

Shevii Shel Pesach 5776

If you were leaving home for a long time (perhaps never to return again) what would you make sure to bring with you? (My son Avi is in the audience today, I'm pretty sure he would make sure to bring a ball so he could play sports wherever he would go, and perhaps a Wii game system- if his parents let). There is a Midrash in this morning's Torah reading that highlights what Moshe made sure to take with him compared to what the Jewish People took with them. Moshe was busy locating and extracting the bones of Joseph (and his brothers) to fulfill the promise made to Joseph before he died, that his body would ultimately be brought out of Egypt buried in the Land of Israel upon the people's arrival. And while Moshe was busy with the bones of Joseph, the rest of the nation was busy extracting the spoils of Egypt- gold and silver and valuables- in fulfillment of the promise God made to Avraham at the Brit Bein Habetarim. There was another Biblical character who took something out with her from Egypt, that gets less attention yet teaches us an important lesson.

Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine כַּתְּמֻקָּה מְרִיָּם הִנְבִּיָּאָה אֶחָזִית אֶהְרֵן אֶת הַתֶּף
in her hand, and all the women came out after her with בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל הַנְּשִׂיִם אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּיִּים וּבַמְּחִלָּת:
tambourine and with dances.

It is Miriam who leaves us with our final image of the events at the Yam Suf. She gets the final word- what is her scene meant to teach us?

Another question: Where did these women get their tambourines? Rashi was bothered by this question and quotes a Rabbinic teaching:

with tambourines and with dances: The righteous בַּתְּפִיִּים וּבַמְּחִלָּת: מוֹבִטְחוֹת הָיוּ צְדִקְנִיּוֹת
women of that generation were [so] certain that the Holy שְׁבִדּוֹר שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה לָהֶם נִסִּים
One, blessed be He, would perform miracles for them, וְהוֹצִיאוּ תוֹפִיִּים מִמִּצְרַיִם:
they took timbrels out of Egypt. — [from Mechilta]

We know from the Seder that the Jews were in a rush as they left Egypt. They did not even have time to allow their dough to rise. But they did have time to grab items that were important or had special significance.

Miriam: finds the time to make/ take tambourines, and to encourage all the other women to take tambourines with them on their way out of Egypt. Because Miriam was confident that the People would be OK and that God would perform miracles on their behalf.

Moshe took with him the bones of Joseph. He left Egypt committed to preserving the past history of our people. Miriam left Egypt looking forward, confident of a brighter future, so she took with her the musical accompaniments necessary to celebrate with optimism.)

According to Chazal, Miriam's name may be related to the word *Mar*, bitter, because she was born during the most intense period of Jewish slavery. Yet her name is also related to the word for "rebel" (*Morim*). She rebelled against the pessimism and hopelessness that was rampant among the Jewish nation during the darkest periods of Egyptian slavery. From an early age, Miriam consistently demonstrated optimism and encouraged others to be optimistic.

There are two types of optimism: One type of optimism is the confidence/ firm belief that things will work out the way one hopes. This is the optimism Miriam demonstrated as a young girl, convincing her parents to reunite and have another child even as Pharaoh had decreed death for all Jewish boys. This is the optimism demonstrated by Miriam the big sister, hiding in the bulrushes when her baby brother Moshe is sent down the Nile in a basket. The Torah says (Shemot 2:4) that

His sister stood from afar, to know what would be done to him. דִּוְתַצַּב אַחֵת מִרְיָם מֵאֵלָּהּ לְדַעַת מַה יַּעֲשֶׂה לָּהּ

Miriam was sure that the boy would be OK. She stood there to see what her role might be in the salvation of this boy that she was certain would occur.

There is another type of optimism; An optimism in the ultimate triumph of good. This second type of optimism does not assume that we will always see things work out the way we want or hope. It does not even assume that good will triumph in the short term. But it is the conviction that doing what is right always pays off- though not necessarily in the ways we had hoped for or had anticipated. Miriam possessed both types of optimism.

This is the optimism Miriam demonstrates as the daughter who convinces her parents to reunite and have another child, even though she does not know what might happen should a child be born. All she knew was that we Jews must remain optimistic and help the Egyptians by giving up hope.

This is also the optimism displayed by Miriam the midwife. According to the Midrash, she's Puah; she saves the male children on the birthing stone, even though there was no way to protect these children forever. However it would work out in the end, she was committed to doing what was right and her part in saving Jewish children.

Miriam's ability to persevere with optimism, and to stand up for what was right is a trait that she not only possessed herself, but was able to inculcate into the next generation, especially her son- Chur. Chur is better known to us as the Grandfather of Betzalel, the Chief Architect of the Mishkan. But Rashi notes that Chur was Miriam's son (on 3 separate occasions – Beshalach , Mishpatim, Vayakhel).

All we know about Chur from the Torah is that he helped Aharon keep Moshe's arms up during the Jews' first battle after leaving Egypt, against Amalek.

Chur was also a martyr. (In Parshat Ki Tisa,) Rashi quotes the Midrash that Aharon was convinced to help the people create the golden calf because he saw how they had murdered Chur who tried to stop them.

Where did Chur get the resolve to stand up to the entire nation, to fight for what was right even if he was not sure he would be successful? From his mother Miriam.

It didn't work out well for Chur, but this attribute gets passed down to Chur's grandson Betzalel, Miriam's great-grandson, who channels this optimism and perseverance into building the Mishkan even though he has no experience or training to do so.

Miriam is often overlooked, among her siblings and the rest of the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

According to Rashi she is referred to this morning as Achot Aharon as a reminder that she was a prophetess yet back before Moshe was born and she was only Aharon's brother.

In the Midbar, The Jews were sustained by a miraculous spring that followed them throughout all of their travels. This spring is referred to by Chazal as Be'er Miriam. It was in Miriam's merit that water was supplied to them. It was only after her passing, when the well dried up, that the people begin to appreciate Miriam's greatness and what she had contributed to Bnai Yisrael.

Today, on Shevii Shel Pesach, let us not forget about Miriam. Let us seize this opportunity to pay tribute to her. Her decision to bring tambourines with her as she left Egypt is indicative of an attitude of optimism that we must learn from and utilize in our own lives.