

MIRIAM'S FATE

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Parshas Behaaloscha

Miriam's Fate

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Today's Learning:

Zevachim 14:3-4

O.C. 153:12-14

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sotah 21

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 29

According to our Sages, two events from this week's parashah occurred on the twentieth of Sivan, which falls next week. One is the end of the month-long miracle of the slav / the birds that miraculously rained down on the Jewish camp to be eaten. The other is that Miriam was quarantined for speaking lashon hara against Moshe.

According to many authorities, we are required by the Torah (Devarim 24:8- 9) to remember daily the punishment which Miriam suffered for her sin. However, writes R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) even among those who observe this practice, there does not seem to be less lashon hara spoken. Why?

He answers: There are several reasons for this, each of which may be understood by a parable. If one ignores his doctor's instructions on how to take a certain medication, the medication may not help him. Similarly, remembering Miriam's fate is not a magical cure; it comes with instructions: do not engage in idle talk, avoid situations where lashon hara is common, etc. Many people do not heed these instructions. Also, if a person ignores his illness until disease has spread to his whole body, medicine may be useless, or will at least take longer to have any effect. This is unfortunately the case with lashon hara, a prohibition so neglected that no easy cure is possible. Instead, one must recognize the extent to which he has become entrapped by this sin, and only then will true and complete correction be possible. (Zechor L'Miriam, ch.1)

"With matzot and bitter herbs they shall eat it." (9:11)

R' Moshe Sherer z"l (1921-1998; long-time president of Agudath Israel of America) writes: Compared to the symbols of the other holidays, matzah is rather low-key. On Rosh Hashanah, the shofar is blown loudly. On Sukkot, we parade with the lulav standing tall. On Chanukah, we light menorahs in our windows. On Simchat Torah and Purim, we also celebrate conspicuously.

Why is it, then, that throughout history, it was Pesach which seemed to enrage our gentile neighbors the most? Why was it typically at Pesach time that Jews suffered from blood libels and pogroms?

Certainly, writes R' Sherer, this was the work of the sitra achra (loosely translated: the angel who is the guardian of all evil forces) himself. Matzah represents too much for us to be allowed to eat it in peace.

What does matzah represent? It reminds us of Hashem's strong hand and of the eternity of the Jewish people. Even when our ancestors in Egypt fell perilously close to spiritual oblivion, Hashem saved them. Also, matzah represents the transmission of our heritage and beliefs from generation to generation, as it is written (Shmot 13:8), *"And you shall relate to your son . . ."* Over the matzah, we tell our children of the many empires that forced our ancestors to eat matzah in secret and of the fact that we outlived those empires.

From matzah, we also can learn how to fight those empires. The Gemara states that matzah which is made in direct sunlight is unfit for Pesach. So, too, our activism must be low-key. Matzah also may not contain food coloring. So, too, our activism must be free of foreign, non-Torah influences. (Be'shte Enayim p. 43)

"When you go to wage war in your Land against the enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound short blasts of the trumpets . . ." (10:9)

From the seemingly superfluous words, "against the enemy who oppresses you," Rambam derives that there is a mitzvah to sound the trumpets and pray to Hashem over any form of oppression, be it a drought, plague or other trouble. He writes that this is part of the process of teshuvah / repentance, and that through teshuvah one causes his troubles to depart. The biggest sin, Rambam writes, is to ascribe one's troubles to fate or coincidence.

R' Yaakov Yitzchak Halevi Ruderman z"l (founder and Rosh Hayeshiva of Ner Israel; died 1987) added (during the Yom Kippur War): Even those who ascribe troubles to coincidence start to pray when the troubles are their own. That is how we must see the troubles of our brethren in Israel - as our own.

Moreover, said R' Ruderman, Chazal teach that every person should believe, "The whole world was created for me." This obligates each of us to believe that his prayers can make a difference. (Masat

Levi p. 332)

"Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and its officers . . ." (11:16)

Rashi quotes the midrash which says that the term "officers" refers to those people who were assigned by the Egyptians to whip Jews who failed to meet their work quotas. In fact, these officers failed to do their "duty" and were beaten themselves.

R' Aharon Kotler z"l asks: Why is this a qualification to serve on the sanhedrin / high court? He explains that a Jewish leader can succeed, not in his own merit, but only in the merit of the Jewish people. It is therefore incumbent upon a would-be leader to demonstrate his total commitment and self-sacrifice for his people. Moshe, too, the midrash tells us, used to help his brethren with their slave labor although, as a Levite, he was exempted by Pharaoh. (Mishnat R' Aharon Vol. II, p.113)

"My servant Moshe, in My whole house he is trusted." (12:7)

What does it mean when the Torah says the Moshe was a "servant of Hashem"? R' David Kimchi z"l ("Radak") explains (in his commentary to Yehoshua 1:1) that someone who devotes all of his powers to serving Hashem and who, even when he is engaged in mundane matters, does them for the sake of serving G-d, is called a "servant of Hashem."

R' Elchanan Wasserman z"l hy"d elaborates: Slaves cannot own property; everything they acquire belongs to their masters. Similarly, when a person recognizes that all of his powers and belongings belong to Hashem and must be used exclusively to serve him, he can be called a "servant of Hashem." [Ed. note: Hebrew uses the same word - "eved" - to mean "slave" and "servant."]

In this light, adds R' Wasserman, we can understand Rambam's statement that, although no person will ever be as great a prophet as Moshe, one can be as great a tzaddik as Moshe. Anyone can choose, as Moshe did, to direct all of his actions to serving G-d.

Of course, it was easier for Moshe to do this than it would be for any of us. However, the Gemara teaches that a poor person's sacrifice of wheat is as beloved to Hashem as a rich man's sacrifice of an ox. One must only make the sacrifice. (Kovetz Ma'amarim p.48)

How can one serve G-d all of the time? R' Eliyahu Reingold shlita (maggid shiur at the Yeshiva Gedolah of Greater Washington) answered with the following parable:

Imagine that you need to move your car from City A to City B, but you do not wish to drive it there yourself. There are companies whose business is finding people who need to travel from City A to City B but who have no cars. These companies match car to driver, collect a fee, and everyone's needs are satisfied.

To ensure the delivery of the car, the company gives the driver a deadline by which he must arrive at the destination (after which the police will be called). The length of time that the driver is given depends on the distance; however, the driver is not expected to drive 24 hours a day. Time is built in to the schedule for an appropriate amount of rest and relaxation.

As long as the driver keeps his destination in mind, a reasonable amount of time may be spent on diversions. So it is with serving Hashem. One is not expected to learn Torah and perform mitzvot 24 hours a day or even at every waking moment. One is expected to keep the ultimate destination in mind and to relax so that he will be able to serve Hashem better. If he does that, even his diversions become part of serving Hashem. (Heard from R' Reingold)

R' Yitzchak of Drogo bych z"l

R' Yitzchak of Drogo bych was one of the leading followers of the Ba'al Shem Tov and helped disseminate the latter's teachings in the province of Galicia. Neither the year of R' Yitzchak's birth or death is known, but he lived from approximately 1700 to the sixth or seventh decade of that century. He was a descendant of R' Yitzchak Chayon, author of Apei Ravrevai, and many generations of his ancestors were respected rabbis. His mother Yente was known as the "prophetess."

R' Yitzchak was an itinerant maggid / preacher who traveled throughout Galicia and Volhynia, and even visited Slutsk, Lithuania. He lived for a time in Brody, where he was supported by R' Yosef Ostra, a well-known philanthropist who maintained a shul and kollel at his own expense. Brody was the home of R' Yechezkel Landau (the "Noda B'Yehuda"), a fierce opponent of the Ba'al Shem Tov, and R' Yitzchak, too, was at first opposed to the young chassidic movement.

It is told that R' Yitzchak had the gift of falling asleep immediately upon retiring at night. Once, after making a derogatory remark about the Ba'al Shem Tov, he was unable to sleep, so he decided to travel to Mezhibozh to ask the chassidic leader's forgiveness. The Ba'al Shem Tov greeted him warmly, saying, "You have come a long way to ask forgiveness for having mocked me. I forgive you wholeheartedly."

R' Yitzchak eventually became maggid and dayan / rabbinical judge of Horochow, Volhynia. He used to say that a preacher must consider three things: First, his goal should be to cause the spirit of the Torah to permeate every listener; second, he should direct himself to the entire community; and third, he should not speak unless he is confident of the truth of his words as if he heard them from the Almighty himself. He used to say, "When I am setting out to preach in different communities, the yetzer hara comes to me and says, 'Yitzchak, you had better stay home and study Torah. Why do you want to exhaust your energy? Why do you want to neglect the study of Torah?'

"I reply, 'I am only going to preach in order to make money,' and the evil inclination then leaves me alone. However, the moment I begin to preach, I cast away all material considerations and

concentrate on imbuing the audience with a love of Torah and fear of the Almighty."

R' Yitzchak used to say: "It is not right that people wait until Erev Yom Kippur to be reconciled. How can one bear a grudge against a Jew for an entire year? Reconciliation should take place every day."

R' Yitzchak's son was the chassidic rebbe R' Yechiel Michel of Zlotchov.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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