



## **Passover Toolkit**

**Passover, Freedom, Miriam & Abortion Access:  
*A resource to explore abortion access through the themes of liberation in Passover and the leadership of Miriam.***

**Passover asks us a central question:**

***What does it mean to be free?***

Jewish tradition teaches that freedom is not only political. It is lived in the body, in questions of health, safety, and dignity. In the Exodus story, Pharaoh seeks to control who will be born. The midwives refuse. They "fear God" more than they fear the king (Exodus 1:17), establishing a core Jewish principle: when law causes harm, moral responsibility may require resistance.

Passover reminds us that liberation means more than leaving Egypt. The Exodus continued through the wilderness, through Torah, through the transition to a people who could govern themselves with justice. That project has always included the body: who controls it, who is trusted with decisions about it, and who is protected from coercion. Liberation means people are trusted to make moral decisions in the midst of complexity.

For many Jewish communities today, access to abortion is understood within this framework: as connected to dignity, health, and religious freedom, and to the ability to live according to one's own values and conscience.



## In the Exodus story:

- Women refuse Pharaoh's attempt to control Jewish reproduction. The midwives "fear God" and do not carry out his command, choosing conscience over decree (Exodus 1:17).
- They protect life not through grand miracles, but through quiet, risky acts of courage: midwives who defy, a mother who hides her child, a sister who speaks up (Exodus 1:17–2:7).
- Miriam stands at the river, "stationing herself from afar" and then stepping forward at a moment of danger in an act of watchfulness and intervention that resists Pharaoh's power (Exodus 2:4–7; Megillah 14a).
- In these acts, they preserve not only individual lives, but the possibility of a future. These acts make redemption itself possible before it has even begun (Exodus Rabbah 1:13; Sotah 11b).

### This story invites reflection:

In the Exodus story, we meet women making quiet, risky choices about bodies and babies. What do we learn from their courage? Where do we see echoes of that courage today?

How does it feel to imagine a world where Pharaoh dictates who may be born and who may not? Where do we see versions of that kind of control in our own time?

Torah tells us the midwives "feared God." How does that moral grounding shape the way they use their power? What anchors our own decisions when law and conscience collide?

## Miriam's Cup: Freedom and Bodily Autonomy

During the seder, many communities place a cup of water on the table to honor Miriam. Tradition teaches that Miriam's well sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, offering life-giving water on their journey to freedom.

As a young girl, Miriam watches over her brother at the river and intervenes with courage and clarity. She does not accept Pharaoh's decree. Instead, she helps carve out another possibility.

Tonight we remember that sustaining life also means resisting those who would control our bodies and limit our futures.

*Leader: We lift Miriam's Cup to honor those who act to protect bodily autonomy and human dignity.*

*All: May every person have the power and support to make their own moral decisions about their body and their future.*

### One Word Practice

Miriam's cup reminds us that liberation is not only a story we inherit. It is one we continue to tell. Take a moment to reflect: what does freedom mean to you, right now, in your own life? When you are ready, share one word: something you have, something you long for, or something you are fighting to protect. As each person speaks, listen. Together, your words become something larger than any one of them.

## The Midwives' Defiance

At the very beginning of the Exodus story, before the plagues, before the sea splits, resistance begins quietly. With women.

Pharaoh issues a decree to control Jewish births, commanding that Hebrew baby boys be killed at the moment of delivery. It is an attempt to dominate not just a people, but their future—their ability to bring life into the world. And it is the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who refuse.

In the biblical telling, their role is brief but profound. Standing at the threshold of birth, entrusted with power over life and death, they choose differently. Because they “fear God,” they do not carry out Pharaoh’s command. Instead, they protect the infants, preserving life in the face of violence.

The rabbis linger here. They expand this moment, lifting up the midwives as among the first resisters in the Exodus narrative. They teach that Shifrah and Puah feared God more than they feared the king and showed that moral courage sometimes means defying even the most powerful authority. And, the rabbis teach that in the merit of the righteous women that were in that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. Liberation cannot come, in our story, without resistance.

Before liberation comes, before miracles unfold, there are these acts: quiet, embodied, risky choices to protect life and dignity. And the story insists that this, too, is where redemption begins.

## A New Question for the Seder

Add a fifth question alongside the Four Questions:

Why should we talk about reproductive freedom on Passover?

Because the Exodus story reminds us that freedom means living without oppressive control over our bodies and lives. Jewish tradition calls us to build a world where compassion, dignity, and care guide our laws and our communities.

On Passover, we are commanded not just to remember oppression, but to see ourselves as if we personally became free. That obligation asks us to recognize where autonomy is still constrained in our own time. Speaking about reproductive freedom and abortion access during Passover connects the ancient story to present day realities: it affirms that true liberation includes bodily autonomy, access to care, and the ability to make decisions guided by conscience, safety, and dignity.

