



Beshalach

Leadership That Lasts

Miriam and Devorah will take centre stage this Shabbat. These two extraordinary role models for all people, for all time, will be featured in our reading for Parshat Beshalach.

We will read about Miriam's leadership, and we will read about Devorah in the Haftarah accompanying the Parasha.

Parshat Beshalach, this year, as is the case nearly every year, takes place on the Shabbat prior to Tu B'Shvat, the New Year for trees. And it's fascinating to note how, in our tradition, outstanding role models are presented to us through the imagery of trees.

For example, in Parshat Shelach Lecha, Moshe sends spies into the land of Canaan. One of the questions he posed to them was, "Hayesh-bah etz im-ayin"— "Find out, please, if there is a tree in the land."

This couldn't have referred literally to a tree because there must have been thousands, if not millions, of trees there at the time. Rather, according to our tradition, what Moshe asked the Meraglim (the spies) to find out was: was there a towering individual, somebody that everybody looked up to? Somebody who was a role model for one and all.

The Gemara in Masechet Taanit, (daf Heh, amud Bet), expands on this theme. The Gemara tells the story of a man who was walking in the midst of the heat of the summer, right in the heart of the desert. He was hot, he was exhausted, he was hungry, he was thirsty, and, fortuitously, he came across an oasis.

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And in the heart of that oasis, there was a beautiful tree. Immediately, he ate from the delicious fruit of the tree and drank water from the brook alongside it. Then he fell asleep under the protection of its bows, and when he eventually woke up, fully rejuvenated and ready to go on his way, he turned to the tree and said, "Tree, I would like to give you a Bracha (blessing) but what can I bless you with?"

You already have everything: wonderful roots, an outstanding trunk, great branches, delicious fruit, and a source of water nearby." And then a thought crossed his mind. Turning to the tree, he blessed it by saying, "May it be the will of Hashem that all of your offshoots will be just like you."

An outstanding role model is somebody who doesn't just have physical offshoots— children, grandchildren—but everyone with whom they come into contact becomes an offshoot. Somebody whose hearts they touch and whose minds they mould. And that was indeed true of those legendary biblical figures, Miriam and Devorah.

Role models to the extent that their impact is felt by us to this very day.

So may Hashem bless all of us, that we should become outstanding role models, and that others should say of us, "May all their offshoots be just like them."
Shabbat Shalom.