

Miriam's Well:

The Relationship Between Miriam and Water

It's All Relative: A Textual Look at Relationships in Tanach

במדבר כ':א-ב

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּל־הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר־צִן בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֶׁב הָעָם בְּקִדְשׁ וַתָּמַת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם: וְלֹא־הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן:

The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron.

רש"י שם

ולא היה מים לעדה. מכאן שקל ארבעים שנה היה להם הבאר בזכות מרים (תענית ט')

Since this statement follows immediately after the mention of Miriam's death, we may learn from it that during the entire forty years they had the "well" through Miriam's merit (Taanit 9a).

גמרא תענית ט' א:ט'

מִיִּתְיָבִי רַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּרָנְסִים טוֹבִים עֲמְדוּ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶּיּוּ הֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּמִרְיָם וְשֹׁלֵשׁ מִתְּנוֹת טוֹבוֹת נִתְּנוּ עַל יָדָם וְאֵלֶּיּוּ הֵן בָּאָר וְעֵנָן וּמִן בָּאָר בְּזָכוֹת מִרְיָם עֲמוּד עֵנָן בְּזָכוֹת אַהֲרֹן מִן בְּזָכוֹת מֹשֶׁה מִתָּה מִרְיָם נִסְתַּלַּק הַבָּאָר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַתָּמַת שָׁם מִרְיָם וְכִתִּיב בְּתַרְיָה וְלֹא הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה וְחִזְרָה בְּזָכוֹת שְׁנֵיהֶן

The Gemara raises an objection from a *baraita*: Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says: Three good sustainers rose up for the Jewish people during the exodus from Egypt, and they are: Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And three good gifts were given from Heaven through their agency, and these are they: The well of water, the pillar of cloud, and the manna. He elaborates: The well was given to the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud was in the merit of Aaron; and the manna in the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is stated: "And Miriam died there" (Numbers 20:1), and it says thereafter in the next verse: "And there was no water for the congregation" (Numbers 20:2). But the well returned in the merit of both Moses and Aaron.

רבינו בחיי שם

ולא היה מים לעדה. כשמתה מרים נסתלק הברא כי היה הברא בזכות מרים שהיה לה זכות המים ממשה, שנאמר (שמות ב:ד') ותתצב אחותו מרחוק, ומה שנסתלק עתה במיתתה ראה שבזכותה היה עמהם, ומכאן שכל ארבעים שנה היה להם הברא.

ואמרו במדרש (במדבר כ"א:ז) אז ישיר ישראל את השירה הזאת, שירה זו נאמרה בסוף ארבעים שנה, והברא נתן להם מתחלת ארבעים.

"The congregation had no water." As soon as Miriam died, the well which had traveled with the Israelites all these years ceased providing water. The water which the people had enjoyed all these years was due to the merit of Miriam who had stood by watching what would happen to her infant brother when he was in a basket in the reeds at the edge of the river (Exodus 2,4). G'd had rewarded her for that act of kindness by making her the provider of water for Moses' people. The people had not appreciated this until the well ceased with Miriam's death.

Our sages in Tanchuma Chukat 20 claim that the song Israel sang in Numbers 21,17, i.e. **אז ישיר ישראל** "then Israel would sing this song, etc.," was sung at the end of the forty years whereas the well had been provided for them at the beginning of the forty years.

שפתי חכמים שם

הברא בזכות מרים. שהרי מיד כשמתה מרים לא הי' להם עוד מים. וא"ת למה לא היה הברא בזכות אהרן או משה, וי"ל בזכות שהמתינה למשה על המים לראות מה יעשה לו כשהושלך בתיבה, לכן נעשה לה זכות זה של באר דהיינו מים שנתן הקב"ה מים לעדה בשבילה:

For immediately after Miriam died they no longer had water. You might ask: Why was the well not in Aharon's or Moshe's merit? The answer is that it was in the merit of Miriam waiting for Moshe by the water, to see what would happen to him when he was placed there in the box [as a baby] (Shemos 2:4). In return, this merit of the well, i.e., the water that Hashem provided for the congregation was on her behalf.

שמות ב:א-ט

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת-בֵּת-לֵוִי: וַתְּהֵרָה הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי-טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים: וְלֹא-יָכְלָה עוֹד הַצִּפְּיָנוּ וַתִּקַּח-לוֹ תֵבַת גָּמָא וַתַּחְמְרָהּ בַּחֲמֵר וּבַצִּפֹּת וַתִּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשֶׂם בְּסוּף עַל-שֹׁפֵת הַיָּאֵר: וַתִּתְּצֵב אַחֲתָו מִרְחֵק לְדַעָה מֵהַיַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ: וַתֵּרֶד בַּת-פְּרָעָה לְרַחֵץ עַל-הַיָּאֵר וַנִּעְרַתֶּיהָ הַלֵּכֶת עַל-יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתֵּרָא אֶת-הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת-אֶמְתָּהּ וַתִּקְרָהּ: וַתִּפְתַּח וַתֵּרָאָהּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה-נֹעֵר בְּכָהּ וַתַּחְמַל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִי־לִי הָעִבְרִים זֶה: וַתֹּאמֶר אַחֲתוֹ אֶל-בַּת-פְּרָעָה הַאֵלֶךְ וַקְרָאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה מִיִּנְקוֹת מִן הָעִבְרִיִּת וַתִּיַּנֵּק לָךְ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד: וַתֹּאמֶר-לָהּ בַּת-פְּרָעָה לֵכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ הָעַלְמָה וַתִּקְרָא אֶת-אִם הַיֶּלֶד:

A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a

distance, to learn what would befall him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother.

שמות ט"ו:כ'-כ"א

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אָחוֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֵּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתֵּצֵאנָה כָּל־הַנְּשִׂיִם אַחֲרֶיהָ בַּתְּפִילִּים וּבַמַּחֲלֵלֹת: וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם שִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאָה גָּאָה סוֹס וָרֶכֶב וָרָמָה בַּיָּם: {ס}

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them: Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

גמרא תענית דף ב:

מאי היא דתניא מאימתי מזכירין על הגשמים רבי אליעזר אומר משעת נטילת לולב רבי יהושע אומר משעת הנחתו. אמר רבי אליעזר הואיל וארבעת מינין הללו אינן באין אלא לרצות על המים וכשם שארבע מינין הללו אי אפשר בהם בלא מים כך אי אפשר לעולם בלא מים

From when does one begin to mention the rains in his prayers? Rabbi Eliezer says: From the time that one takes the *lulav*, i.e., the first day of *Sukkot*. Rabbi Yehoshua says: From the time that one puts the *lulav* down, i.e., at the conclusion of *Sukkot*. § The *baraita* cites a discussion of these opinions. Rabbi Eliezer said: It is since these four species, the *lulav* and the other species taken with it, come only to offer appeasement for water, as they symbolize the rainfall of the coming year. And this symbolism is as follows: Just as these four species cannot exist without water, as they need water to grow, so too, the world cannot exist without water. Therefore, it is proper to mention rain in one's prayers when taking the four species.