

MIRIAM TAUGHT THE LESSON OF NOT GIVING UP HOPE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemos

Miriam Taught The Lesson Of Not Giving Up Hope

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 708 - Your Child as a Shabbos Goy. Good Shabbos!

The Mishna [Sotah 9b] discusses the concept of Divine reward and punishment that is "measure for measure". One example cited is because Miriam waited to see what would happen to her brother's basket floating in the Nile [Shemos 2:4], all of Klal Yisroel waited for Miriam for a seven day period [Bamidbar 12:15] when she was temporarily "exiled from the camp" as punishment for speaking lashon hara against her brother.

At first glance, the fact that Miriam stayed at the riverbank to see what would happen to her brother does not seem to be such a great deed on her part. She may have stayed out of curiosity, it may have been out of concern, but it does not seem like such a significant and important act that it should require all of Klal Yisrael to wait for her in the wilderness for an entire week.

In order to appreciate the actual significance of her act, we need to see it in the context provided by the Gemara in Sotah [12a]. The Talmud states that Amram (Miriam's father) was one of the great men of the generation. When he heard Pharaoh's decree to throw all the male children in the Nile, he gave up hope and decided to divorce his wife (Yocheved), rather than bring any more children into the world who would just be drowned in the Nile at birth. Amram set the pattern for the rest of the nation and everyone followed suit and divorced their wives as well.

Miriam told her father that his decree was worse than Pharaoh's decree. Pharaoh's decree was only directed at the males. Amram's decree would affect both the males and the females. Pharaoh's decree would only affect the fate of the children in this world, Amram was decreeing that the children would not come into existence and therefore would have no life in either this world or the next world. Amram listened to the advice of his daughter. He remarried Yocheved and at the age of 130 she became pregnant and had the child who grew up to be Moshe Rabbeinu. Again, everyone else followed Amram's example and remarried the wives they had divorced.

The Gemara then relates that when Moshe was born, the house filled with light. Amram kissed Miriam on the forehead and told her "Your prophecy has been fulfilled." However, when Moshe was thrown into the Nile (to hide him from the Egyptians), Amram went over to Miriam and slapped her on the forehead and asked, "Now what happened to your 'great prophecy'?"

It is in this context that we begin to understand the meaning of the pasuk "And his sister stood away from him at a distance." The reward that Miriam later received was not just for standing at the Nile for a few moments, it was for being the heroine of the whole story of Amram and all the Jews taking back their wives. It was for being responsible for the birth of the person who became the leader of the Jewish nation. She saved her brother and in effect the entire nation because she refused to give up hope.

Things looked hopeless. At the when time Miriam spoke up to her father, there were already thousands and thousands of Jewish children who had died in the Nile. By standing firm, to see what would be with her brother, she demonstrated a particularly Jewish trait - resilience and refusal to abandon hope. Miriam's heroic faith and resilience thus gave courage to the nation and saved them from the terrible fate of discouragement and despair.

The Izhbitzer Rebbe expresses a similar idea. The law is that if one loses an object and gives up hope of ever getting it back (yeeush), then the person who finds the object is entitled to keep it. However, as long as a person has not given up hope of recovering his lost object then the finder is not allowed to keep it. The Izhbitzer Rebbe explained that a person's hope is the only thing that connects him to that object. He has lost possession and he cannot use it. His hope alone still binds him to the object. Once I give up hope, I've severed any connection I have to my lost object and that is why the finder can then keep it.

That is why, the Izhbitzer Rebbe said, it is so destructive to give up hope. Whatever the situation, as long as one keeps his hope alive, there remains a potential cure, or a potential redemption, or a potential salvation to the crises. One must maintain hope in order to have a chance to see that salvation come to fruition.

Had Miriam given up hope, then the last connection to the future deliverance of the Jewish people would have been severed. This is why her act of faith was so crucial. The payback for this was that when Miriam became a leper and the Jewish people were in the desert, the Almighty told them that they must wait for her.

Why was this an appropriate payback? Because there is one thing that should never be done in the desert and that is to wait. In the heat, in the adverse conditions of a desert, one dare not dilly-dally around. The Jewish people could have said - "Miriam will catch up with us. We cannot stick around. What will become of us?" G-d told them. "No. Remember Miriam. She had faith. She did not give up hope because she knew that the rescue of the Almighty comes in the blink of an eye. We will wait for Miriam. Do not worry about the water. Do not worry about the lack of food. Do not worry about

the heat."

Miriam taught us the timeless lesson of not giving up hope when things look bleak. This valuable lesson, symbolized by her waiting to see what would happen to Moshe in the Nile, is certainly worthy of the payback of waiting for Miriam when she was not able to travel.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Shemos are provided below:

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