at this sacred time.

We are today’s Torah women; Adonai links us to our past, our present and our future. Adonai is with us always.

We are *Stronger Together* because of our connection to one another and because of our sacred partnership with Adonai. Let us remember and celebrate the sacred work we do every day on behalf of our sisterhoods and congregations. And may we continue to make our moments together sacred connections throughout our centennial year. Amen!

*This d'var Torah was written by WRJ executive committee member Cynthia Roosth Wolf for adaptation and use by sisterhoods/women's groups during the 2013 WRJ Centennial year. We are grateful to Cynthia and Michael Wolf and Family for generously sponsoring this Centennial project.*