

Song of Miriam
By Starhawk

And Miriam took her timbrel in her hand,
And there she danced
On the shores of the Red Sea
Beside the living waters.

This is the song of Miriam,
Long forgotten, now remembered.

I am the bitter sea,
The blue spring in the desert,
The replenishing rain.
The renewing river,
The well of sweet water,

The strong arm you can lean upon,
The outstretched hand.
I will lead you out of bondage
To the promised land.

For many long years,
We dwelt in exile
Forced to hard labor
For our Egyptian masters
The only dancing we did
Was the stomping of clay and sand
Into bricks for their tombs.
But for all those years,
My sisters and I
Kept alive the memories,
The knowledge of the mysteries.
Dwelling beside the great river
We were the priestesses of the waters.
Sacred water, in all its forms,
Spring, river, bitter sea...
The womb waters, and our bitter tears...
We kept alive the faith that the day of freedom would come.
Until it came to pass that the Pharaoh
Grew afraid of our people.
He sent out his soldiers with a new decree,

To order the midwives that every newborn son of the Hebrews
Must be drowned.

They came to me, Shifrah and Puah,
They said, "We cannot do this thing,
We are midwives of life, not death.

So we must die."

But I said, "Don't fear, don't despair,
Have faith in the power of She Who Sustains Us.
The hour of our liberation has come!"

We left that night, in such haste,
Our bread had no time to rise.

They followed me, Miriam
They trusted me to lead them.

All through the long night we ran,
Out into the trackless desert,
Until when morning came, we heard behind us
The thunder of chariot wheels,
The war cries of the Pharaoh's soldiers.

And before us lay the sea,
Deep and impassable.

Then the people cried out, "What have you done?
You have led us to death and destruction!

Far better to have stayed as slaves,
Then to all die here."

But I was not afraid.

I know the secrets of the tides.

I serve the Mother of Waters,

And she would serve us in our need.

I spoke to the waves, in the ancient tongue,

I heard their answer.

"If you have faith," I told the people,

"Walk forward! Into the sea!"

We could hear the hooves behind us,

And the clash of metal.

One man stepped forth, one woman,

Then another, and another,

And the sea pulled back,

Dry land appeared,

And we crossed.

It was a long crossing,
Between blue walls of water,

Waves suspended, waiting...
And it seemed to me that I walked
The road of the future.
The way before us was a hard one,
We would wander, lost, for years upon years,
But we would survive.
I would find sweet water.
Water speaks to me, whispers through my skin,
And beneath the driest desert,
Lie sweet blue springs.
The people would say of me that I have a well,
That follows wherever I go.
A sweet land awaited us,
Flowing with milk and honey.
Green hills where the cyclamen blooms,
And a wide plain
That looks to the sea.
But this generation would not see it.
And the generations to come would tell new stories,
To stoke their pride, to erase the shame of bondage,
Stories of conquest and war.
And the story would unfold,
Year by year, century by century,
Sometimes the conquered, sometimes the conquerors,
Exile after exile, homecomings that brought no peace.
And I called out to the people,
"When you reach the promised land,
With the sour taste of slavery still on your tongue,
Take sweet fruit and nuts,
Grind them with honey, spices and wine.
Make a mortar of joy and intoxication
To take the bitterness from your mouth,
To build something new.
And eat it with the bitter herbs, with the unrisen bread,
To remember your liberation.
Remember that you were slaves:
Therefore do not enslave others.
You were exiles.
Do not drive others from their homes.
You were oppressed,
Do not become oppressors in your turn.
Let the sweet charoset remind you,
That fruit is only sweet if it is shared.

Freedom cannot be held in a clenched fist,
Only in an open hand."

Then we reached the shore.
The waves closed behind us.
Our pursuers were cut off,
And we were free!

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I will lead you out of bondage
To the promised land.

To build a new foundation
In a promised land

Through the long years of exile
Under the lash
Forced to hard labor
Building the bricks of tombs

I held the memory
Of green hills
And a wide plain
That looks to the sea

I am the fish tailed mermaid
I am the waters of life

My drum holds the beat
Of liberation
My dance is the dance
Of freedom