



# Shalom Bayis

*Why Miriam and Aaron were gossiping about Moshe.*

## The Poor Husbands

When a young couple gets engaged, we observe an interesting ritual: When the bride-to-be tells her friends of her engagement, they all dissolve in fits of happiness, telling her how lucky she is and even that they're a little jealous of her.

Guys, on the other hand, typically get the following reactions when they tell their friends they're getting married: "What a pity—you're really going to suffer now!"; "You don't know what you're getting yourself into!"; and so on. And these comments don't come from the bachelor friends either—on the contrary, they come from the married guys, who make such a fuss that it seems that their entire married lives are one long pain.

Listening to such men makes one think that perhaps someone forced them to get married—as if policemen literally came to their doors and dragged them to the wedding hall against their will.

Now, my heart just goes out to these guys. They really "suffer": They have wives who take care of their homes, raise their kids, and make them warm meals. And worst of all, *nebach*, they have to take the garbage out once a day—and even that they don't always do.

The wives, on the other hand, work hard—and they are happily married, yet their husbands talk like they're being abused. I have yet

to hear of a shelter for abused husbands.

The bottom line, my dear friends, is that it all depends on which glasses you wear when you look at life.

## **Miriam's Gossip**

In this week's Torah portion, we read about how Moshe Rabbeinu himself complained that he no longer had the strength to carry the Jewish Nation. He lamented to G-d: "Did I give birth to them that I need to suffer from them?"

In response, G-d told him to select 70 elders upon whom G-d would bestow part of Moshe's prophetic abilities—they would become minor prophets and help him lead the nation. And indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu selected 70 elders and gathered them around his tent.

Now, let's picture this scene for a moment: It's the biggest inauguration ceremony you could imagine. Even when one single rabbi is formally installed, a whole ceremony and celebration is held. Here, there were to be 70 leaders inaugurated, and they were about to receive no less than the spiritual power of prophecy! So, of course, everyone came to this inauguration: The elders' wives, their children and grandchildren, their teachers, aunts, uncles and cousins. It was like a high school or college graduation where every family member and friend you could think of shows up, and are all busy snapping pictures from start to finish.

Naturally, there was also a VIP seating section. In the front row, there were the communal leaders, beginning with Moshe Rabbeinu. Next to him was seated Aharon the High Priest and Miriam, next to whom was seated Tzipora, Moshe Rabbeinu's wife, as Rashi tells us. But it gets better: The Midrash tells us that "the Jews lit candles and celebrated for them," meaning they created a festive atmosphere. And then, Miriam herself got up to speak in honor of the event. She said: "Happy

are the wives of these men who were appointed leaders of the community.”

Miriam, who was a prophetess in her own right, essentially told the crowd, “What a merit these women have to have husbands who have become prophets! In one second, they turned into very important people: ‘She’s so-and-so’s wife...’”

But Tzipora, who had been sitting next to Miriam, suddenly said, “Woe to the wives of these men, because from the day the Divine Presence settled upon your brother, he abstained from me.”

Tzipora obviously had a totally different view of the entire matter. She therefore whispered to Miriam, so that no one would hear, that it was no honor at all: From the time her husband Moshe became a prophet, he was never home...

Miriam turned to her brother Aharon and told him what she had just heard. They continued with a discussion: “Was it only Moshe that G-d spoke to? Did G-d not speak to us too? And yet we did not separate from our spouses...”

In other words, G-d did speak to Miriam and Aharon in prophecy too—and yet, they continued with their family lives. So why did Moshe need to completely abstain from his wife? What really happened there?

## **Moshe’s Initiative**

The Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 87a) tells us that there were three decisions in Moshe Rabeinu’s history that he undertook of his own volition—and which G-d later agreed to. These were:

1. In the days of preparation leading up to the Giving of the Torah, as the entire Jewish Nation camped opposite Mt. Sinai, G-d informed Moshe that the Jewish Nation should prepare themselves “today and

tomorrow,” meaning, for two consecutive days—but Moshe said to the Jewish Nation, “Be prepared for three days.” Moshe added one more day of preparations, and indeed, G-d agreed to this change. Where do we see that G-d agreed? From the simple fact that the Divine Presence did not rest upon Mt. Sinai until Shabbos, the day on which the Torah was given, after three days, exactly as Moshe had dictated.

2. Moshe Rabbeinu came down from Mt. Sinai after 40 days and saw the Sin of the Golden Calf, and everyone knows what he did: He broke the Luchos, the Two Tablets. He didn’t first ask G-d what to do. It simply came to him from his heart. And G-d “agreed to his actions,” as Rashi explains, and said to him, “Yasher koach,” which in plain English means, “Good job!”

3. The third decision is mentioned in our Parshah this week. Moshe had decided that since G-d spoke to him constantly, unlike other prophets who had to “schedule meetings” with G-d, so to speak, he never knew when G-d would suddenly start speaking to him. He therefore decided to be in a state of readiness all the time to speak with G-d—so he decided to abstain from his wife. And here too, G-d agreed with his decision.

## **The True Reason**

So now, what exactly is Miriam’s problem here? Why did she mention Moshe’s abstinence to Aharon? Was she simply gossiping? It doesn’t make sense to say that about such a great prophetess like Miriam. She was not an ordinary woman, and she certainly appreciated how great Moshe Rabbeinu truly was, unlike us. So, we must say that Miriam and Aharon had a very important goal in mind. And that’s why they talked about it—because what was important to them was not gossip but rather, what we call shalom bayis: Domestic harmony. Love and peace between husband and wife.

Now, how do we know that shalom bayis was so important to Miriam

and Aharon? Many of you may have heard of the story of Miriam as a little girl: How she convinced her parents, who had divorced, to remarry each other.

At the time, the Jewish Nation was still in exile in Egypt, and the Pharaoh had decreed that all newborn Jewish boys be thrown into the Nile to be drowned. (The Pharaoh purposely wanted to keep the newborn girls alive so that they'd marry Egyptian men as adults, thus assimilating the Jewish Nation into Egyptian culture.)

Now, Miriam's father, Amram, who was the leader of the Jews at the time, publicly divorced his wife in response to Pharaoh's decree. His argument was, why stay married and bring children into the world if they're just going to be murdered? But along came his daughter Miriam and said, "Dad, your decision is worse than the Pharaoh's! He doesn't want there to be any Jewish baby boys. But your decision means there won't be any Jewish baby girls either!"

And the Talmud (Tractate Sotah 12a) tells us, that "Amram rose and took back his wife and seated her on a throne, and Aharon and Miriam danced before her." We see from here that even when she was just a little kid, Miriam was worried about divorces and couples staying together.

And Aharon's peacekeeping record is even more pronounced. In Pirkei Avos, Ethics of the Fathers, we are told, "Be of the disciples of Aaron the High Priest: Love peace and pursue peace." How did Aharon "love peace and pursue peace?" Where do we see that in his life? The Midrash tells us that Aharon HaKohein, the High Priest himself, would personally run about the Jewish community door to door, making peace between husbands and wives. As far as Aharon was concerned, his life's work was to create shalom bayis.

So, of course, when these two heard that Moshe had been abstaining from Tziporah, it really hurt them, and they wanted to correct it.

But here, G-d Himself intervened, saying to them, “I speak to Moshe directly’—meaning to say, “If Moshe is so great a person that G-d Himself speaks to him personally, then he certainly knows what he’s doing.” And of such a person, a rebbe, one does not ask questions.

Nevertheless, the essential concern of Miriam and Aharon remained correct and legitimate. That’s why we remember every day what Miriam did, mentioning it at the end of the morning prayers—because it’s not just a negative reminder that Miriam spoke gossip, but a positive reminder of how important shalom bayis is, and how far we have to go to help shalom bayis come about.