

# Re-Calling Our HerStory

---

## Miriam the Prophetess

JUDITH MAERYAM WOUK

*L'eau a joué un rôle significatif dans la l'histoire de Miriam dans la Bible. Elle surveille son frère au bord de l'eau, elle danse à la Mer, une légende juive l'identifie à un puits et elle est associée symboliquement à la naissance. Miriam comme un modèle ancien, est une inspiration pour les femmes d'action.*

Water plays a significant role in the Biblical story of Miriam the Prophetess, the sister of Aaron. She watches her brother Moses by the river, and provides him with a wet-nurse; she leads the dance when the Israelites successfully reach the far shore of the Sea, in Jewish lore a well follows her, and she is symbolically associated with conception and birth. An ancient role model, Miriam is again inspiring women to action.

[T]here is a . . . concern about the lack of empowering images of women in the cultural system and about how this lack shapes the way we think about ourselves, how our consciousness is formed, and how effective is our ability to act.

[There are] radical consequences for women when the dominant cultural symbol systems are exclusively male, or feature women whose identity is entirely derivative or serving a patriarchal status quo.... (Condren 117)

Miriam has never been so ubiquitous. The reasons for her popularity are numerous . . . from the simple desire to add women's voices to a text that has been silent about women's central role in the . . . story, to a recognition of a lost . . . leader of great stature. (Schwartz xii)

### Miriam's Cup

I am sitting with seven other women around a table. In the center is a plate with a beet, an egg, a bowl of apples and dates, and a variety of vegetables. I say, "We have added a new ritual to our Jewish Passover celebration: the Kos Miriam, Miriam's Cup. Let's each pour some spring water into the cup, to symbolize all that sustains us through our journeys" (Greenbaum 10).

I explain that this ritual uses water, not wine, because of the long association of water, including tears, blood, milk, and other fluids, with women.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, water plays an important role for the Biblical Miriam, who is often found near water (although not, oddly, in it or interacting with it) (Schwartz 1):

- She saves her brother's life when he is left in a basket by the Nile River;
- She leads a victory song and dance as the Sea of Reeds<sup>2</sup> closes behind her;
- She is followed by a well that sustains the Israelites in the desert;
- Metaphorically, her faith creates a spiritual oasis which gives her people the confidence to overcome hardships.

Then I say two prayers, freely reinterpreted from the Hebrew:

These are the living waters, God's gift to Miriam, which gave us new life as we struggled with ourselves in the wilderness. Let us bless the source of life that

gives us living waters.

Let us bless the flowing fountain of life, as we are brought from the narrows<sup>3</sup> into the wilderness, sustained with endless possibilities, and enabled to reach a new place. (Greenbaum 11; Falk 368, 501)

My striving to reach a new place resulted in this paper that explores a foundational story, what has and has not been recorded/retained/handed down, and how that affects us today.

desert. There are rivers and other surface water; however, the bulk of the water is ground water (Brooks).

The situation of the Middle East and North Africa with regard to water resources has not changed over the centuries: currently the population is withdrawing 80 percent of all renewable water resources (South Asia is second at 30 percent). That being said, there is wide professional agreement that there is still enough water for everyone to live and prosper in dignity, that the main problems are political processes and institutions that disadvantage

---

## Miriam represents women's struggle for recognition and equity. She appears only eight times in the Biblical story, all brief. She is named in seven and speaks in two, fewer than 30 Hebrew words. Was she an actual living person? A mythological composite woman? Or perhaps she is a humanized portrait of a desert water goddess

---

Miriam represents women's struggle for recognition and equity. She appears only eight times in the Biblical story, all brief. She is named in seven and speaks in two, fewer than 30 Hebrew words. Was she an actual living person? A mythological composite woman? Or perhaps she is a humanized portrait of a desert water goddess (Schwartz 1).

As Laurie Horn puts it:

I am Miriam.

Sister of Aharon:

The one they called *'a-n'viah*—the prophetess.

All my life, I have searched for or run from water.

When my mother pushed me out, her feet were damp with the mud of the Great River.

I have walked in water, danced in it, sweated for it, swallowed it—even prayed silently in fear as my impatient brother, Moshe,<sup>4</sup> beat stones for it.

Hundreds of times, I have seen water and blood gush from between the legs of a woman with more force than it sprang from the rock at Meribah.<sup>5</sup>

The source of human life is between the legs, but the source of all life is YHVH.<sup>6</sup> (Schwartz 17)

### Miriam's World

The story of Miriam contains a river, a sea, and a well—water from the ground; Miriam has no association, for example, with rain. It is dated to about 1200 BCE, and placed in the territory now known as the Sinai Peninsula. According to Middle East water expert David B. Brooks, most evidence suggests that the climate at that time was less dry than it is now; the terrain was more savannah than

poor people. The approach has always been top down, masculine, centralized (Brooks).

Culturally, we have little detail on how women served in the early Israelite cult, how much leadership they held, and how that leadership changed over time (Schwartz 6).

### Miriam at the Nile

Miriam first appears as a distant figure. When Pharaoh's astrologers told him that the savior of Israel would meet his end by water, Pharaoh decreed that all male babies be thrown into the Nile<sup>7</sup> (Goldzweig).

Their mother hid her baby brother by the river in a basket, and the child's sister "stood afar off to know what would be done to him". Pharaoh's daughter, who had come to bathe in the river, saw the ark, sent her handmaid for it, opened it, and beheld "a boy that wept". The sister then spoke: "Shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women that she may nurse the baby for [you]?" Pharaoh's daughter replied, "Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother." (Hebrew-English Bible, Exodus 2:2-8)

So far, no-one has been named. Years later, Moses is called by Pharaoh's daughter the Egyptian word for child (Bithia) or in Hebrew "I drew him out of the water" (Exodus 2:10).

The names of the rest of the family appear piecemeal in genealogies elsewhere. For example, Exodus 6:20 names Amram and Jochebed/Yocheved as the parents of Aaron and Moses and Numbers 26:59 says Amram's wife Jochebed bore Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

The Qur'an tells a similar story. When the ark reaches Pharaoh's palace, the courtiers rescue it with evil intent.



Sabiha Rehman, "Untitled," pencil and watercolour on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches.

Pharaoh's wife takes the child and defends him before Pharaoh. Moses' mother, panicking, orders his sister to follow him; she watches him from afar without revealing her identity. When the child refuses to suckle, she offers to find a wet nurse who will be sincerely attached to him, who is actually his biological mother (Qu'ran).

Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:5-10), in various places called Bithiah/Batyah ("daughter of God") Thermuthis/Tharmuth (Franklin) or Asia/Asiya (Qu'ran), is claimed by some Jewish commentators as an Israelite, either born or converted. In one version, she bathes in the Nile to cleanse herself of the impurity of idolatrous Egypt. (Antonelli 142) In another, the cool waters of the Nile ease discomfort from a skin affliction. When servants refuse to fetch the basket, her arm miraculously becomes long enough to reach across the river (Antonelli 142). When she touches the basket, her boils and scabs vanish. She then immerses in a ritual bath for purification and soul empowerment (Ribner 147). A third commentator, asking "why would anyone want to bathe in a river full of dead babies?" suggests it was a metaphorical washing, a deliberate act to see with her own eyes what her father was

doing. "Once she saw [Moses] she needed to wash the blood of this deed off her own soul by taking action ... she would hold herself complicit if she turned away" (Mirkin 275).

### Miriam at the Reed Sea

Miriam first appears by name in Exodus 15:20-21 at the Sea of Reeds leading the women in singing, dancing and drumming.<sup>8</sup> In two brief verses, Miriam gets both a name and a voice.

Yarber describes the scene:

The path to freedom is often muddy. Water sloshes through your sandals and the soles of your shoes stick, clinging to the past, weighing down the future. No one said dancing in wet sand was easy. But it is very holy. Just ask the brave prophetess who celebrated liberation by dancing on the shores of a reedy sea....

Can you picture it? Feet still muddy. Sweat dripping from their brows. Water lapping behind them. In that moment of liberation, Miriam chooses to dance.... (Yarber)

Haberman adds sexual and birth imagery. Citing a twelfth century commentator she

connects the women drawing water from the Nile to them seducing their husbands to increase the population. "The imagery of fish and water, sumptuous dining, seduction and lovemaking in the fields make vivid a daily erotic existence. From misery, they arouse each other to desire for love and life." (Haberman 186)

Haberman then compares the Exodus from "the narrow place" to the birth experience, with the parted waters of the Reed Sea as the birth canal.<sup>9</sup>

The Egyptian army in pursuit is the placenta, part of the organism which once nurtured, now lifeless after the final postpartum closing. In the Sinai Desert, God breastfeeds Israel heavenly soft, moist manna. (Haberman 187)

Interspersed with explicit descriptions of the births of her five children,<sup>10</sup> Haberman concludes:

Birth is more than a symbol of liberation, birth has the potential to create and breed a culture of liberation. A transition from enclosure to manifestation, each birth releases one being encompassed within the domain of

another—from powerlessness and dependence into maturing connection. (Haberman 189)

Other interpretations take the view that at this intense, spiritual experience, YHWH required men and women to stay separate; Moses instructed the men not to go near a woman, Miriam instructed the women not to allow a man near them (Antonelli 176-177).

### Miriam's Well

Miriam next surfaces in the wilderness, challenging Moses (Num 12:1-16).<sup>11</sup> In one interpretation, Miriam consults Aaron out of sympathy for Moses' wife, who had told her that Moses had stopped having sexual relations<sup>12</sup> (Antonelli 349). This is reminiscent of Miriam's influence on her father years before. Reacting to the edict to drown new-born males, Amram and the other men separate from their wives. Miriam, age six, urges her father not only to risk, but to attempt conception: "Pharaoh's decree is directed only against our male children, but yours is also against the females. You are

a righteous man and your edict will surely be effective." At this, Amram and the other men remarry and Moses is born (Elwell 140; Berzon 1).

After her punishment<sup>13</sup> for talking against Moses, Miriam never speaks again, nor is she spoken to. After a brief announcement of her death and burial,<sup>14</sup> she disappears from the narrative (Trible 128). The next sentence, "there was no water for the people to drink," connects Miriam's life with the magical Well (Schwartz 11).

The Biblical story is elaborated in the Talmud (teachings of rabbis between 200 and 500 CE) and in midrash (stories that fill in gaps in the biblical narrative).

Water is a central metaphor in the exodus narrative; the characters are perpetually at risk of perishing because of either too much or too little water (Elwell 141-2).

Throughout their journey, the Israelites depend on Miriam's Well, which traveled with them, "rolling up mountains and descending into valleys with them." Wherever Israel encamped, the well rested close by, opposite the Tent of Meeting" (Elwell, 141).

This well,<sup>15</sup> according to Midrash, was given by God because of the merit of Miriam.<sup>16</sup> During the 40 years of wandering in the desert, it provided literal pure and refreshing water (Berzon).

This is ironic in light of one meaning of Miriam's name, usually translated bitter water [Hebrew, "mar" "bitter" and "yam" sea].<sup>17</sup> Born into the bitterness of slavery, she has now overcome it (Schwartz 9, Goldzweig); Miriam's name indicates her capacity to swim against the tide of society when necessary (Antonelli 348).

Is there a "natural" explanation for this well? The earliest record of dowsing (divination to locate water or other underground items, also known as water finding or water witching) is fifteenth century Europe. However, many people have found water in deserts by astute observation of plants and geological phenomena (Brooks).

The Talmud and Midrash see Miriam's Well symbolically as a source of spiritual and moral strength; Miriam's message is interpreted as uncompromising reliance on God even in the face of seeming hopelessness (Berzon).

Chabad, an Orthodox Jewish movement, goes even further with the symbolism. Citing sources from the second to the eighteenth centuries, Goldzweig attributes to the Well the timing, position and arrangement of each encampment in the desert, and concludes that the well-water aids understanding of the oral traditions of Torah.



Sabiha Rehman, "Untitled," pencil and watercolour on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches.



Sabiha Rehman, "Untitled," pencil and watercolour on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches.

### Reprise: Kos Miriam

Miriam's Cup is one contemporary way of drawing attention to the importance of Miriam and the other women of the Exodus story—women who are often overlooked but about whom Jewish tradition says "if it weren't for the righteousness of women of that generation we would not have been redeemed from Egypt" (Greenbaum 10).

As Elwell puts it:

Throughout their desert wanderings,  
The Israelites were refreshed by miraculous springs  
That bubbled out of deep crevices  
In the rocky landscape.

When Miriam died, the waters dried up,  
The people mourned the slave child who waited by a river,  
The woman who danced across a sea,  
The leader who sang a nation to freedom.

When the springs flowed once more,  
They named them Miriam's well.

When fear blocks our path, when our travels deplete us,

We seek sources of healing and wells of hope.  
May our questions and our stories nourish us  
As Miriam's Well renewed our people's spirits.  
(Elwell and Weisberg qtd. in Greenberg 10)

### Conclusion

Miriam occupies a unique position in biblical writings. In text and midrash, she gives us a legitimate, traditionally sanctioned role model unlike any other (Schwartz 8).

Historically:

- Miriam is the first person, male or female, to be called a prophet/ess.<sup>18</sup>
- The text shows her in relationship to other women. She interacts with her mother. She sets the stage for collaboration and perhaps even community among women (herself, her mother, Pharaoh's daughter, her attendants, and perhaps midwives) (Schwartz 4; Mirkin 265).
- Together she and the Egyptian princess create an alliance that surpasses race, class, religion and every other form of personal status (Schwartz 4).
- In Biblical text Miriam never marries nor gives

birth.<sup>19</sup> No other woman receives such a high status on her own (Schwartz 4).

- Miriam confronts authority and claims her power openly, as opposed to the guile and deceit of the women of Genesis<sup>20</sup> (Schwartz 6).

- In only two passages in which Miriam is mentioned by name does she actually speak. In both of these<sup>21</sup> Miriam stands with Moses, claiming leadership. She leads the women at the Song of the Sea, and demands the right to interpret divine word during the sojourn in the wilderness (Schwartz 11).

- Her role in saving her brother and in celebrating the crossing of the sea highlights her concern for her people. Later they reciprocate, refusing to continue the march in the wilderness until the diseased Miriam is restored (Num 12:15). Three references to the people at her death further underscore their loyalty to her (Trible 128).

- Some people believe that in days to come (at the “end of days”), Israel will go forth again with drums, dances, and merrymakers (Jer 31:4). As the inaugurator of a performance and composition tradition of song, drums and dances, Miriam continues to resonate (Trible 128).

Miriam’s legacy lies partly in her Well:

- Believed by many to be hidden, some say visible from the top of Mount Carmel as a sieve in the Mediterranean Sea; others, in the Sea of Galilee where it feeds Israel’s water reserve, it continues to heal skin conditions and promote understanding (Goldzweig; Schwartz 2-3; Haberman 229, Antonelli 173).

- Metaphorically, Miriam’s Well welcomes seekers into monthly Rosh Chodesh/New Moon celebrations (Elwell 142; Adelman).

- A social worker is inspired to provide care beyond just physical safety to a young woman on the streets after a drunken fight with her mother (Mirkin 264).

- A local Kosher Food Bank that provides fresh vegetables to low income women is called Miriam’s Well.<sup>22</sup>

As well, Miriam herself is being reclaimed as a model for leadership.

- She was a prophet who led a celebration after crossing the Reed Sea, perhaps by leading the women as Moses led the men (Antonelli 348) or perhaps by reciting a “prayer-song” with the entire Israelite community, women and men (Haberman 213).

- Women of the Wall, whose mission is social and legal recognition of their right, as women, to wear prayer

shawls, pray, and read from the Torah collectively and out loud at the Western Wall have gathered monthly in Israel for more than 20 years. Reviving the liberation thrust of Miriam’s activism, their celebrations enact the spiritual, liturgical, and political significance of Miriam’s prayer-song (Haberman 223-224).

- Some women study Torah in Miriam’s name, adding their insights and questions to the commentaries of the generations (Elwell 142).

- Miriam’s story is common to, and can unite, women across the spectrum of Jewish practice and that of other Abrahamic religions.

As Yarber puts it:

We remember you, Miriam, when our muddy feet dance toward liberation. We remember you when our once-silenced voices sing the songs of freedom. Even in your absence, your cadence journeys. (Yarber)

*Thanks to Dr. David Brooks, Rabbi Anna Maranta, Farhat Rehman, Wendy Miriam Valhof, Genevieve Vaughan, and Dr. Jonathan Wouk, who provided assistance and insights that carried me forward.*

*Judith Maeryam Wouk is a retired Federal public servant who now indulges in her passion for reframing ancient women’s stories. She also loves to drum. Her most recent publication is on “Unaccompanied/ Separated Minors and Refugee Protection in Canada,” published in Refuge: Canada’s Periodical on Refugees. She can be reached at judithwouk@gmail.com*

*Sabiba Rehman lives in Ottawa, Ontario. Her work has been featured at Ottawa City Hall for the City’s 150th anniversary inauguration and at the Ottawa Public Library.*

<sup>1</sup>For example, “Water turns up frequently in dreams and in many different contexts. It may have broad, generalized references to the unconscious, to the womb and the security of inter-uterine existence, to mothering, nurturing, and so on.... It may have more specific sexual references to the place where sperm (fish) swim around.” (Ullman and Zimmerman, 128). In Hebrew tradition, women’s fluids, especially blood, are associated with “impurity” and ritual bathing (Wasserfall).

<sup>2</sup>Often mistranslated as Red Sea, the Hebrew word is the same as the material of Moses’ basket.

<sup>3</sup>The literal meaning of “mitzrayim”, usually translated “Egypt”.

<sup>4</sup>Hebrew for Moses.

<sup>5</sup>When it was hit by her brother with a staff (Exodus 17:6).

<sup>6</sup>Transliterated Hebrew for the Tetragrammaton, the

unpronounceable name of God, often written Yahweh or Jehovah.

<sup>7</sup>Girls were spared because Pharaoh's astrologers predicted a son as deliverer. They could see that he had already been conceived and would ultimately suffer misfortune through water. Pharaoh misinterpreted this and decreed that all boys be drowned. He was not afraid of divine retribution because God had promised [Noah] never to destroy the world again with water (Antonelli 139). "Yokheved cast Moses' basket into the water, rather than in a field, so the astrologers would get an image of a child cast into the Nile and Pharaoh would end his decree (Antonelli 141). It worked.

<sup>8</sup>In the tradition of the priestesses in the temples of Hathor, the goddess of love, childbirth, song and dance. Initially, only women from elite social classes served in Egyptian temples as 'musician priestess' where they provided music and choreography in the Old Kingdom (2575 – 2150 BCE) (Slayford).

<sup>9</sup>Antonelli, 170, as well.

<sup>10</sup>"Contractions come as unrelenting waves in the sea during a mighty storm. Hot and sweating I propel myself through the teaming waters, soaking" (Haberman 192). "Home birth entails the responsibility to handle materials. Not discreetly whisked away to the hospital incinerator, blood-drenched sheets and placenta are tangible reminders of our carnality. Washing and disposing of the physical remains, this birth honors the process through to its terminus (Haberman 199).

<sup>11</sup>"Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife. "[Has יַחַוּחַ] spoken only with Moses?" [Hasn't] he spoken also with us?"

<sup>12</sup>Miriam and Aaron learn the significance of this when God calls to them and they are forbidden from sexual relations. They cry "Water, water!" [for immersion]. This shows that Moses acted properly in separating from his wife (Antonelli 350 quoting Rashi).

<sup>13</sup>She turns white (usually interpreted as leprosy) and is banished for seven days.

<sup>14</sup>"Miriam died [in Kadesh], and was buried there" (Numbers 20:1).

<sup>15</sup>As opposed to the wells of the Biblical Rebecca, Rachel, and Zipporah, which are associated with meeting their husbands, respectively Isaac, Jacob, Moses.

<sup>16</sup>Miriam had two merits connected specifically with water; there are differing opinions for which merit the well was bequeathed: watching over the infant Moses or exuberant praise after the Splitting of the Sea. As well, it was to Miriam's credit that the Israelites continued to procreate in Egypt despite Pharaoh's decrees. Therefore, water—the most crucial need—was in her merit (Goldzweig).

<sup>17</sup>The Hebrew mem resh yud mem is both "bitter water"

(marim) and "Miriam" (which might also be "one who sees water."). (Antonelli 173) In Egyptian Miriam may mean "beloved" (Elwell 140).

<sup>18</sup>Hebrew, like French, requires that nouns be either male or female in form.

<sup>19</sup>Although tradition supplies her with both husband and children.

<sup>20</sup>Rebecca, for example, deceives her husband Isaac to secure for her son Jacob various blessings, including the blessing of the dew. (Haberman 219)

<sup>21</sup>Exodus 15:20 and Numbers 12.

<sup>22</sup>I was taken to visit by Cynthia Powell.

## References:

- Adelman, Penina V. *Miriam's Well: Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*. 2nd ed. New York: BiblioPress, 1990. Print.
- Antonelli, Judith S. *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997. Print.
- Bach, Alice and J. Cheryl Exum, *Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1991. Print.
- Berzon, Rabbi Bernard L. "70. Chukat – The Well of Miriam." *Sermons the Year 'Round*. Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, Inc., 1978.
- Bithiah*. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 15 June 2014. Web. 18 June 2014.
- Brooks, David B. Email to the author. 10 May 2014.
- Brown, Erica. "The Well Dried Up: Miriam's Death in Bible and Midrash." Schwartz 42-51. Print.
- Condren, Mary. "On Forgetting our Divine Origins: The Warning of Dervogilla." *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* 2.1 (1997): 117-132. Print.
- Deen, Edith, *All the Women of the Bible: 316 Concise Biographies*. Edison, NJ, Castle Books, 1955. Print.
- Elwell, Rabbi Sue Levi. "Beshalach: Miriam's Song, Miriam's Silence." *The Women's Torah Commentary*. Ed. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000. 138-142. Print.
- Elwell, Rabbi Sue Levi and Ruth Weisberg. *The Open Door: A Passover Haggadah*. New York: CCR Press, 2002.
- Falk, Marcia. *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, The Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival*. Harper San Francisco, 1996. Print.
- Franklin, Stephen E. *Typhon: the Holocene Period. Part I: Assignment of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Assyrian King-lists*. "Chapter 3: Children of Merneptah – Moses, Miriam, and Seti II." Web. 2004-2014. Accessed 18 June 2014.
- Goldstein, Rabbi Elyse, ed. *The Women's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly*

*Torah Portions*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000. Print.

Goldzweig, Rena S., "The Prophetess of Redemption." *Kabbalah Online: Kosher Kabbalah from the Holy City of Safed, Israel*. 2003. Chabad.org. Web. 18 June 2014.

Greenbaum, Yaffa. *Shalom Bayit Passover Haggadah*. Jewish Family Services of Ottawa. Passover 2010. Print.

Haberman, Bonna Devora. *Israeli Feminism Liberating Judaism: Blood and Ink*. Lexington Press, 2012. Print.

Hammer, Rabbi Jill, with Shir Yaakov Feit. *Omer Calendar of Biblical Women*. 2012. Print.

*Hebrew-English Bible According to the Masoretic Text and the JPS*. 1917 Ed. Mechon Mamre. HTML version 2005. Web. 18 June 2014.

Horn, Laurie, "Births." Schwartz 17.

Lonergan, Stephen C., and David B. Brooks, *Watershed: the role of fresh water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1994. Print.

Meyers, Carol, gen. ed. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, assoc. eds. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000. Print.

*Miriam*. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. 23 May 2014. Web. 18 June 2014.

Mirkin, Marsha Pravder, "The Birthing of Community: Social Responsibility and the Women of Early Exodus." Schwartz, 264-78.

*Qu'ran. Surat Al-Qaşaş (The Stories)*. 28:4-14. Web. 18 June 2014.

Ribner, Melinda, *The Secret Legacy of Biblical Women: Revealing the Divine Feminine*. New York: Melinda Ribner, 2012. Print.

Schwartz, Rebecca, ed. *All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet & the Women of Exodus*. Mountain View, CA: Rikudei Miriam Press, 2001. Print.

Slayford, Lian. "The Rise, Decline and Disappearance of Hathor's Priestesses." *Bukisa: Share your Knowledge*. 6 October 2009. Web. 18 June 2014.

Trible, Phyllis, *Miriam 1*. Meyers, 127-129. Print.

Ullman, Montague, M. D. and Nan Zimmerman, *Working with Dreams*. New York: Laurel/Eleanor Friede, 1979.

Wasserfall, Rahel, ed. *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1999. Print.

*Women of the Wall*. Jerusalem, 2014. Web. 18 June 2014.

Yarber, Angela. "Painting Miriam." *Feminism and Religion*. 8 June 2013. Web. 18 June 2014.

## PENN KEMP

### Middle March and Beyond

Last day of winter and snow recedes slowly as creatures emerge tentatively to feed. We are all immersed, immured, enveloped in this strange in-between time, ice melting to air. Transition ritual: old kings must die.

So we are told. Be gone, cold. Welcome, fluctuating circumstance. Holding our breath, hanging as elements change their nature, we women wait patiently, impatiently, accepting, rejecting conditions that no longer serve us.

Hoping against hope, whatever that means for a future few sure will be any longer golden or even green, given climate change, given stupidity on all levels of governance, internal, external. We await the chance to

vote, elections upcoming, change essential but arbitrary. We fear the tricks of power determined to stay in place, in control no matter how wild the swirl of oceans gone beyond all known bounds predicated on

past possibility or predicted by those whose voices are silenced by the powers that be: that be sly, short-sighted, power-mad and roiling to keep a lid on that boiling crock—those melting glaciers, the rising sea levels.

*Activist poet/playwright Penn Kemp is London's inaugural Poet Laureate, with twenty-six books of poetry/drama and ten CDs. As Western's Writer-in-Residence, she produced Luminous Entrance: Sound Opera for Climate Change Action (DVD). She hosts Gathering Voices, Radio Western. Quattro Books published Jack Layton: Art in Action, which she edited.*