

TWO INSIGHTS: MIRIAM DID NOT GET EULOGIZED AND AARON DID NOT GET COMPLAINTS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chukas

Two Insights: Miriam Did Not Get Eulogized and Aaron Did Not Get Complaints

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah CDs on the weekly portion: CD #907 Bracha Achrona on Coffee. Good Shabbos!

"...And Miriam died there and she was buried there. And there was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together upon Moshe and upon Aaron. The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up saying..." [Bamidbar 20:1-3]

The incident of Mei Meriva follows the death of Miriam. The supply of water from the Well, which had been traveling with the Jews and flowing miraculously all these years, ceased to flow. Rashi, quoting the Gemara in Taanis 9a, cites this as proof that during the entire 40 years the Jews spent in the wilderness, the Well was present and flowing for the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam.

The Kli Yakar writes that the Well stopped flowing following Miriam's passing, as a punishment for the people not properly eulogizing Miriam at the time of her death. Following the death of Aharon and Moshe, the Children of Israel cried. Such a statement does not appear following Miriam's passing. The Torah says that she died and she was buried but there is no mention of any eulogy or mourning. The Kli Yakar states that Miriam died without anyone so much as missing her and it was for this reason that the supply of water was taken away from them. They did not appreciate who Miriam was and the Almighty therefore said "I will show you who Miriam was!" The reason for the departure of the Well was in order that they retroactively recognize that only in her merit did they have water in the wilderness for the past 40 years.

It is strange, perhaps, to hypothesize that the Children of Israel did not know that the Well existed in Miriam's merit. But if they did know, then we are left to deal with the problem -- why did they NOT

demonstrate gratitude and pay her the proper respect at the time of her passing?

This is a fundamental lesson of life - people can become accustomed to even the greatest of miracles! The first time they received water from the rock, they were amazed. But when something continues for forty years, day after day, people begin to take it for granted. That is what happened. They took Miriam for granted and they took the miracle for granted.

Many times, I have walked out of a funeral with the emotion "I did not fully appreciate this person while he was still alive." This is exactly what happened with Miriam. The Well was in her merit. But she died and it was "another day at the office" for the rest of the nation. Her righteousness and merit had been taken for granted. The Torah is telling us this is not right. When such a person dies, it is incumbent - at least retroactively - to try to understand who she was and to give her the tribute she deserved.

There is another fascinating lesson to be derived from these pesukim. "There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together upon Moshe and upon Aaron. The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up..." Is this not noteworthy? They gathered together against both Moshe and Aaron, but they only quarreled with Moshe. What happened to Aaron?

One of the disciples of the Ari z"l, the Baal Bris Avraham, says an interesting insight. He interprets the statement "and they gathered upon Moshe and upon Aharon" to be referring to the fact that the nation came to be 'Menachem Avel' [console the mourners] the two brothers on the loss of their sister (Miriam). Picture this: the two leaders of Israel were sitting Shiva and people came to console them regarding the loss of their sister. What do they say? "We have no water to drink!"

Why then, did they only complain to Moshe? The Baal Bris Avraham says that Aaron was so beloved amongst the nation that people could not have complaints against him. As we also learn in this week's parsha, Aaron was the quintessential lover of peace and pursuer of peace. He patched together people's marriages. He made peace between feuding neighbors and feuding business partners. He was beloved to everyone. That is why we are taught he was mourned by "ALL the House of Israel" [Bamidbar 20:29], which the Torah does not even say by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even though they had complaints, they were not going to start up with Aaron. When you love someone, you do not start up with him. This is not to say that Moshe was not a man of peace, but there are two distinct personality traits - the attribute of Truth (Emes) and the attribute of Peace (Shalom). In reality, they are contradictory attributes. When a person emphasizes Emes, he lets the chips fall where they may and Shalom sometimes falls by the way side. When a person emphasizes Shalom, he must sometimes bend the truth, and Emes might fall by the way side.

It is very hard for these two character traits to exist in their full glory in the same person. Moshe was the Teacher of Israel. He was the one who gave the Torah. Torah must represent Truth. 'This' is what the law is! Aaron did not have that position. He was the Kohen Gadol. His preeminent attribute was more Shalom [Peace] than it was Emes [Truth]. This is not to say that Aaron did not also represent

Emes and it is not to say that Moshe Rabbeinu did not represent Shalom, but in terms of their prime attributes, they were different.

Aaron, as the man of Shalom in the Jewish nation, was more beloved and consequently, even though people were upset because they did not have water - to such an extent that they brought it up in the middle of "Shiva" - nevertheless, they did not complain to Aaron. They did complain to Moshe. When we love someone, we do not complain to him.

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