Parshat Chukat: The Well of Miriam

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Our Sages teach us that the Well of Miriam accompanied the Jews in the desert in the merit of Miriam. When she passed away, the well dried up. If we examine the nature of the well and the personality of Miriam, we can discern an intricate connection between them.

The mishna in Avot tells us that the mouth of the well was created bein hashashmot on the first erav Shabbat. The Maharal explains that the well consisted of a mundane element of Friday, and a holy element of Shabbat. Although the well functioned in the natural world it had a metaphysical dimension.

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer writes that at the end of time, the well will once again spring up under the threshold of the Beit Hamikdash and divide into twelve different paths, one for each tribe. Its waters will irrigate all the barren fields and vineyards, which will then produce fruit. It will sweeten the waters of the Dead Sea and heal all those who immerse in it.

There is a tradition that the well is now found in the Kinneret, and water drawn from its source on Motzai Shabbat has unique healing properties.

We see that the well is not only connected to Friday night but also to Motzai Shabbat. We also see that it not only provided physical nourishment but contains supernatural healing powers.

Let us take a glimpse at the unique personality of Miriam. The Kli Yakar asks how Chazal knew that Puah was really Miriam. He answers that Puah means to coo. Miriam's strength was in her mouth. Her job was to coo to newborn babies and calm them. When she saved the babies in Egypt, she demonstrated her belief that the exile would not last forever. She never gave up hope and continued to trust that the redemption would eventually come.

Rav Yedid notes that we see two outstanding elements of Miriam's personality. She believed in her prophecy that her mother would give birth to the redeemer. When Moshe was placed in the Nile, she stood by to watch him. She never let go of the vision of redemption. Second, she valued the beauty and sanctity of the Jewish home. She told her father that he, as the gadol hador, must be a model of rebuilding this holy sanctum.

We see these themes repeated later in the Torah. Miriam took along drums when they left Egypt because she strongly believed that Hashem would perform miracles for them. Additionally, the washbasins in the Mishkan were fashioned from the mirrors of the Jewish women of Egypt. With iron clad emuna, inspired by their leader Miriam, the women used their mirrors to continue holy Jewish family life and raised new generations. They believed that the geula would come.

The Netziv offers a different explanation. Just as the mann fell closer or further from each person depending on his level of tzidkut, the water would flow based on a person's level of middah hachesed. Water is chesed and women water would flow based on a person's level of middah hachesed. Water is chesed and women

Sibling rivalry is a burning issue for parents raising families today. Almost everyone's read an article or two about it. If we look at some of the stories in Tanach, there aren't many siblings who had perfect relationships with each other. Kayin and Hevel, Yishmael and Yitzchak, and Yaakov and Esav all had differing personalities and struggled with their siblings. Even those sibling relationships which weren't as disastrous such as, Shimon and Levi and Avraham and his brothers, were still complex. What are sibling relationships supposed to be like? What can we as parents do to foster positive connections? What should we be aiming for?

In Shir Hashirim the Jewish people are referred to many times as “Achoti”-my sister. The perfect sibling relationship is one in which each sibling sees the other as a mirror. There’s a certain level of balance and equality.

Hashem calls us His sister because he wants to see His middot reflected in us. However, the fact is, children are different in age, sex, personality, and life circumstances. They have different needs and if you decide to give each child the same thing you will encounter trouble. How can we give siblings a feeling of unity when they are not really one? In addition, all children are born with an inherent, intuitive feeling that the world was created for them. The child can transform these feelings into one of responsibility but he can also misdirect it by demanding everything for himself and picturing himself as the center of the world. It is then very difficult for him to understand why everything doesn’t circle around him and why his other siblings seem to be more important than him. How can we nurture healthy sibling relationships?

With very young children, sibling issues are much less severe than with older children. If a one and a half year old wakes up one morning to discover a new sibling, it will become a part of his reality very quickly. However there may still be challenges. An only child is used to being the sole recipient of his parent's attention. When a new baby comes, he has to learn to share his parents. You have to realize that the older child is far more vulnerable than the new baby who has no expectations. The child has no way of understanding that the new baby isn’t his replacement. Therefore, try to keep the older child central and introduce the baby slowly as a presence. When visitors come, have them talk to the older child first. The baby loses nothing and the older child gains centrality. Sometimes you will need to speak with your relatives beforehand about this so that they are emotionally and psychologically equipped to do this. Have a present ready that you bought that

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Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R’ Chaim Tzvi
Bringing Torah To Life #19
Helping Children Appreciate Their Siblings
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbeitzin Tziporah Heller
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the relative can give to your child, before she shows you her present for the baby. Nursing can become an issue. The intimacy, warmth, and closeness of nursing can awaken a primal instinct in the older child who might want to have it again. The child may regress back to babyish behavior such as bedwetting or wanting a bottle or asking to nurse. Try not to make a big deal about it. He will not do this indefinitely. Making a big fuss will just get him the negative attention he wants which will only encourage him to continue. However this does tell you that he needs extra love. So when he is playing quietly, get down on the floor with him and give him the extra attention he needs. If you think he needs more, try to get a babysitter he knows and likes to take him out. This will give him quality time and will offer you some rest time with the new baby. I am aware that there are psychological theories that posit that a person’s entire sense of self value is formed by the end of the first year. Therefore you have to centralize the baby and not the older child. Still I personally think that a baby’s sense of security and esteem develops with time after consistent warmth received from his parents, and the fact that his sibling is getting some of the pie won’t make it worse. Some parents find the new baby more emotionally and physically attractive. Naturally, they will pay little attention to the older child. These feelings need to be checked. Your older child is just as dear and precious and cannot be neglected.

We will continue with older toddlers and young children next week.

Class Spotlight: Self Mastery – A Study of Michtav
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Michtav Me’Eliyahu, Rav Eliyahu Dessler’s seminal work, takes a penetrating look at a host of topics ranging from our relationship with G-d, fellow man, and ourselves. In this stimulating course, Rabbi Cohen discusses these profound essays, inspiring us to think and grow.

In his famous essay, Kuntres Hachessed, Rav Dessler analyzes the concept of being a notein, a giver and a notei, a taker. Hashem gives without expectation of anything in return. Man too has the ability to emulate Hashem by becoming a giver. Taking indicates a love for oneself. This desire is so strong it can lead a person to thievery and dishonesty. Rav Dessler notes that a person is obligated to become a giver and not be dependent on others.

If the purpose of our lives is to give and not expect repayment, how can one engage in business where the goal is to profit more than expect repayment, how can one engage in business where the goal is to profit more than that his mind was not on spiritual matters but he sewed he was being meyachdach yichudim.

Similarly, Yaakov worked faithfully as a shepherd for Lavan for over twenty years and did not learn Torah while on the job. The Torah idea of working and business is to take in order to give back a perfect product. Payment is only a way to enable us to continue giving.

The gemara in Nedarim notes three kinds of people who are considered dead: someone who is blind, a poor person, and someone who is childless. What is the shared characteristic of these three people? They are all unable to give in a fundamental way. Life is the ability to help others.

In the beginning of Parshat Shemot, Paro asked his three advisors, Bilam, iyov and Yitro what to do with the Jews. Bilam devised a plan to ensnare them, iyov kept quiet, and Yitro defended them. Bilam was punished with death, iyov was stricken with suffering, and Yitro was rewarded.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks, if suffering seems worse than death, why was iyov punished more severely than Bilaam? He answers that in fact Bilaam’s punishment was harsher. The mere fact that iyov was still alive meant that he could still give of himself, help others, and share in others’ happiness. Giving is equated with true life.

Rav Dessler asks, does love cause giving or does giving create love? At first glance it seems that love arouses a person to give. But Rav Dessler argues the opposite is true. In Parshat Shoftim, the Torah exempts three people from going out to war: one who planted a vineyard but did not reap its fruit, one who built a home but did not consecrate it, and one who was mekadesh a woman but did not complete the nisuin. Can one compare love of a field or house to a wife? He answers that all three people invested a part of themselves into something that they have become attached to. This demonstrates that giving causes love.

The Michtav M’Eliyahu writes that true ahavat Hashem can only be achieved by cultivating the mida of hakarat hatov. When Hashem revealed himself to the Jewish people at Har Sinai he said, “Anochi Hashem Elokecha asher hozei cha m’eretz Mitzrayim.” The foundation of knowing Hashem is feeling gratitude for all the miracles he did and continues to do for us.

There are three instances in the Torah that mention ahava, Yaakov’s love for Rachel, the Torah commandment to love our fellow Jew, and the mitzva of ahavat Hashem. Showing gratitude to one’s spouse and fellow Jews spills over to our relationship with Hashem. Ungrateful- fulness stems from a deficiency in giving. If a person does not have ahavat chaveirim, he cannot come to true ahavat Hashem.

Giving of oneself is the highest level of netina. Working to perfect this mida will bring us to shleimut and helps us come closer to Hashem, the ultimate giver.

Rebbetzin’s Perspective: Class #9
Excerpted from Rebbeitzin Tziporah Heller’s Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:
Must I stay in touch with a friend who I no longer have much in common with and who is not going in the same direction as I am? What if she values the friendship, while I don’t? Sometimes this involves getting our families together for a Shabbat meal and they are not ideal company. I want to do the right thing even when my heart isn’t in it. What do you advise?

Answer:
You have to consider your own life first. If she is negatively influencing you, for example, if she constantly speaks lashon hara, or is financially dishonest and is trying to make you more like her, you have to disengage yourself.

If she’s simply uninteresting or emotionally draining, don’t walk away from the friendship. You have to realize that there’s hashgacha prait involved in the fact that Hashem put the two of you together. There must be a way for you to learn and give in this relationship. Being above her spiritually, means you are probably her only tie to a more elevated existence. The more you do for others, the more you do for yourself. If Hashem put you in this position where you can positively impact your friend, you need to fill the role and give it your all.

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