

## Drash

Shabbat shalom! In this week's portion, the Israelites had been roaming the desert looking for the promised land for a long time and are feeling impatient and ungrateful to G-d. Although they have what they need to survive, they find themselves upset and in need of more resources. Later in the story, Moses comes home from a long day of listening to the Israelites complain to him, and then hears Miriam and Aaron complaining about how he is a prophet and they are not. Because of this jealousy, they also talk negatively about Moses's wife who is from the Cushite tribe.

”והענן סר מעל האהל והנה מרים מצרעת כשגלג ויפן אהרן אל-מירם והנה מצרעת  
sahr mayal hahohel v'hineh Miriam metsora'at cashaleg vayimpen aaron ahl-  
Miriam v'hineh metsora'at ) When G-d hears them gossiping about Moses, G-d  
strikes Miriam with tzara'at, and the Israelites stop moving to the promised land  
and wait for Miriam to recover. This shows us how important Miriam is to the  
Israelites. I learned from one of my teachers that one of the reasons the Israelites  
choose to wait for Miriam to recover is because Miriam waited for her brother at  
the Nile when he was a baby, so in a way, all of the Israelites are returning the  
favor by waiting for her. The midrash of Miriam's well associates Miriam with  
providing water to the israelites. a well follows wherever she goes. This shows  
that Miriam is an essential leader and member of the israelites.

My first reaction, when I read this portion, was the parallels to covid19 and the isolation everyone felt during this time because Miriam felt isolated just like many of us during covid, but I think everyone is tired of hearing about covid, so I'm going to talk about something else. also, I wanted to spread awareness about my values of women's or AFAB (assigned female at birth) peoples' rights.

After analyzing my portion and listening to my friends' drashot, I started to notice a pattern of objectification and dehumanization of women in the Torah. For example, Miriam was punished for both herself and Aaron's words but is never directly credited for this.

Let's think about this a little more. Miriam only appears four times in the entire Torah, the first time being when she sends Moses down the Nile, then when she leads the women in song across the sea, then in this portion when she becomes ill, and finally when she dies in numbers (20:1) and she's only mentioned by name twice. In one of the two times Miriam is mentioned by name, she gets sick and almost dies for making a mistake!

This reminds me of an extremely distressing issue we are experiencing all over America, which is that abortion rights are being taken away from women and people who can carry babies. Today, women and AFABs all across America are being demonized and harassed for asking for basic human rights, like prioritizing their health, making their own decisions about their bodies, or even using certain types of birth control, although patriarchal culture and the non-consensual sexualizing of feminine

presenting people becomes more prominent every day. Not only do these laws go against women, but they also go against many Jewish beliefs as well! This is similar to how Miriam was blamed for something that was not entirely her fault. Although I find these laws outrageous, I believe we can overcome this challenge. The Torah was clearly written a very long time ago, so we can't expect the treatment of all people to be perfect, but we can see that even though women are treated unfairly in many of the stories, there are instructions to mend our community and our society. Judaism is evolving every day! We are all participating in the evolution of Judaism, because we can't move forward as a community without adjusting our practices. Even though Miriam had to be separated from the group, the Israelites waited for her, because they love her. And although Miriam's power may not come directly from G-d, her power comes from the people who love her and value her. (lo v'chayil v'lo v'choach kee eem beruchruchy) not by might, nor by power, but by spirit alone. This is a quote from my haftarah that was told to Zerubbabel from G-d through an angel that I've interpreted as; if we all believe something to be true, we can learn and empower ourselves to change ourselves and our community. Even dismantling this system that allows the government to control women's bodies. I believe that if we all believe that something is unjust, we can change it. And that is why we've come so far. Although our country is

built on injustice, we can work together to rematriate, rebuild, and reorganize.

## **Thank You Speech**

Shabbat Shalom!

Thank you to everyone for being here today, and supporting me in becoming a B-mitzvah! There are many people who have helped me get to this point, so thank you to all of my teachers, especially Rabbi Tzipi, Rabbi Chai, Jonathan Emanuel, and all of the Wilderness Torah staff and Amitim staff. I would also like to thank my friends who have supported me through all the challenges I have faced in my studies to become a B-mitzvah, particularly Noa who has helped me study, provided emotional support, and is my voice of reason. Thank you to my family, who have always checked in on my studies and care so much about my interests. I love you guys. Last, I would like to thank my parents, who have done nothing but help and support me in everything I do for the past thirteen years and have always given me the best knowledge and advice for every aspect of my life. Thank you guys so much.