

ELDAD AND MEIDAD: THE REST OF THE STORY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Behaaloscha

Eldad and Meidad: The Rest of the Story

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 728 - Lechem Mishneh Revisited. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Beha'aloscha introduces two personalities about whom the Torah tells us very little. Nevertheless, according to certain sources Eldad and Meidad have a fascinating background. That which the Torah does tell us here about them, in light of this background, gives us new insight that is certainly worth pondering.

The nation complains to Moshe Rabbeinu, telling him they want meat. Moshe becomes frustrated with the people, shows his frustration to the Almighty ("Where will I find meat to feed this entire nation?") and finally confesses "I am not able to lead this entire nation by myself, it is too hard a job for me to handle." [Bamidbar 11:11-15].

G-d hears Moshe's request for help and commands him to gather 70 men from the elders of Israel and to have them join him in the Ohel Moed. "I will come down and speak to you. You will be enveloped in prophecy and then I will miraculously take the prophetic spirit that is upon you and will share it with them." [Bamidbar 11:16-17]

Rashi cites the parable of the candle. Moshe is the lit candle; the 70 Elders, who until now have not "been lit", will now have their wicks kindled, so to speak, by Moshe's candle. However, this in no way will diminish "the light of Moshe's candle."

This is exactly what happened. The seventy elders became deputized prophets, so to speak, and had the power of Moshe's prophecy transferred to them such that they too could prophesize. The Torah relates, however, that two people (Eldad and Meidad) remained in the camp. Rashi indicates that these two were supposed to be part of the 70 elders, but out of modesty, they refrained from joining the others. Rashi says that they used a lottery system to pick the 70 and these two were indeed picked, but they asked, "Who are we to merit receiving this Divine gift of prophecy?" Nevertheless, even though they did not join the others in the Ohel Moed, the spirit of prophecy was

transferred to them as well and "they prophesized in the camp".

A young lad (Rashi identifies him as Gershom son of Moshe) ran to Moshe and reported that Eldad and Meidad were speaking words of prophesy in the camp. Yehoshua, upon hearing this states: "My master Moshe, put them in jail!" Moshe's response to Yehoshua is, "Are you being zealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of Hashem could be prophets, if Hashem would but place His Ruach upon them!" [Bamidbar 11:29]

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel teaches the amazing fact that Eldad and Meidad were half-brothers to Moshe Rabbeinu. How did that happen? We know based on the Gemara in Sotah that because of the decree of Pharaoh to throw the male children into the Nile River, Amram divorced his wife Yocheved. According to the Gemara, Amram was the leader of the generation and set an example that everyone else later emulated. Amram only remarried Yocheved after his daughter Miriam pointed out to her father that his decree was worse than Pharaoh's decree because it precluded Jewish girls from being born as well, while Pharaoh's decree only affected the males. Moshe was born from that remarriage.

According to the Tanna, Yonasan ben Uziel, during the period between her two marriages to Amram, Yocheved wanted to continue to have children and so she married Elzaphon ben Parnach and gave birth from him to two sons -- Eldad and Meidad -- during that brief marriage.

Let us ask a few questions about this amazing teaching: Here we have a situation where the Gadol haDor [leader of the generation] ruled that it was forbidden to bring children into the world while Pharaoh's decree was in effect and that therefore every married couple should separate. How could it be that Yocheved went against the ruling of her former husband Amram, the Gadol haDor, remarried and brought two sons into the world?

Aside from this halachik question, let us ask a psychological question: Is it harder for a father to throw a baby into the river or for a mother to throw a baby into the river? Obviously, it is harder for a mother to do such a thing. How could it be that the father (Amram) said, "I can't bear to throw my baby into the river. I would rather separate from my wife and not have children." Yet, the mother (Yocheved) was willing to take her chances in this matter and was prepared to accept the fact that she may have to throw her baby in the river. Would a mother be capable of doing such a thing?

Finally, Yocheved was over 120 years old at this time. For her to still have babies required a miracle. Yet she expects to remarry and have babies after the Gadol HaDor paskened not to have babies! Why would she think the Almighty would perform a miracle for someone who transgressed the ruling of the leader of the Jewish nation?

Where is Yocheved coming from? She contradicts the ruling of the Gadol Hador, she contradicts the natural maternal instinct, and she expects a miracle from G-d despite her transgressing the ruling of the Gadol Hador! What was she thinking?

I heard from a great person that there can be only one interpretation for Yocheved's behavior. Yocheved had a clearer understanding of the Will of the Creator than did her husband Amram, the greatest personality of the generation. She was a daughter of Levi, a granddaughter of Yaakov Avinu. She was a generation closer to the Patriarchs than was Amram. The closer a person is generationally to the Patriarchs, the clearer the person's understanding of the Will of the Almighty will be.

Yocheved had the true understanding that such "calculations" are not for man to make. Man must do what G-d commands and then G-d needs to worry about the calculations. She was right and her husband the Gadol HaDor was wrong. The proof that she was right is Eldad and Meidad. They did not need the borrowed prophecy from Moshe Rabbeinu employed by the other Elders in the Ohel Moed. They had their own prophesy and it was superior to those of the other Elders. According to Rashi, the other Elders only prophesied for that one day and then it stopped. Eldad and Meidad, however, continued, to have the gift of prophesy. Their prophesy was more pristine, holier, more genuine and longer lasting than that of the other Elders. Why? They were the children of Yocheved, who demonstrated self-sacrifice to do the Will of the Creator.

We have always known that Yocheved was rewarded for her dedication to G-d by having great children (Moshe, Aaron and Miriam) descend from her [See Shemos 1:21; Rashi there]. Now we know the rest of the story.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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