

IN MEMORY OF MIRIAM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The entire congregation of the Children of Israel arrived at the desert of Tzin in the first month, and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. (Bamidbar 20:1)

IT IS AMAZING how much we “fight” our parents as children, and then respect them later as adults. For the longest time as teenagers, we think our parents can’t “hear” us, and don’t understand who we really are. Once grown up, and especially after raising children of your own, we usually realize that our parents were just trying to share their gained wisdom with us, as we now try to do with our own children, who claim that WE don’t hear or understand THEM. It’s a cycle of foolishness.

Everything changed for me with MY father on a single day, and rather unexpectedly. I was at university at the time, but I had borrowed a book from a friend on the laws of honoring one’s father and mother. Needless to say, with each page that I turned, I also turned a new leaf. I could not believe how, in fighting for my personal childhood “rights,” I had violated so many Torah laws regarding the all-important mitzvah of “Kibud Av v’Eim.”

Before even finishing the book, I picked up the phone to call my father long-distance from school, and to apologize for years of inexcusable behavior. I told him about the book and what it said, and how I had completely come to realize and accept that even if I was right about the things I wanted, I had been wrong about the way I fought for them.

My father could tell, even long distance, that my apology was heartfelt. We had a decent relationship UNTIL that time, but a far closer one FROM that point. This week marks my father’s, a”h, sixth yahrzeit, and greatly miss his insights, love, and friendship. I dedicate this week’s PERCEPTIONS in his memory, to Yisroel Ya’akov ben Tzvi, z”l.

I didn’t just mention this in passing. This week’s parsha also has something to say about a parent-child relationship, though it is not obvious from the parsha itself. But the Talmud says that the well dried up in this week’s parsha following the death of Miriam to make it known that it followed the Jewish people in the desert for 40 years in her merit.

Which merit? The Talmud relates:

“There went a man of the house of Levi” (Shemos 2:1): Where did he go? Rav Yehudah bar Zevina said that he went in the counsel of his daughter. A Tanna taught: Amram was the greatest man of his generation, and when he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed, “Every son that is born you shall

cast into the river," he said, "We labor in vain do." Therefore, he divorced his wife, and all [the men] divorced their wives as well.

His daughter said to him, "Father, your decree is more severe than Pharaoh's, because Pharaoh decreed only against the males but you have decreed against the males and females. Pharaoh only decreed concerning this world, but you have decreed concerning this world and the World-to-Come. In the case of the wicked Pharaoh, there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not, but in your case, because you are righteous, it is certain that your decree will be fulfilled . . ."

So he went and took his wife back, and all [the men] took their wives back as well. (Sotah 12a)

There are a few questions that should be asked on this little account, especially given that Amram was the Gadol HaDor at the time, and Miriam had been all of six years old, a very MATURE six years old. But why focus on how such a great man could overlook what his six-year-old daughter clearly saw when we can discuss their relationship that led to the birth of their future savior?

Granted that they were extraordinary people. Most fathers are not Biblical characters, or leaders of their generation. Most six-year-olds are not mature enough to grasp the gravity of a situation and advise their father about how to deal with it. But, what counts here is not the age, but the example created for other parent-children relationships henceforth.

It's also important to take a step back and realize the Hashgochah Pratis of the situation. God runs the show, not a Gadol HaDor or his precocious six-year-old daughter. He wrote the script. He built into it a redemption through a six year old daughter. God is the One Who made the future redemption depend upon the wisdom and confidence of young girl. The question is, why?

Normally we say that a person is zocheh to accomplish great things because of previous great merits. But, this was before the era of Torah and mitzvos, and a six-year-old is not even obligated in mitzvos. It's before the age of the yetzer tov, so what free will does such a young child have anyhow? What merit could she have had already by the age of six that would have put her in such a glorious historical position?

The answer to that question actually appeared at the beginning of Parashas Shemos, albeit with the explanation of the Talmud:

Pu'ah was Miriam. Why was she called "Puah"? Because she cried out—po'ah—to the child and brought it out. Another explanation of "Pu'ah" is that she used to cry out through Ruach HaKodesh and say: "My mother will bear a son who will be the savior of the Jewish people!" (Sotah 11b)

A name defines a person. A Hebrew name defines a person's soul and spiritual drive in life. This is what Miriam was all about, the redemption of the Jewish people, even at the very tender age of six. She may have been advanced for her age, but whether she was delivering babies or predicting the birth of a future savior, her mind was always on the redemption of her people.

So much so, in fact, that people called her by a name that indicated this. And this is why Amram gave her his ear and followed her advice, even though HE was the leader of the generation. He saw a connection to their people and their redemption that he didn't even see in himself. And, it impressed him enough that her age did not cause him to downplay the importance of her message.

In fact, BEING only six, Amram knew that such a special message through such a special daughter had to be a special message from Heaven. So, rather than stand on ceremony and overlook the one who was truly seeing clearly at the time, Amram heeded the words of Miriam which led to the redemption of the Jewish people, and as Rashi points out in this week's parsha, the mystical life-sustaining well that followed them throughout their 40 years in the desert.

Though not originally intended as a lead-in to the next part of this message, it has ended up being one.

I have been writing PERCEPTIONS on the weekly Torah reading for Torah.org for about 15 years now, b"H. Ever since the beginning, I have considered it to be a great merit and honor to be involved with such an important organization, so devoted to the dissemination of Torah. For me, it has never been a matter of financial benefit, but one of sharing the beauty and depth of Torah with as many readers as I can. Torah.org has helped tremendously with this.

Over the years, I began my own non-profit organization called "Thirtysix.org." It has been a way for me to expand my operation, which has included other weekly articles besides Perceptions, books, and audio and video presentations. It has also allowed me to share crucial material about our stage of history, the importance of Israel today, and the Final Redemption.

To continue this work, b"H, I will be running a campaign through Charidy.com, during which every donation made will be matched. It is a once-a-year opportunity, and Torah.org has graciously allowed me to approach my Perception's readers to participate in this fundraising drive. A separate letter will go out, b"H, announcing the beginning of the 72-hour campaign and how to make a contribution.

Whether you have been a reader Perceptions for years, or even just a short while, this is an opportunity to partner with me in its continuance. If you have enjoyed Perceptions, even benefited from it, it is a good time to show your appreciation for over a decade of writing. Every contribution is welcome, and all amounts will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your loyalty over the years, and in advance for any contribution you might make. This includes any promoting of the campaign you might do before or while it is running through any social media with which you are familiar.