

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Beshalach**  
**January 23, 2016**

**פרשת בשלח**  
**י"ג בשבט תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 13:17-17:16

After the Bnei Yisrael cross the Reed Sea in safety while Paro's army drowns, they sing praises to Hashem; in response to their complaints about a lack of food and water, Hashem gives them *manna*; they are then attacked by Amalek.

There are actually two Songs of the Sea. The first is led by Moshe; the second by his sister, Miriam. The text in chapter 15, verses 20-21 says:

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחֻזַּת אֶהָרֹן, אֶת-הַתֵּף--בְּיָדָהּ; וַתִּצְאֶן כָּל-הַנָּשִׁים  
אַחֶיהָ, בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֹת. וַתַּעַן לָהֶם, מִרְיָם: שִׁירוּ לַה' כִּי-גָאֵה גָאֵה,  
סוּס וָרֶכֶב וְרָמָה בָּיָם.

Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took the drum in her hand and all of the women went out after her with drums and dances. And Miriam answered them: Sing to Hashem for Hashem is highly exalted; the horse and rider Hashem threw in the sea.

The Talmud in Tractate *Megillah* 14a lists Miriam as one of the seven prophetesses and asks why she is described as "the sister of Aharon" with Moshe's name omitted. Says the text:

Our Rabbis taught: 'Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied to Israel...

‘Seven prophetesses.’ Who were these? – Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chanah, Avigayil, Chulda, and Esther....

Miriam, as it is written, ‘And Miriam the prophetess the sister of Aharon.’ Was she only the sister of Aharon and not the sister of Moshe? – R. Nahman said in the name of Rav: [She was so called] because she prophesied when she was the sister of Aharon [only] and said, ‘My mother is destined to bear a son who will save Yisrael.’ When he was born the whole house was filled with light, and her father arose and kissed her on the head, saying, ‘My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled.’ But when they threw him into the river her father arose and tapped her on the head, saying. ‘Daughter, where is your prophecy?’ So it is written, ‘And his sister stood afar off to know’ [in chapter 2, verse 4, when Moshe is in his basket in the Nile]; to know, [that is,] what would be with the latter part of her prophecy.

There is a better known *midrash* found in *Exodus Rabbah* 13 about Miriam and her prophecy, or perhaps just her common sense:

Amram (the father of Aharon, Miriam and Moshe) was at that time the head of the *Sanhedrin* (the Jewish court), and when Paro decreed that ‘If it be a son, then you shall kill him,’ Amram said that it was useless for the Israelites to beget children and forthwith divorced his wife, whereupon all the Israelites arose and divorced their wives. Then said his daughter Miriam to him: ‘Your decree is more severe than that of Paro; for Paro decreed only concerning the male children, and you decree upon males and females alike. Paro is depriving them of life in this world. You are depriving them of life in this world and in the world to come. Besides, Paro being wicked, there is some doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not, but you are righteous and your decree will be fulfilled.’ So he took his wife back and was followed by all the Israelites, who also took their wives back.

It is often said that the exodus from Mitzrayim could not have happened without the women, and there are many, many additional *midrashim* demonstrating this.

These are but two *midrashim* about one particular woman, her prophecy, and her common sense.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What did Miriam mean by each of her arguments that her father's decree was worse than Pharaoh's? Given this *midrash*, why do the Rabbis say that the exodus would not have happened except for the women of Israel?
- Moshe and Miriam led the Bnei Yisrael in *Shirat Hayam* (the Song of the Sea) in thanks to Hashem for saving them from the Egyptians. What would you sing to Hashem in thanks for?