

## TOPICS IN THE WEEKLY PORTION:

# ***PARASHAT BEHAALOSECHA: MIRIAM'S SIN***

*The Sixteenth Street Synagogue – May 30, 2007*

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### רש"י על במדבר פרק יב פסוק א

ותדבר מרים ואהרן - (ספרי) היא פתחה בדבור תחילה לפיכך הקדימה הכתוב תחלה ומנין היתה יודעת מרים שפירש משה מן האשה רבי נתן אומר מרים היתה בצד צפורה בשעה שנא' למשה אלדד ומידד מתנבאים במחנה כיון ששמעה צפורה אמרה אוי לנשותיהן של אלו אם הם נזקקים לנבואה שיהיו פורשין מנשותיהן כדרך שפירש בעלי ממני ומשם ידעה מרים והגידה לאהרן ומה מרים שלא נתכוונה לגנותו כך נענשה ק"ו למספר בגנותו של חבריו:

"And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses" - She started the conversation. On this account the text mentions her first. How did Miriam know that Moses had separated himself from his wife? R. Nathan answered: Miriam was with Zipporah when it was told to Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp" (11, 27). When Zipporah heard this, she exclaimed, Woe to the wives of these if they have anything to do with prophecy, for they will separate from their wives just as my husband has separated from me! It was from this that Miriam learnt about it, and she told it to Aaron. Now if Miriam who had no intention of disparaging him was punished thus severely, all the more so he who deliberately speaks disparagingly of his fellow!

### אבות דרבי נתן פרק תשיעי

מרים אמרה אלי היה דבור ולא פרשתי מאצל בעלי. אהרן אמר אלי היה דבור ולא פירשתי מאצל אשתי ואף אבותינו הראשונים היה דבור עליהם ולא פרשו מאצל נשותיהן אבל הוא מפני שדעתו גסה עליו פירש הוא מאצל אשתו. ולא היו דנין אותו בפניו אלא שלא בפניו ולא היו דנין אותו בודאי אלא בספק ספק שדעתו גסה עליו ספק שאין דעתו גסה עליו. Said Miriam: The Divine word came to me, yet I separated not from my husband. Said Aaron: The Divine word came to me, yet I separated not from my wife, the Divine word came to our forefathers: yet they separated not from their wives. But since he is so overweening (i.e. prides himself on the prophetic heights he has attained and withdraws from society), he separated himself from his wife.

### Joseph Caspi

I am surprised at the ancients who are so much more perfect than me, to the soles of whose feet I do not reach, how it ever occurred to them to explain a text in the Torah the very reverse of its written meaning, by substituting a word or adding phrases opposite in meaning. ... As the Lord liveth this mode of interpretation agreed upon by all our ancient authorities in religion and faith is beyond me and I cannot accept it.

I therefore maintain that the text bears no other interpretation but that Moses took a Cushite or Ethiopian woman. What happened was as follows. After Moses married Zipporah he took another wife. An Ethiopian woman for reasons best known to himself and it is not our business to pry into his motives. He must certainly have known what he was about. We are not told when this event happened whether at the moment of its mention during their journey in the wilderness or before. Other events too are not recorded in the Torah. Since the matter had not been mentioned hitherto. and we should not be surprised at the statement "because of the Ethiopian woman he had married-, the text adds the words "for he had taken (married) an Ethiopian woman" as if to say: Know that it is true that he had married an Ethiopian woman notwithstanding it had not hitherto been recorded in the Torah and it was regarding her that they spoke ... Had Moses separated himself completely from woman, adopting a life of celibacy as the ancients averred. Moses would not have been the most perfect man that had ever walked the

world. Our Sages have stated that "whoever is greater than his fellow. His impulses are greater than his". His natural vitality and activities had not become weakened at eighty and even at a hundred. Abraham who was inferior to him begat a son at a hundred. Accordingly we cannot accept it that Moses became a celibate since he was no Franciscan, Augustine or Carmelite monk.

#### ספר דברים פרק כד

(ח) הַשְׁמֹר בְּנִגְעַת הַצִּרְעָתָה לְשֹׁמֵר מֵאֵד וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יֹרֶוּ אֶתְכֶם הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶם תִּשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת:  
(ט) זְכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְיָ לְךָ אֵלֹהֶיךָ לְמִרְיָם בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם:

**8** Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you, as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do. **9** Remember what the LORD thy God did unto Miriam, by the way as ye came forth out of Egypt.

## ספר במדבר פרק יב

- (א) וַתְּדַבֵּר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמִשְׁחָה עַל אֲדֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכֹּשִׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח כִּי אִשָּׁה  
כֹּשִׁית לָקַח:
- (ב) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֲרַק אַךְ בְּמִשְׁחָה דְבַר ה' הֲלֹא גַם בָּנוּ דְבַר וַיִּשְׁמַע ה':
- (ג) וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו מְאֹד מִכֹּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה:
- (ד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' פֶּתְאֹם אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל מִרְיָם צֵאוּ שְׁלֹשְׁתְּכֶם אֶל אֹהֶל  
מוֹעֵד וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁלֹשָׁתָם:
- (ה) וַיֵּרָד ה' בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן וַיַּעֲמֵד פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּקְרָא אַהֲרֹן וּמִרְיָם וַיֵּצְאוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם:
- (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמַעוּ נָא דְבַרִּי אִם יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֵכֶם ה' בְּמִרְאָה אֵלָיו אֲתוֹנְדַע בְּחִלּוֹם  
אֲדַבֵּר בּוֹ:
- (ז) לֹא כֵן עֲבַדֵי מֹשֶׁה בְּכֹל בֵּיתִי נְאֻמָּן הוּא:
- (ח) פֶּה אֶל פֶּה אֲדַבֵּר בּוֹ וּמִרְאָה וְלֹא בְחִידֹת וּתְמִנֹת ה' יִבִּיט וּמִדּוֹעַ לֹא יִרְאֶתֶם  
לְדַבֵּר בְּעַבְדֵי בְּמִשְׁחָה:
- (ט) וַיִּחַר אַף ה' בָּם וַיִּלְךְ:
- (י) וְהָעֲנָן סָר מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְהָיָה מִרְיָם מְצֹרַעַת כַּשָּׁלֵג וַיִּפֹּן אַהֲרֹן אֶל מִרְיָם וְהָיָה  
מְצֹרַעַת:
- (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אַהֲרֹן אֶל מֹשֶׁה בִּי אֵד נִי אֵל נָא תָשֶׁת עָלֵינוּ חַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר נוֹאֲלָנוּ  
וְאֲשֶׁר חָטְאָנוּ:
- (יב) אֵל נָא תְהִי כַפַּת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאתוֹ מִרְחֹם אֱמוֹ וַיֵּאכֹל חֲצִי בָשָׂרוֹ:
- (יג) וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' לֵאמֹר אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ:
- (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאַבְיָה יִרְקֵי בְּפִנְיָהּ הֲלֹא תִפְלֵם שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תִּסָּגֵר  
שְׁבַעַת יָמִים מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְאַחַר תֵּאֲסֹף:
- (טו) וּתִסָּגֵר מִרְיָם מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְהָעַם לֹא נָסַע עַד הָאֲסֹף מִרְיָם:
- (טז) וְאַחַר נָסְעוּ הָעַם מִחֲצֵרוֹת וַיִּחַנּוּ בְּמִדְבַר פָּאָרָן:

## **NUMBERS - CHAPTER 12**

**1** And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman.

**2** And they said: 'Hath the LORD indeed spoken only with Moses? hath He not spoken also with us?' And the LORD heard it.—

**3** Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.—

**4** And the LORD spoke suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam: 'Come out ye three unto the tent of meeting.' And they three came out.

**5** And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth.

**6** And He said: 'Hear now My words: if there be a prophet among you, I the LORD do make Myself known unto him in a vision, I do speak with him in a dream.

**7** My servant Moses is not so; he is trusted in all My house;

**8** with him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD doth he behold; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?'

**9** And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and He departed.

**10** And when the cloud was removed from over the Tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam; and, behold, she was leprous.

**11** And Aaron said unto Moses: 'Oh my lord, lay not, I pray thee, sin upon us, for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned.

**12** Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.'

**13** And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying: 'Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee.'

**14** And the LORD said unto Moses: 'If her father had but spit in her face, should she not hide in shame seven days? let her be shut up without the camp seven days, and after that she shall be brought in again.'

**15** And Miriam was shut up without the camp seven days; and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

**16** And afterward the people journeyed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.