

Jam Session on the Beach

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BESHALACH (5758)

MIRIAM THE PROPHETESS EXPERIENCED A DIFFICULT BEGINNING

“And Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aharon, took the drum in her hand, and all the women went out after her with drums and dancing” (15:20). At that point, the women praised Hashem for saving *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] from Paroh’s army at the *Yam Suf* [Reed Sea].

The *Gemara Sotah* 12B, at the bottom of the page, wonders about the terminology in our *pasuk* [verse]. Why is Miriam considered AHARON’S sister? Is she not also the sister of Moshe? The *Gemara* answers that there is a hint here to an early prediction of hers. At one point in her life, when she was ONLY the sister of Aharon, not Moshe, before Moshe’s birth, she pronounced some prophetic words. *Rashi* on this *Gemara* says that the words in our *pasuk*, “the prophetess - sister of Aharon”, indicate this. In short, our *pasuk* alludes to the fact that she had *nevuah* [prophecy] before Moshe came into the world.

What was the *nevuah*? On the top of *Sotah* 13A, *Chazal* [our Sages] relate that she predicted Moshe *Rabainu*’s [Moses our teacher’s] birth. “In the future, my mother will bear a son who will rescue the *Bnai Yisroel*.” When Moshe was born, the entire house was filled with light. Her father, Amram, got up and kissed Miriam on the head. He said to her, “My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled!” However, after time passed and they were forced to place Moshe in the Nile River, her father rose and struck her on her head (reprimanded her, pointing out that her *nevuah* seemed incorrect). He said to her, “My daughter, where is your prophecy?” This, says the *Gemara*, is the meaning of a *pasuk* in *Shmos* [Exodus] 2:4. “And his sister stationed herself at a distance (as Moshe floated down the river) to know what would be done to him.” The *Gemara* explains that Miriam was genuinely curious about her earlier prophecy. What would become of it? That is the intention of the words, “to know what would be done to him”. She pondered about the future of her little brother.

☞ Below, in a *Da’as Zekainim* on *Parshas* [the Torah portion of] *Beha’aloscha*, we will see a deeper, more shocking interpretation of this event, that Miriam stood herself far away **for seven days** after Moshe was put into the river. Please stay tuned.

It should be noted that Amram definitely had sacred and noble intentions when he questioned the validity of his daughter’s *nevuah*. He clearly believed that she needed rebuke at that exact moment for her apparently faulty prophecy. Remember that Amram never committed a sin in his life. He only left this world because such was decreed upon all of Adam *Harishon*’s [Adam the first man’s] progeny after the snake advised Chava to eat from the *aitz hada’as* [tree of knowledge] (*Bava Basra* 17A before the *Mishna*). Thus, although Miriam’s prophecy DID come true at the end, Amram is not considered sinful for censuring his daughter. Furthermore, the *Maharsha* mentions that others have a different version of this *Gemara*. The *sefer* [book] called *Shoresh Yishai* says that his *Gemara* relates that Miriam’s MOTHER, Yocheved, scolded her for her apparently false prophecy when Moshe was put into the Nile. According to this, her father DID still believe in the authenticity of her *nevuah*, even at that trying moment. The *Midrash Rabba* 1:22 on *Shmos* also declares that Miriam’s MOTHER, not father, “hit her over the head” when the *nevuah* seemed to vanish.

The bottom line is that Miriam’s beginning was not so smooth. A *Da’as Zekainim* on *Parshas Beha’aloscha 12:14* adds much to our understanding of the *Gemara Sotah* 13A. Recall that when Miriam later criticized Moshe’s separation from Tzipora and was punished with *tzora’as* [a leprous-like affliction] for this *loshon hora* [evil gossip], Moshe *davened* [prayed] for her to be healed (*Beha’aloscha* 12:13). “Please, Almighty G-d, heal her now.” Hashem responded that Miriam needed to suffer some sort of punishment. “If even her father would have spit in her face, would she not be embarrassed for seven days? Let her be closed up out of the camp for seven days” (12:14). To what event was Hashem referring when He mentioned her father rebuking her (spitting in her face)? It almost sounds as if an earlier episode of Miriam’s father scolding her is being used as a reference now.

Yes, states the *Da’as Zekainim*. Hashem is referring to what actually occurred when Moshe was placed into the Nile, back in *Mitzraim* [Egypt]. Miriam’s father, Amram, did reprimand her, wondering about the fulfillment of her *nevuah*. She was, at that time, ashamed for seven days. As we quoted above, Miriam “stationed

herself from afar” as Moshe floated down the river. How does the *Da’as Zekainim* explain these words now? The “distance” at which she placed herself has a deeper connotation. She was literally distanced because of “*nezifa*” [a condition one is in after being officially scolded].

In summary, Miriam suffered disciplinary action shortly after Moshe had been born. She underwent the embarrassment of being distanced from her father for seven days, as Hashem hints in *Parshas Beha’aloscha*. Indeed, Miriam did not see true “*nachas*” [happiness] from her original *nevuah* until today’s *parsha* [Torah portion]. How is this so?

As we started our discussion, it says that Miriam the prophetess took the drum in her hand, and she led the women in music and dancing. Also recall *Rashi* on the end of the *Gemara Sotah* 12B, that the words “*haneviah achos Aharon*” [the prophetess, sister of Aharon] hint that her original prophecy had been said before Moshe was born, when she was only the sister of Aharon. Another issue must be clarified. From where did Miriam and the women obtain musical instruments now, at the splitting of the sea?

Rashi on our *pasuk* (15:20), based on a *Mechilta*, mentions that the righteous women of that generation were certain that Hashem would perform miracles for *Bnai Yisroel*. Consequently, they took drums out of Egypt with them, prepared to celebrate and praise the Creator. The *Sfas Emes* adds that when the sea spit out the dead Egyptians, it obviously tossed out their possessions as well. Included in these must have been various musical instruments. Kings usually equip their armies with such items to add to their splendor. Also, when we left *Mitzraim*, taking with us loads of their vessels and utensils, these instruments were likely included.

But the *Sfas Emes* wonders about a word in our *pasuk*. Why does it say that Miriam took THE drum in her hand? Was it a special one? He answers that prophets often had with them specific instruments. (These were on hand so that the *navi* [prophet] would be in a joyous frame of mind, necessary for receiving prophecy.) He brings *psukim* [verses] to prove this well-known fact. **Once Miriam’s prophecy was fulfilled, that Moshe would deliver the Jews from the Egyptians, she took THE DRUM in her hand. This was her official instrument, her tool of trade, which signified that she was a genuine prophetess. This could only take effect in our *parsha*, where Paroh’s pursuing army is drowned, and Miriam is labeled as “Miriam *Haneviah*” [Miriam the prophetess].**

“I brought you up from the land of Egypt...and I sent before you Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam” (*Micha* 6:4). Although her illustrious career started on a rough note, Miriam the *tzadaikes* [righteous woman], Miriam the prophetess, became one of the three leaders of her outstanding generation.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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