

## Parshat Chukat: The Well of Miriam

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

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 hashmashot on the first erev 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 soothe. Miriam's strength was in her mouth. Her job was to soothe 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 man fell closer or further from each person depending on his level of tzidkut, the water would flow based on a person's level of middat hachessed. Water is chessed and women are connected to chessed. The Maharal notes that spring water rises from beneath the ground to above. Miriam's mission was to bring the people from a lower level to a state of elevation and desiring Hashem.

Water has an absorbable quality. When water is absorbed, it transforms latent potential into actual life. The waters of Miriam nurtured the nutrients of Torah and abstract faith to each individual, and were absorbed on his particular level. Just as the well had both a mundane and holy quality, Miriam's job was to teach the people how to uplift the physical into something spiritual.

This is reflected in Motzai Shabbat where we take the holy experience of Shabbat and bring it into the new week. Miriam is connected to the beginning of Shabbat and the end of Shabbat. The well is also connected to the beginning of time and the end of time. Miriam understood that this world has a beginning and an end. She embodied the power to hold on and believe that salvation would ultimately come. May our efforts to emulate Miriam's indomitable faith and strength, help bring the final redemption speedily in our days.

## Speaking With Integrity

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

Being a person of integrity means starts with avoiding common temptations to mislead and lie. A person should be willing to admit when he is wrong. The Gemara on many occasions relates how a tanna or amora would state his opinion and then later rescind it. The Rambam explains that this is meant to teach us to be honest and truthful. The biographies of great tzaddikim often relate how a great rabbi delivered an important shiur and then, when someone pointed out an error, they would openly admit their mistake.

Most people are more concerned about being

right than honest. But Pirkei Avot teaches the opposite. The Gemara in Brachot says one should teach one's tongue to say "I don't know." Sometimes people don't know the answer to a question and they avoid or switch the subject. If you don't know the answer the appropriate thing to do is to admit you don't know.

The Talmud says there are three questions that one will be asked in the next world and one is, "Were you honest in business affairs?" Rabbeinu Yonah says the worst lies a person can tell are those in financial matters, but

lesser lies should be avoided. The Sefer Chassidim notes that a potential buyer should not tell the seller that his product is inferior in order to pay a lower price. A person could instead say "I'm willing to pay this amount and I'm not going higher." If you go to a person's yard sale and say "I can get this for less" and it's not true, that's forbidden.

Telling a kid to say he's younger than he really is in order to get a discounted rate is teaching kids to lie. Likewise, one should not teach children to be dishonest by telling them to say I'm not home when one really is. Rav

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Kamentzky would tell his children to say he would be available at a certain hour. A person should be careful not to say the opposite of what they feel. The Gemara says Hashem hates one who harbors one thing in his heart but says another. Dr. Twersky gives a good example. If you meet someone you don't like, it's not hypocritical to smile and say hello. But one should not say, "I'm so happy to see you." There's a mitzva in the Torah that one must keep one's vows. Failing to do so is a serious violation. Most people think this only applies when one makes a formal vow, but Chazal learn that if you make a commitment to do something and you violate your pledge you've

violated this commandment. This means keeping your word, particularly when people are relying upon you even if what you've committed yourself to do is inconvenient. Don't commit to do something unless you're really sure you can do it. Be careful and sparing with your words. If you offer to do something and then back out it will cause more animosity than if you hadn't offered in the first place. Part of being truthful is honoring what you've committed in your heart. Don't put people off with false excuses. Delaying paying bills when you can pay is one of the examples in Gemara of disgracing Hashem's name.

Geneivat daat (stealing of the mind) means misleading someone to make him think more highly of you than you deserve, or to make them think you've done them a favor when you haven't. This is prohibited. One may not invite a person to come eat with you when you know they won't come. Another form of geneivat daat is cheating on tests. Rav Moshe says if you get a job based on your cheating of a test than the money you're earning is dishonest. If a college student gives in a paper written by someone else that too is geneivat daat.

## Parshat Chukat-Miracles of Faith

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Gemara tells the story of the angels' argument to save Chananaya, Mishael, and Azarya from the fiery furnace of nevuchadetzar. The angel Yurkuma offered to put out the fire with ice and hail while the angel Gavriel countered that he would descend into the fire and cool it down. Hashem sent the angel Gavriel. The Shem Mishmuel asks, what would have been the difference between the two miracles? Ice putting out fire shows that Hashem can harness specific forces to overwhelm other forces. But a greater testimony to His omnipotence is manipulating the force itself. Hashem controls the essence of nature. He can change the rules as He sees fit and He can make fire cold just as He can make it hot. Ratzon Hashem (G-d's Will) can alter the behavior of the laws of nature, because its very behavior is His Ratzon. In Shachrit we say, "Hamechadesh b'tuvu bchol yom tamid"-Hashem in His goodness

renews every moment of creation. He is constantly involved. When Hashem caused water to flow from the b'eer (the miraculous Well of Miriam which produced water from a rock) it was as if stone molecules were turned to water molecules. This testified that Hashem could control things at their root source. However when He commanded Moshe to hit the rock, it was a miracle disguised in nature. A stick made of hard-like diamond can potentially split a stone so water will flow out. It was one force overwhelming another. Miriam's merit activated the miracle of turning stone into water. When she died, the water ceased flowing. It was now necessary to essentially change the rock to water again, but Hashem refused to perform this miracle for Moshe. The merit of Klal Yisrael would need to replace the merit of Miriam. Miriam had emunah. She believed that the stone was Hashem's will and that He could transform it into water if He so

wished. Finding Hashem in our everyday lives, in the little incidents of Divine Providence, helps us come to the belief that He can change the essence of nature. This is what the Jewish people were expected to achieve at the end of forty years. Hashem said to Moshe, "Hakhel es h'am...v'dibartem el hasela"-Gather the people and speak to the rock'. If the Jewish nation would have acquired the proper faith it would have been adequate to just speak to the rock. Unfortunately they did not reach that level and therefore Moshe Failed.

How can we rectify this flaw in emunah? Opening our eyes to see the daily Divine Providence in our lives, cultivating faith and belief in Hashem, and trusting that just as miracles kept us alive throughout our long exile they will continue to sustain us.