

Beshalach - Rabbi Lerner - January 20, 2013

Miriam Leads the Women in Song

15:20-21 *And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took her tambourine in her hand and all the women went forth after her with tambourines and dances. Miriam called out to them (VaTa'an Lahem), "Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea."* These last words are almost exactly the same as those at the beginning of the Shira. Why does the Torah say only the sister of Aharon and not also the sister of Moshe? Why identify only one - and why not Moshe, the greater of the two? **Rashi**: she is called a prophetess [she is in fact the only woman in the Torah referred to as one] because she delivered a prophecy much earlier before Moshe was born, when she was only the sister of Aharon; her prophecy was about the birth of Moshe, who would be the savior of the people; and she convinced her parents to remarry on the basis of it, with all of the nation following suit; she told her father he was being worse than Pharaoh who made his decree only on the males, while her father was affecting both males and females. She was only a young child at the time - she was six when Moshe was born. An alternative interpretation - it was Aharon who was Moser Nefesh for her, who went out of his way for her when she was stricken with leprosy for her Lashan Harah against Moshe later in the desert; it was Aharon who spoke up in Beha'alozechah, in 12:11-12: *Aaron said to Moshe "I beg you, my lord, do not cast a sin upon us, for we have been foolish and we have sinned. Let her not be like a corpse, like one who leaves his mother's womb with half his flesh having been consumed."* He pleaded with Moshe to pray for her so that she wouldn't be like a dead person; this touched Moshe, who then prayed to Hashem to heal her; Moshe was mochel on his Kavod and asked Hashem to forgive her. So this was a sign of gratitude for what Aharon was ultimately going to do for her.

And Miriam called out to them - Vata'an Lahem Miriam. **Rashi**: Moshe led the men in song, while Miriam led the women, saying the phrase to the women who would then repeat it. **Sifsei Chachamim**: in the same way that Moshe said the whole Shira to the men, so did Miriam say the whole Shira to the women - not just one sentence, it was the whole text of Az Yashir; since Moshe said the whole text, it was not necessary for the Torah to repeat it here to tell us what Miriam had them say; but the women essentially said the whole thing, just like the men.

Ramban (and **Rabbeinu Bachya**): Why does it just say the sister of Aharon? Moshe played a big role in leading the men in this Shira; Miriam led the women; these are important prayers we say every day. Both Moshe and Miriam were explicitly linked to the Shira. It would have been a big slap in the face to Aharon, who was one of the three national leaders, had the Torah not mentioned his name as well; Hashem was very sensitive to this, and in order to get his name mentioned in the Shira, the Torah mentions his name this way. She is the older brother of the two, and he was great in his own right as a prophet and the Kohein Gadol; it is the way of the Torah to give kavod to those with Yichus. This way Aharon was not slighted. It is also plausible to say that it is the Derech HaTorah to identify a sibling through the oldest of the brothers of their family - as we see in Bereishis 36:22 where it says *Lotan's sister was Timna*.

Rabbeinu Bachya: the fact that there was prophecy given to a woman is not surprising; they are equal to men; both woman and man are referred to with the word *adam*, as we see in the beginning of the Torah. This pasuk emphasizes this equality. Sarah was an even greater prophetess than Miriam (and even greater than Avraham), but it doesn't mention any prophecy given by a woman until Miriam because Hashem was revealing His shechina in a big way at this

time. Some of the most important principles of the Torah have been spelt out through women and not men. Avigayil, the wife of David, teaches us about the bonding of the souls with Olam Habah - *Vehaysah Nefesh Adonee Tzerurah Bitzror HaChayim*. Chana, the mother of Shmuel, says that God causes people to die and to resurrect them; He brings them down to the bottomless pit and then raises them up again - all about Techiyas Hameysim. We should therefore not be surprised at the role played by Miriam.

Rav Nissan Alpert: Why does it say she answered them - *lahem* - it should be *lahen*, to the women; it should be feminine, not masculine? Miriam said to the women - "You should be just like the men - you also have to sing this song; Moshe led the men and we cannot stand here mute - you have to be just like the men because this song is shayich to you just like it is to the men - you too were part of the miracle." This is the source that women are chayav in the miracles of Megilla, Chanukah candles, and to drink the four kosos of wine at the Seder - while they are mitzvos linked to time, of which women are normally exempt, the women were all saved in these instances by miracles; they were saved from mortal danger, and therefore they too were obligated in the mitzvos. That is why Miriam said that the women are just like the men and must sing the Shira. This concept was taught by Rav Yehoshua Ben Levi, that women are obligated in a mitzvah when involved in the miracle - it is a rabbinic concept, but here is a Biblical source of the obligation.

Kli Yakar: Miriam was now called a prophetess because here at the Yom Suf, she, with all of the nation, saw the Shechina - this is when she became a Neviah, not when she was a young girl. At this time all of the women, as well as the men, saw the shechina and said Zeh Kaili Ve'Anvayhu. It was a tremendous prophecy that they were able to see this great miracle; Miriam was the conduit for the inspiration for the women to sing Shira. To receive prophecy it must be through Simchah - normally because of childbirth pain, women don't have simcha; here Miriam was inspired to reach a high level, and through her all of the women reached this level as well.

Abarbanel: Why is she called Miriam the Neviah, the sister of Aharon? Because she was the sister of Aharon - she was on the same level as Aharon, not Moshe; no one is on his level of prophecy.

15:22: *Moshe caused Israel to journey from the Yom Suf and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur; they went for a three day period in the Midbar, but they did not find water.* He was forcing them to travel; there was opposition on their part. **Rashi:** He forced them to move from the Yom Suf against their will, because the Egyptians had adorned their horses and chariots with gold ornaments and precious jewels, and all of these washed up on the shore after they drowned. There was tremendous wealth here that the Jews were collecting; Moshe had to force them to go; there was a tremendous desire to continue to plunder them and take as much wealth as possible. **Rabbeinu Bachya:** Going out from here into the desert was an enormous test for the Jews; every experience the Jews were going to have now in the desert was something totally new; the desert was treacherous; they were going out into the desert when it was already getting warm in the late spring, going with women and little children, without water. They were traveling in the heat of the desert for three days without water. There was no trial like this. When they came to Marah where there was water, they found it bitter - an even greater test. Moshe had to force them to go because of their tremendous fear of the desert, all of which was justified; and their fears came true. Hashem put them through this trial to teach them Bitachon; the huge open miracles had concluded - has God convinced the people to believe in His abilities to take the whole nation into the wilderness and sustain them on a daily basis. They did not want to go.

Rabbeinu Chananel says that when the Torah says they traveled three days in the desert, it was actually not accurate - they traveled a three days' journey in one day - there was a kefitsas haderech. It had to be only one day because it would be impossible for the entire nation to survive three days without water - certainly the weaker ones in the bunch - young children, elderly, nursing women - could not have survived three days. This whole journey was to be a test of faith, they had to believe in God's ability to make things work out.

Abarbanel: Moshe didn't just force them. He had to lead them. Why did they get punished that there was no water? There is an interpretation that when they bad mouthed Moshe at the Yom Suf, saying that Moshe was going to have them all killed at the Yom Suf, asking "were not enough graves in Egypt that he had to bring them out there to die" - they sinned against Moshe with this sarcasm. So, since they sinned at the water, they were punished by water, or lack thereof. A better interpretation though is that this journey Moshe himself commanded - it did not come from a signal from above, from Hashem. They weren't even set up in the proper formation to travel, as we learn in Bamidbar. The leading pillar of cloud and fire that had led them out of Egypt (13:21-22) and showed them the proper way until that point did not move here. The pillar of cloud was only to get them to the Yom Suf because that completed the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt - the splitting of the sea was the end of the Exodus experience. One of the reasons it says Miriam was a prophetess over here is because her prophecy about Moshe being born and being the redeemer of the Jewish nation did not get confirmed until this point, when the Egyptians were drowned and the Jews were clearly free of Egypt; until the army drowned, the Jews could have been forced to return to slavery. So this prophecy of Miriam was not revealed until this point, this final act, which was the completion of her prophecy. It is when we were finally finished with the Mitzrim that the prophecy was revealed. The pillar of cloud was only to bring them to the sea. After that, it was Moshe who led them further - he was the tour guide; from this point until they get to Har Sinai, he was the one leading them. He had to force them to go and trust him. This is why after three days without water they complained to Moshe, about Moshe; Moshe was doing this on his own and had to pray to Hashem, who responded and instructed Moshe to throw a tree branch into the bitter waters to sweeten them. After Har Sinai, the pillar of cloud will lead the people once again until they are ready to enter the promised land.