

Walk Modestly with Your G-d

Haftorat Balak, The Tenth book of Trei-Assar (The Twelve Minor Prophets)

The Book of Michah 5:6-6:8

This week's haftorah includes the famous verse regarding walking modestly with Hashem. How do we apply this principle in our time?

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah Reading

This week's *haftorah* reveals Hashem's amazing love for His people. It opens by describing the messianic epoch when there will no longer be any need to turn to other nations for assistance. Prior to the war of Gog and Magog the mighty nations of the world will assemble against Israel. However, Israel will turn into a strong "lion among the beasts of the forest," no longer relying on the other nations, but finally triumphing over all of them. At that time, the Jewish people will place their full trust in Hashem and recognize that salvation comes from Him alone. Michah continues describing the purification process during the Messianic era, leading to complete belief in the one true G-d by all the people in the world. Hashem will remove all the weapons of war from Israel, because they will no longer be needed. In the same vein, Hashem will destroy all forms of idolatry including sorcery, fortunetellers, and the *Asherah* trees. Michah recalls some of the ways in which Hashem protected Israel during our 40 year journey in the wilderness. He mentions the incident of Balak the king of Moav hiring the sorcerer Bilam to curse the Jewish people – the main topic of this week's Torah reading. He describes how Hashem delivered Israel from Egypt and replaced the curses that Bilam, son of Beor, tried to utter against them with blessings. Thus, this is an appropriate *haftorah* for *parashat Balak*. Michah concludes the *haftorah* with advice regarding the main thing Hashem requests of us, namely to: perform justice, love kindness and walk modestly with Hashem.

Miriam – Inspirational Teacher of Women

Among the many great things Hashem did for us, that we need to properly appreciate was providing us with excellent leadership: "For I brought you up out of the land of Mitzrayim, and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moshe, Aharon and Miriam" (*Michah* 6:4). Reading about this great team of Jewish leaders at the present time can also be seen as a tribute to Aharon the *Kohen* and Miriam, the prophetess, who passed away in last week's *parashah*, *Parashat Chukat*. *Targum Yonatan* adds in his translation of this verse: "Miriam to teach the women," just like Moshe Rabbeinu was the first "Rosh Yeshiva," Miriam was the first Torah teacher of the Jewish women. Rav Aviner explains how humanity is created in the image of G-d, both male and female. Our physical and spiritual differences, make it impossible to teach men and women in the same manner. Each gender has its own way of learning and requires its own separate guidance.

If Miriam is the role-model for all female Torah educators of women, why is it not mentioned directly in the Torah that Miriam was the teacher of women? I believe this is to teach us a vital difference between the teaching method of men and women. Since, men are more rigid and scientific; they need formal teaching such as lectures. However, women learn from many different modalities of education. In a formal lesson, only the intellect is speaking. In real life, the entire personality relates. Since women sometimes learn more from behavior in real life than from a formal *shiur* (lecture), Miriam did not

necessarily apply the formal way of teaching. In the national bestseller, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Deborah Tannen explains that men report while women “rapport.” Whereas, men seek information, women care most about “gaining closeness through more intimate self-revelation.” For this reason, Miriam is not described directly in the Torah as “the teacher of women,” because she was not a formal teacher. When she went among the women with her tambourine and danced, they were motivated to get up and join her exhilarating praise of Hashem. It didn't state that Miriam told the women to go out with drums and dances, only that “Miriam the prophetess...took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances” (*Shemot* 15:20). It was her charismatic personality and righteousness, which inspired the Jewish women to follow her lead. Miriam, the prophetess, taught all the daughters of Israel by way of her righteous deeds. From Miriam, the entire nation of women learned how to improve their behavior and connect with Hashem.

“Walk Modestly With Your G-d.”

The conclusion of our *haftorah* describes how in the messianic era, the Jewish people ask for guidance how to serve G-d. The prophet reminds us, that all we need to do is contained within the Torah and the *mitzvoth*, which he sums up as follows: “He has told you, O man, what is good, and what G d requires of you: only to do justice, love kindness, and walk modestly with your G-d” (*Michah* 6:8). The Hebrew term for “modestly” used in this verse derives from the root of the word *tzniut*. This teaches us about the vital importance of *tzniut* for men, as well as women, especially in the messianic age. The three most important character-traits we need to cultivate are justice, *chesed* (kindness) and *tzniut*. It is easy to understand the centrality of kindness and justice in the Torah. Hashem created the entire world for the sake of *chesed* (*Tehillim* 89:3), and the Torah is permeated with stories of the *chesed* of our patriarchs and matriarchs. Without justice, the world cannot continue to exist. Therefore, establishing a court of justice is even among the seven *mitzvoth* for *B'nei Noach* (gentiles). However, what is so important about *tzniut*, that it is included in the three main attributes Hashem requires of us?

It is interesting to note that only *tzniut* is described as walking with Hashem. Although some mistranslations may read “before your G-d,” the Hebrew word *im* does not mean “before,” but rather “with” (*Maharzav, Bemidbar Rabah* 1). Through developing the *mida* of *tzniut*, we emulate the ways of Hashem as the following midrash demonstrates:

“Hashem spoke to Moshe in the *ohel moed* (the private tent of meeting)’ (*Bamidbar* 1:1). Hashem had spoken to Moshe earlier from the burning bush, in Mitzrayim and in Sinai. Once the *ohel moed* stood, Hashem said: *tzniut* (modesty) is beautiful, as it says, ‘. . . to walk modestly with your G-d’ (*Michah* 6:8). So said David, ‘Every honorable *bat melech* (princess) dwells within’ (*Tehillim* 45:14). *Bat Melech* refers to Moshe . . . Hashem said, ‘Such is My honor, that I will speak from within the *ohel moed*’” (*Bemidbar Rabah* 1:3).

Rabbi Mordechai Willig learns from this *midrash*, that our *pasuk* from *Michah* refers not only to man’s *tzniut* before G-d, but also to Hashem’s own modest behavior. Hashem acts with utmost *tzniut* by speaking from the interior covered space of the *ohel moed*. We acquire closeness to Hashem by emulating Him through *tzniut* behavior. Therefore, we must be *tzanua* with Hashem, who modeled *tzniut* to the point of being invisible.

Co-ed Bathrooms and the Honor of the King's Daughter

In contrast, I was made aware by some of my Shabbat guests, that the female students in certain very well respected colleges, like Yale, have no option but to share bathrooms with their fellow male students. "What exactly is wrong with co-ed bathrooms?" asked my guest. "There is nothing specific in the Torah against that." I'm not even going to attempt answering the question, as the issue seems to me so basic that it doesn't need any particular command. I am saddened about how decadent our Western society has become, that we have lost all sense of decency and modesty. Even the Moabite women were permitted to convert to Judaism precisely because of the notion of modesty. While the Moabite men are forbidden to convert, "because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came out of Mizrayim" (*Devarim* 23:4-5), this did not apply to the Moabite women, since it is not the way of a woman to go out towards wayfarers, to bring them bread and water (*Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot* 77a). Now tell me, is it the way of a woman and "the honor of a king's daughter" to go out to the co-ed bathroom, brushing her teeth next to a man shaving, even if she is perfectly covered by her bathrobe?

"Tzniut is Beautiful"

Although *tzniut* applies to men and women alike, women have the potential to express this attribute to an even greater extent. Perhaps, this capability is related to the inherent beauty of women. The phrase "tzniut is beautiful" is a recurring theme in the Oral Torah. In our midrash from *Bemidbar Rabah*, Hashem calls *tzniut* beautiful. Prior to the giving of the second *luchot* (tablets), Hashem told Moshe, "No man shall ascend with you [up the mountain]" (*Shemot* 34:3). Rashi explains, "...there is nothing more beautiful than modesty." The Torah giant and landowner Boaz, noticed Ruth because of her exceptional *tzniut* (*Rashi, Ruth* 2:5). The midrash commenting on this verse, explains, that since he [Boaz] saw her beautiful deeds, he asked about her (*Ruth Rabah* 4:6). Through her beautiful deeds, Ruth merited to become the mother of royalty, the ancestress of King David, and ultimately, the *Mashiach*. Likewise, if we, Jewish women learn to excel in *tzniut* and model exemplary modest behavior, in spite of the immodest spirit prevailing in our current Western society, we will G-d willing walk with Hashem on the path of our final redemption.