



אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאת רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky

5780 - Parshas Chukas/Balak – Great But Late

Parshas Chukas tells the story of the death of Miriam, Moshe and Aharon's sister. After she passed away, the Jews had no water, and Hashem instructed Moshe to hit the rock to draw out water. Rashi explains that there was a "well," in the form of a rock, which travelled along with the Jews during their 40 year journey in the desert, which gave water in the merit of Miriam. Once she passed away, the water from the well dried up.

Yet something doesn't add up. The gemara (Chullin 7b) tells us that "Tzaddikim in their passing are greater than during their lifetime." Shouldn't Miriam's well not have dried up after her passing? On the contrary –it should have remained strong and vibrant!

During the 17th century, the richest Jew in Cracow was known as "Yossele the Miser." He was a rich man, yet he earned his infamous title by hoarding his wealth, and flaunting his money and power with his grand home and lavish lifestyle, and not giving a nickel to charity. Community leaders often approached him and begged him to share some of his wealth with the community's poor, but he refused. He scorned at the less fortunate, and would hold his head high as he prayed in the synagogue and went about his business.

His family was just about excommunicated by the townsfolk, yet he would not change his evil ways. Thus, he lived his life until he grew old and sick, and passed away. The chavra kadisha (burial society) refused to bury him, and his body lied in his home for a few days, until they begrudgingly conducted a hasty burial ceremony on a neglected plot in the back of the cemetery, an area normally reserved for paupers and other societal outcasts.

For a few days, the pathetic life of Yossele the Miser was forgotten, but within a week, strange occurrences began to unfold in the town. All the poor began asking the local rabbi for money. Widows and orphans took to the streets, and begged passerby's for a handout. The Rabbi was overwhelmed with requests for assistance. Something strange was going on, yet no one knew why there was suddenly a huge spike in the number of charity cases!

The Rabbi made some inquiries, and discovered an astonishing fact. There was an anonymous benefactor who would silently support the entire population of poverty stricken Jews of Cracow, and he had just passed away. That benefactor was none other than Yossele the Miser! He had been secretly giving tremendous sums of money to support the poor of Cracow.

Immediately, the rabbi sent out a message for the entire town to gather at Yossele's grave, and beg for forgiveness. On the tombstone which read "Yossele the Miser," the rabbi added the word HaTzadik—the Righteous One.

According to the story, the rabbi involved was the famed sage Rav Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller zt"l, the author of the "Tosfos Yom-Tov," and he requested to be buried next to Yossele, in the back of the famous Jewish cemetery in Cracow.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l explained based on the Kli Yakar's commentary. He explains that Jews sinned by not appreciating Miriam. They did not recognize her greatness, and did not properly eulogize her. The passuk tells us, (Bamidbar 20:1) "And Miriam died there and she was buried," without mentioning the Jews crying or eulogizing her.

As a punishment, they lost their source of water which was in her merit.

Rav Kamenetzky explains. A tzaddik's influence is great, and yes it normally become greater after his passing.

Yet his influence can achieve on behalf of his congregation only in direct relation to the respect and honor they had from him. When the Jews did not properly eulogize Miriam, her posthumous righteousness was unable to continue to perform miracles, and her well no longer gave water.

But when one bestows the proper honor and respect for our leaders, he is rewarded much beyond his own years.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky is the Director of Advancement at Yeshiva of South Shore - ישיבה תורת חיים -בית בנימן - He is currently compiling the vast storehouse of all the Torah thoughts from his grandfather. If you have any stories to share from his grandfather, you can email him at skamenetzky@yooss.org.