

Parsha Ponders

Beha'alosecha | June 13, 2025 | 17 Sivan 5785

Humble positions¹

ותדבר מרים ואהרן במשה על אדות האשה וגו'

Miriam and Aharon spoke about Moshe, regarding [his separating from his] wife²

Our Sages tell us that Moshe separated from his wife once he became a prophet. He felt he needed an extra level of purity to retain his constant connection to Hashem, preventing his earthly relationship with his wife from continuing. Miriam thought this was inappropriate, and consulted with Aharon what to do to rectify this. Rashi informs us how Miriam found out about this fact about Moshe's private life. Hashem told Moshe to gather seventy elders to form the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court. There were 72 candidates, and all of them received some form of prophecy. Two of them, Eldad and Meidad, retained their prophecy, long after the others stopped. Tziporra, Moshe's wife, commented to Miriam that, "Woe to the wives of these two, for when my husband became a prophet he separated from me". Why did Tziporra specify Eldad and Meidad? All of the seventy elders received some form of prophecy...

Eldad and Meidad prophesized something disparaging about Moshe's future. Yehoshua, Moshe's faithful student, took this personally, and asked Moshe to "destroy them"³. What did he mean? Rashi explains that he requested that the burden of community work should be placed upon them. As a result, they'll automatically wither away. This is surprising, for who was the greatest community worker if not Moshe? We see he didn't wear out.

The greatest trait for prophecy is humility. For as we are taught⁴, Hashem only rests His presence upon a humble person, as we see from Moshe himself. It makes sense then that since Moshe was the humblest person, he was the greatest prophet. However, we see that Eldad and Meidad were also humble, like Moshe. How so? When Moshe was tasked with leading the Jewish people, he initially declined⁵. Had he known that he was worthy for the position, he wouldn't have refused. However, due to his intense humility, he couldn't fathom how he was appropriate. The same is true with Eldad and Meidad. Despite having been chosen to be part of the Sanhedrin, they declined to join, due to their humility.

Now, if a person isn't the leader of the community, isn't needed by the masses, it's no surprise if they're humble. Usually when a person is in a position of authority, their power gets to their head. Moshe, despite his position, retained his humility. Yehoshua's idea was to impose positions of authority upon Eldad and Meidad. The hope was that this would get to their heads, and they would become haughty. Their prophecy would then cease.

According to this, we can say that Tziporra understood that her husband's level of prophecy was on another level than that of other prophets, including the seventy elders who had prophesized. For her husband refused the position, and yet the seventy elders accepted their new authority. However, Eldad and Meidad, who themselves were prophets, had refused the position. She thought their humility was like her husband's, and thus their prophecy as well. Therefore, she said, "Oy to the wives of Eldad and Meidad". Specifically these two, who were like her husband in their lofty level. Miriam was not happy

¹ Based on Kesav Sofer to Numbers 12:1

² Numbers *loc. cit.* with Rashi

³ Ibid 11:28 with Rashi

⁴ Nedarim 38a

⁵ Exodus 4:13

with the whole situation, as Aharon was similar to Moshe, and yet he hadn't separated from his wife. However, Hashem revealed that Moshe was different than all prophets, and thus was a special case.

Yet, we can say that Tziporra wasn't in fact complaining about her relationship. She was very proud of Moshe, and in her righteousness forgave what was coming to her as Moshe's wife. She let Moshe reach the loftiest of levels of prophecy, being constantly connected to Hashem. So what was her intent with her comment about the wives of Eldad and Meidad? When she saw Eldad and Meidad prophesizing, like Yehoshua, she thought this was an affront to her husband Moshe. She said that surely their prophecy will not last. She felt their wives wouldn't agree to the arrangement that she herself had made with Moshe. "Woe to the wives of Eldad and Meidad", if they had reached the level of Moshe, and they will have to separate from their wives, it will be too difficult for their wives to handle.

Miriam heard Tziporra's words, but interpreted them as a complaint regarding her own situation. Miriam felt the whole arrangement was inappropriate, and discussed it with Aharon. Miriam made two mistakes, thinking that Tziporra was upset, and that Moshe wasn't different than any other prophet. Hashem had to teach Miriam about her mistake, and the rest is history.

Good Shabbos