

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler

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B'shalach

We have, in the past, reviewed the many similarities that connect our haftara, the story of Israel's victory and D'vora's song of praise, with the parsha and its story of Israel's victory and Moshe's song of praise. In analyzing the miracle at Yam Suf, Rav David Fohrman wonders why, after ALL of Israel echo Moshe's song of praise, Miriam must lead the women in a separate song (or, perhaps, more correctly, "refrain"). We find nowhere in the Tanach that a song shared by all is then repeated by only women. What was the need for Miriam to sing the praises again?

In a brilliant essay, Rav Fohrman, reviews the actions of Miriam, based upon the approach of Chazal, to reveal his answer. Miriam was a believer. It was she who convinced her parents to remarry after they separated, arguing that she had a vision predicting that her mother would give birth to the future savior of Israel. After the birth of Moshe, her father questioned the veracity of her vision when the young child had

to be hidden among the reeds (SUF) on the Nile. "What happened to your vision?" her doubting father asked. So, while parents remained at home, Miriam, still believing in her vision, stood by the reeds to see how her vision would come to fruition. She watches as the daughter of the pharaoh, a real threat to Moshe's life, approaches and surprisingly, fetches the baby from the Nile. Then, rather than walk away, Miriam provides a Hebrew nursemaid for the baby.

Years later, she stands at Yam Suf together with the entire nation, and sees the water that threatens B'nei Yisrael, and watches the Egyptians as they approach to destroy the Israelites, realizing then that they now stood before the Sea of Reeds (SUF).

In summation, Moshe is saved because Miriam had faith that a divine miracle would be performed and did everything to make sure that it would. It is, therefore, no wonder that she who never lost faith, would sing out Hashem's praises upon witnessing the vision that she alone cherished finally come true.

The haftara echoes a similar theme. Rav Amnon Bazak underscores the contrast between the stories and points out that the episode described in the Torah - and the victory song as

well - focus on Hashem's power and His victory over the Egyptians. B'nei Yisrael were mostly passive -
HASHEM YILACHEM LACHEM -
Hashem will fight for you while you need merely to remain silent.

Not so our haftara. There we learn of D'vora's gathering an army to fight the enemy, of how the volunteers joined to fight and fought the battle. D'vora's song of victory naturally praises and thanks G-d but it makes the point of praising HAMITNADVIM BA'AM, those who volunteered and fought. Here, both the story and the song of victory - center upon the efforts of the people who organize an army to face - and defeat - their enemy.

The two stories reflect the two different people: those who feared and doubted Hashem's promises and those who had faith in Hashem to go to war and defeat the enemy.

An independent nation with faith in G-d looks to Him for strength and courage to defeat the enemy; a weak nation of slaves who lack the vision can only pray that Hashem fight for them. 🌟