

# The Song of Miriam's Well

*Rachel Adelman*

"Here is no water but only rock  
 Rock and no water and the sandy road. . ."  
 — T.S. Eliot "The Wasteland"

Through the wasteland, I traveled with them.  
 So there was rock and also water.  
 A spring, a stone that rolled,  
 Where no moss grows.  
 The sound of water and cicada,  
 And the dry grass singing.  
 When the Clouds of Glory settled,  
 I lay on my side,  
 And dug myself deep into the desert sand.  
 Date palms sprung up around me,  
 To shade the noblemen with their buckets,  
 Singing:  
     "Rise up, O well, (And in chorus, they'd answer)  
     *Ali be'er.*  
     The well our forefathers dug  
     Maces, staffs, striking the flint face."  
 And like a beehive, spewing swarms of bees,  
 I would spout water for their dry mouths.  
 They knew how to suckle on rock,  
 Honey cakes and oil from the flinty stone.

But when my mistress died...  
 Miriam, who sang at the Nile,  
 Not knowing if her brother, among the Reeds, was to live or die,  
 Miriam, who sang at the Reed Sea,  
 When we emerged alive out of water, this time.  
 Well, I could sing water no more.  
 They came with their buckets in the Wilderness of *Tzin*,  
 Saying *Kaddish* for her, named of bitterness,  
 Miriam, *mayim marim*.  
 Stone-faced, I could not even cry.  
 What does it take to weep sweet water?  
 This time Moshe's staff struck twice  
 And yet no drop.

Now, you are leaving the desert behind.  
 You are thirsty, your people crying for water.  
 But I have no mind to roll on with you.  
 A new water-out-of-rock must be found.  
 Be the overflowing spring,  
 Or a cistern that doesn't lose a drop.  
 Be the one who digs deep into desert sand.  
 Be water-out-of-rock.

**RACHEL ADELMAN** completed her Ph.D. in Hebrew literature (with a specialty in midrash) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2008. Currently, she teaches Tanakh and Midrash in Jerusalem, primarily under the auspices of Matan (the Sadie Rennert Women's Institute for Torah Study), and lectures widely abroad. She also writes a regular column for The Jerusalem Post called "Kol Isha." When she is not writing divrei Torah, articles or books, it is poetry that flows from her pen.