

COGNIZANCE OF BLESSING SOURCE

Parshas Chukas

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

From the cradle of the Jewish People, as they were suffering the pangs in Egypt, Miriam the prophetess plays a prominent role as a leader. Miriam begins her prophecy before Moshe is born, when Aaron was still a child. She then prophesized that her parents would give birth to a son who would redeem Israel from bondage (Sota 13a). She was instrumental in bringing her parents together after separating because of Pharaoh's murderous decrees.

When Moshe as an infant is placed at the bank of the river, Miriam watches him from a distance. She saves him, as Basya goes to bathe and notices the infant. Miriam calls their mother to feed him. As a reward for this period that she stood watch, all Israelites waited for her for seven days, when she was not in a position to journey in the Midbar, measure for measure (Mishna Sotah 9b). How much time did she spend watching him from a distance? Tosfos (ibid 11a) calculates she spent between fifteen and twenty minutes. This is derived from the fact that in rewarding measure for measure Hashem repays five hundred times the amount spent in doing a mitzvah. Thus five hundred times 17 minutes adds up to seven days.

King Solomon, the wisest of all the wise (I Kings 3:12; 5:11) advises: Say unto wisdom, you are my sister (Mishlei 7:4). So much closeness and love for wisdom should a person develop as one has for his sister. Apparently, Moshe appreciated the wisdom of his sister Miriam. When she was in need of healing the Torah records precisely the words of Moshe's prayer for her recovery (Bamidbar 12:13).

No wonder that in the very SHIRA of Moshe, OZ YASHIR, the SHIRA of Miriam is stated alongside Moshe's. The Torah relates her impact upon all the women, who followed her in the Shira, "And all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances" (Shemos 15:20).

b) In our Sidra we learn that during the forty years on their journey in the Midbar, the Israelites were supplied with water miraculously in the zechus (merit) of Miriam. As they reached the month of Nisan of the fortieth year, Miriam died, and there was no water (Bamidbar 20:1). We learn from the

juxtaposition of her death and the lack of water, that all these forty years journeying in the midbar the water was supplied miraculously in the merit of Miriam (Rashi *ibid*). According to the Talmud the water reappeared after a few days, in the *zechus*, merit of Moshe and Aaron. The Maharsho wonders since the merit of Moshe and Aaron was enough to provide water as it reappeared a few days after it ceased, why did the water flow cease for several days. It could have continued uninterrupted in the merit of Moshe and Aaron. Expounds the Maharsho, the temporary interruption of the water flow was essential in order for all to acknowledge the fact that until now the water was supplied in the merit of Miriam.

The gravity of this deprivation should not be underestimated. Several million people, including many children, bereft of water for several days is most distressing, painful. Yet, according to Maharsho it was worthwhile in order for all to feel profoundly that until now, while Miriam was alive, it was in her merit that Hashem provided water on parched land. "Take care lest you forget Hashem Your G-d... Who leads you through the great and awesome wilderness... and thirst where there was no water, Who brings forth water from the rock of flint" (Devorim 8:11,15). In this urgent care to remember Hashem's miracles, the Torah obliges us to remember also the *Tzidkonis* in whose merit the blessing was provided.

The holiday Succoth, like Passover, celebrates the Exodus from Egypt. Except that the emphasis is on the miraculous existence during the forty years in the desert. The Succoth tent, the clouds of glory, for protection is one of the three miracles of that existence. Manna for food is the second. Miriam's BEAIR, well, for drink is the third. This third miracle receives an extra measure of appreciation, as the Torah in our Sidra records a special SHIRA, called SHIRAS HABEAIR (21:17,20).

c) In this context the perspicacious learner includes the decree that Moshe and Aaron would not enter Eretz Yisroel, the land they craved so profoundly to enter. As the Israelites found themselves suddenly without water, after the death of Miriam (*ibid*), Moshe was told to take the rod and gather the Israelites, V'DIBARTEM, and speak, in front of the rock, and the water will come forth from the rock and quench their thirst. Instead of speaking unto the rock, Moshe smote it with the rod. For this he and Aaron were deprived of the privilege to enter and bring the Israelites into the Holy Land (20:7-12).

The divine plan was that the water, which is the most basic need for the sustenance of life, would now come as a result of the study of Torah. Moshe was told to speak in front of the rock... Though V'DIBARTEM may refer to either prayer or Torah study (Netziv ibid.), the term is more applicable towards study of Torah: "Study with them a Perek in front of the rock" (Yalkut Chukas 764; see Ohr Hachayim who insists that the intent was to study Torah at the rock). This was to impress upon the mind, for all time, what power is hidden in Torah study, and what powerful method it is in gaining the Al-mighty's grace.

Moshe was therefore, to take the rod, but not to use it. This was vital and imperative as the Israelites were readying to enter the Land. Failing to perform this mission as prescribed, Moshe and Aaron were meted out retribution not to enter the Land, measure for measure.

"LOCHAIN" (therefore) you will not bring this Congregation to the Land..." (20:12). The word "LOCHAIN" is a form of an oath (Rashi ibid). An oath is the most serious insistence on the sincerity of the "word". Indicative in this oath is the real reason they could not enter the Land. It was the lack of the "Torah word" which is the life breath of the Land.

The question arises why is this refusal to allow them to enter repeated several times. In addition to the above quoted LOCHAIN... it is repeated in connection with Aaron's death (20:24); again in Parshas Pinchas (27:14); again in Vaeschanan (Devorim 3:23-28). One conjectures in addition to state the decree to Moshe and Aaron, it was repeated to teach the Israelites that vital of the vitals, that Jewish power in the land is the power of the "word", the source of blessing, of survival, the word of Torah and prayer. "...which I took from the Land of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow" (Beraishis 48:22) "i.e. word of prayer and Torah word" (Unkeles, Rashi).

The writer wishes his readers a healthy, joyous, and spiritually fruitful summer. Last year's essays during the summer months are available to email receivers, humbly suggesting a second reading may be beneficial.

