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לקוטי שיחות חלק י"א בשלח ב' - ע' 55-62

MIRIAM: A MODEL OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

INTRODUCTION

This Sicha examines the Torah's description of Miriam at the Sea of Reeds. It delves into the nuances of Rashi's explanation of that description and uses it as a model for all Jewish women. In this Sicha we meet Miriam the woman, the sister, the daughter and the leader, as she is shaped by her extraordinary past, her present leadership, the peaks and valleys of her future and her meaningful relationships.

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When the Torah relates that Miriam led the women in rejoicing at the Sea of Reeds (S1), it describes her as "Miriam the prophetess, Aharon's sister".

Rashi (S2) explains that this particular description is appropriate, as she first prophesized when her only sibling was Aharon, the prophecy being that Moshe would be born. Rashi tells us this is written in Gemorah Sotah (S3). Another explanation for being called the sister of Aharon, is that later he would jeopardise his life for her when she would be afflicted with *tzaraas* and for this she is identified here by his name, "Aharon's sister".

THE MAIN QUESTIONS

- 1) Rashi quotes the words of the Torah, "And Miriam the prophetess took", and then gives us two explanations as to why the Torah describes her here as the sister of Aharon. Would it not have been more appropriate for Rashi to rather quote the words, "the sister of Aharon"?
- 2) Why does Rashi state that the prophecy was regarding Moshe's birth. Any prophecy would have given her that status?
- 3) How is it obvious from the verses that her prophecy was about Moshe's birth?

- 4) What deeper message is Rashi conveying by telling us the source of this explanation and that the source is Gemorah Sotah?
- 5) In introducing his second explanation, why does Rashi again state that she was “the sister of Aharon”?
- 6) Whenever Rashi gives two explanations, there is a shortcoming in each explanation that is addressed by the other, but overall, the first explanation is superior. How do these rules apply to our comment of Rashi?

THE MAIN EXPLANATION

The Torah’s need to describe Miriam here as a prophetess seems problematic. It can’t be to identify which Miriam we are referring to. Firstly, she is immediately described as the sister of Aharon, so we know precisely that it is the famous Miriam. Secondly, we have not yet been introduced to her as a prophetess, so that title would not help in identifying her here. So, it is not to identify her.

A second problem is the very relevance of prophecy (S4 – S-6) to this incident. The spontaneous outburst of joy of the Jews at the Sea of Reeds required no prophecy. They had just witnessed great miracles and had been saved from their longtime oppressors! One did not need to be a prophet to be motivated to participate or lead the unbounded joy and celebration (S7). Why then, is Miriam described here as a prophetess?

A third problem is that at this point of time the Jewish nation had complete belief in and were totally obedient to Moshe’s instructions (S8). Yet we do not find that Miriam sought his permission to lead the women in rejoicing.

Rashi therefore explains that the mention of Miriam’s prophecy here at the Sea of Reeds is to address these last two points.

In certain respects, Miriam was superior even to Moshe. The Torah describes her as a “prophetess, the sister of Aharon”, to convey to us that her prophecy was at a time when she was solely the sister of Aharon and not of Moshe, who had not yet been born. The nature of her prophecy at that time was that Moshe would be born.

Think about it - the prophecy of Moshe’s birth was not given Amram and Yocheved who were the leaders of that generation and his parents (and thus in some ways superior to Moshe). The message of Moshe’s birth, a birth that would ultimately transform the Jewish people and Jewish destiny, was given to Miriam, indicating her greatness. Therefore, she could act independently and did not seek Moshe’s permission to lead the celebrations.

As it may be surprising that a young child can prophesize (she was six years old at the time) - and that this should be the plain meaning of this verse - Rashi states that his source is the Gemorah Sotah. There we find a preface to the statement that Miriam was a prophetess. It states that when she was sent by the daughter of Pharaoh to bring Yocheved her mother, she went “*k’alma*”, meaning “she went quickly, as a young woman would”. We see, that despite Miriam’s tender age, she had qualities and abilities beyond her years. This includes the ability to prophesize.

On reflection though, to state that Miriam was superior in some respects to Moshe is a rather radical idea. If the Torah wishes to communicate that she did not require Moshe’s permission, the Torah could have stated that she was “the sister of Moshe”. We then would have known that her prophecy

concerned his birth, she was his sibling and equal (though not necessarily his superior) and therefore she did not require his permission. Yet the Torah does not say that.

Rashi therefore is compelled to give a second explanation of “Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon”. He starts by repeating the words “the sister of Aharon”, for this second explanation focuses solely on these words and not her ability to prophesize. It relates to Aharon’s future defence of Miriam when she would be struck with *tzaraas*.

This explanation though has obvious shortcomings. Why would the Torah speak about a future event, especially an inherently distressing one, in describing the celebration at the Splitting of the Sea?

To recap: we see that the Torah describes Miriam as “the prophetess, the sister of Aharon”. Rashi first explains that this description applies to the time she was solely the sister of Aharon and not Moshe. On reflection, the implications of this explanation seem radical. Rashi then explains that the description as “the sister of Aharon” refers to a future event. This explanation however, is even more problematic. We now understand the need for two explanations and the order of the two.

THE “WINE OF TORAH”

Miriam is associated with the level of Malchus. On the one hand, Malchus is rooted in, and can feel and experience *Atzmus* - the Essence of G-d in a manner that cannot be attained by the levels above Malchus. On the other hand, Malchus does not have its own independent superior qualities.

These two facets of Malchus are interlinked. The reason that Malchus can absorb the Divine light of *Atzmus* – G-d’s Essence, is because it is totally devoid of any other content which makes it open to receiving what flows from Above, including the very highest levels.

The two explanations of Rashi regarding Miriam reflect these two aspects of Malchus. The first explanation describes Miriam’s extraordinary power of prophecy, a prophecy that not only foretold of, but elicited the birth of Moshe, an event that eventually led to great revelation of *Atzmus* – G-d’s Essence (for example at the Splitting of the Sea and the Giving of the Torah).

The second explanation indicates her utter reliance and dependence on Aharon to intercede on her behalf and save her, without which she would have been lost.

These two explanations are interconnected. It is was Miriam’s ability to negate her own being and to be prepared to solely receive from Aharon (who is Z”A – the qualities above Malchus), that allowed her to reach the greatest heights of prophecy and rapport with G-d’s Essence.

THE LESSONS

There is a Miriam-Aharon aspect to the relationship of women and men within a family and a Miriam-Moshe aspect to those relationships.

First there is the Miriam-Aharon stage, where a woman “receives” and is guided by a man, as our Sages have said, “Who is a superior woman? She who does the will of her husband” (S13). This

guidance applies both to the unique abilities and gifts that a woman has received from others and those that she has been born with or developed.

This dedication is reciprocated by the men, as we see that Aharon jeopardised his life for Miriam when she was afflicted with *tzaraas*. As a result of this she is called "Aharon's sister".

This Miriam-Aharon relationship should not be surprising, as the two are a mirror image of each other. Aharon was the embodiment of love, as he said, "Love peace, pursue peace, love the creatures and draw them closer to Torah"(S14). Miriam also embodied love. She was called Puah, because she was one who "called, spoke and murmured to the young child, in the manner that women pacify a crying child" (S15).

Ultimately, one arrives at the Miriam-Moshe stage in the relationship, where a woman actualizes her full abilities and surpasses the men from which she had previously received. She then imparts her abilities to them, culminating in the perfect state of the times of Moshiach when, "a woman will surpass a man"(S12).

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MIRIAM: A MODEL OF GIVING AND RECEIVING

SOURCES

Se'if Aleph – סעיף א'

- 1 **Shemot 15:20**
Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women came out after her with timbrels and with dances.
- שמות טו, כ
ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את־התוף בידה ותצאן כל־הנשים אחריה בתפים ובמחלות:
- 2 **Rashi:**
and Miriam the prophetess took — where had she prophesied? When she was the sister of Aharon alone, before Moses was born she said, “My mother will at some time bear a son etc.”, as is stated in tractate Sotah. Another explanation of “the sister of Aaron”: because he jeopardised his life for her when she was stricken with tzaraas, she is called by his name.
- רש"י:
ותקח מרים הנביאה - היכן נתנבאה כשהיתה אחות אהרן, קודם שנולד משה, אמרה עתידה אמי שתלד בן וכו', כדאיתא בסוטה. דבר אחר: אחות אהרן לפי שמסר נפשו עליה כשנצטרעה, נקראת על שמו:
- 3 **Sotah 12b – 13a**
And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: Go [and the *alma* – young woman went]. Rabbi Elazar says: This teaches that she went quickly like a young woman...
- סוטה יב, ב – יג, א
ותאמר לה בת פרעה לכי [ותלך העלמה] וגו' - א"ר אלעזר: מלמד, שהלכה בזריזות כעלמה ...
- “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon took”. “The sister of Aharon,” and not the sister of Moses? ... This teaches that Miriam already prophesied when she was still the sister of only Aharon, and would say: In the future, my mother will give birth to a son who will save the Jewish people.
- ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן וגו' - אחות אהרן ולא אחות משה? ... מלמד, שהיתה מתנבאה כשהיא אחות אהרן, ואומרת: עתידה אמי שתלד בן שמושיע את ישראל ...
- [קטע האחרון נמצא גם במגילה יד, א.]

[The second paragraph is also found in Megillah 14a.]

Se'if Bais – סעיף ב'

- 4 **Bereshis 20:2, 7**
... and Abimelech the king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. And now, return the man's wife, because he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and [you will] live; but if you do not return [her],
- בראשית כ, ב וז:
... וישלח אבימלך מלך גרר ויקח את־שׁרָה ...
- ועתה השב אשת־האיש כי־נביא הוא ויתפלל בעדך וחייה ואם־אינך משיב דע כי־מות תמות אתה וכל־אשר־לך:

know that you will surely die, you and all that is yours."

Rashi

for he is a prophet – and he knows that you did not touch her, therefore he will pray for you.

רש"י

כי נביא הוא - ויודע שלא נגעת בה, לפיכך ויתפלל בעדך:

בראשית כט, לד:

ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר עתה הפעם ילנה אישׁי אלי כִּי־ילדתי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים עַל־כֵּן קָרָאתִי שְׁמוֹ לְוִי:

5 Shemot 2, 23:

And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, for I have borne him three sons; therefore, He named him Levi.

רש"י

הפעם ילוה אשי - לפי שהאמהות נביאות היו ויודעות ששנים עשר שבטים יוצאים מיעקב וארבע נשים ישא ...

Rashi:

now this time my husband will be attached to me – because the Mothers were prophets they knew that twelve tribes would emerge from Yaacov and that he would marry four women.

שמות ז, א:

ויאמר ה' אל־מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶחֱיוֹ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאָךְ:

6 Shemot 7:1

The Lord said to Moses, "See! I have made you a lord over Pharaoh, and Aaron, your brother, will be your prophet.

רש"י:

יהיה נביאך - כל לשון נבואה אדם המכריז ומשמיע לעם דברי תוכחות.

Rashi:

will be your prophet – similarly, the term "prophecy" always denotes one who calls out and proclaims to the people words of rebuke.

שמות טו, א

אָז יִשְׁרִי־מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה...

7 Shemos 15:1

Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang this song to G-d....

רש"י:

אז ישיר משה - אז כשראה הנס עלה בלבו שישיר שירה, וכן (יהושע י יב) אז ידבר יהושע, וכן (מלכים א' ז ח) ובית יעשה לבת פרעה, חשב בלבו שיעשה לה, אף כאן ישיר, אמר לו לבו שישיר, וכן עשה, ויאמרו לאמר אשירה לה'. וכן ביהושע, כשראה הנס אמר לו לבו שידבר וכן עשה (יהושע י יב) ויאמר לעיני ישראל, וכן שירת הבאר שפתח בה (במדבר כא יז) אז ישיר ישראל, פירש אחריו עלי באר ענו לה.

Rashi:

Then Moshe sang - Then when he saw the miracle it entered his heart that he should sing. Similarly, then spoke Yehoshua, and also, Then he made a house for the daughter of Pharaoh – he thought in his heart that he should make it for her. Here too, *yashir* means his heart said to him that he should sing, and so he did – And they spoke saying I will sing to the Lord. Similarly, when Yehoshua saw the miracle his heart said to him to speak, and so he did – He spoke before Israel. And so too the Song of the Well that opens Then Israel sang, it expresses afterwards – Spring up O well, sing to it.

Se'if Gimmel – סעיף ג'

- 8 **Shemos 14, 31**
שמות יד, לא:
וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת־ה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ ה' וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ:
And Israel saw the great hand, which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in Moses, His servant.
- 9 **Bereshis 41:44**
בראשית מא, מד:
וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל־יֹסֵף אֲנִי פַרְעֹה וּבְלַעְדֶּיךָ לֹא־יָרִים אִישׁ אֶת־יָדוֹ וְאֶת־רַגְלוֹ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and besides you, no one may lift his hand or his foot in the entire land of Egypt."

Se'if Daled – סעיף ד'

- 10 **Bereshis 49:5**
בראשית מט, ה:
שְׁמֵעוֹן וְלוֹי אֲחֵיהֶם כָּלֵי חַמָּס מְכַרְתֵּיהֶם:
Rashi: Simon and Levi are brothers – in one counsel regarding Shechem and regarding Yosef.
- 10 **Devarim 34:10**
דברים לד, י:
וְלֹא־קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כַּמֹּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדָעוּ ה' פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים:
Rashi: Simon and Levi are brothers – in one counsel regarding Shechem and regarding Yosef.
- 11 **Devarim 18:15**
דברים יח, טו:
נָבִיא מִקִּרְבְּךָ מֵאַחֵיךָ כַּמֶּנִּי יִקָּם לְךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵלָיו תִּשְׁמָעוּן:
A prophet from among you, from your brothers, like me, the Lord, your God will set up for you; you shall hearken to him.

Se'if Hay – סעיף ה'

- 12 **Yermiya 31:21**
ירמיה לא, כא
עַד־מַתַּי תִּתְחַמְקִין הַבַּת הַשׁוֹבֵבָה כִּי־בָרָא ה' חֲדָשָׁה בְּאֶרֶץ נִקְבָה תִּסּוּבֵב גֹּבֵר:
How long will you hide, O backsliding daughter? For the Lord has created something new on the earth, a woman shall go after (surpass) a man.
- 13 **Tanna d'bei Eliyahu Rabbah ch. 9 (a slight variation)**
תדא"ר פ"ט (בשינוי לשון)
איזהו אשה כשרה, העושה רצון בעלה.
Who is a befitting woman? She who does the will of her husband.
- 14 **Avos 1:12**
שמות יב, כה: ו
הלל אומר: הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הבריות ומקרבתן לתורה.
Hillel would say: Be of the disciples of Aaron — a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah.

שמות א, טו
וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילֵדֹת הָעִבְרָיִת אֲשֶׁר
שָׁם הָאֹחֶת שְׂפָרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה:

רש"י
פועה - זו מרים שפועה ומדברת והוגה לולד
כדרך הנשים המפייסות תינוק הבוכה.

15 Shemos 1:15
Now the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one who was named Shifrah, and the second, who was named Puah.

Rashi
Puah – This is Miriam who called, spoke and murmured to the young child, in the manner that women pacify a crying child.

RULES OF RASHI **Based on this Sicha**

- Rashi chooses the quote from the verse carefully and his explanation relates to the words he has chosen.
- Rashi quotes a source from Gemorah or Medrash in order to address an underlying question that a perceptive student may have.
- If there are similar sources for Rashi's explanation, he will site the one that offers the greatest clarity.
- When Rashi gives two explanations, each has a shortcoming, but the first is closer to the simple meaning of the verse.
- When Rashi prefaces the two explanations with the words, "There are two explanations", the two explanations are of equal standing.