

Miriam died there and was buried there. (20:1)

Rashi quotes the *Talmud Bava Basra* 17a, where *Chazal* teach that Miriam *HaNeviah* merited *missas neshikah*, death through Hashem's kiss, as did her brothers, Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*. *Rashi* wonders why the Torah does not add *al pi Hashem*, by the mouth of Hashem, as it writes concerning the passing of her brothers. He explains that it would not have been *derech kavod shel Maalah*, appropriate respect for Hashem *Yisborach* to make such a statement. **Horav Shimon Schwab, zl**, asks the question that is probably posed by any student of Torah, anyone who has read and truly understood the depth of meaning of *Shir HaShirim*, a *sefer* written by Shlomo *Hamelech*, which is deemed to be *kodesh kodoshim*, holy of holies. In fact, in one of the opening *pesukim*, the relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* is expressed in much the same way. *Yishakeini mineshikos Pihu*, "He shall kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." The commentators, namely *Rashi*, say this is similar to the relationship between the *chassan* and *kallah*, newly-married couple. Apparently, that *pasuk* does not seem to feel it is presented disrespectfully. What difference is there between *Shir HaShirim* and the Torah?

Rav Schwab explains that *missas neshikah* means much more than Hashem's kiss. It is a departure from this world which occurs as a result of a unique closeness with Hashem, that is so powerfully intense that the *neshamah*, soul, separates itself from the body. Under normal circumstances, one can achieve this level of *deveikus baHashem*, clinging to G-d, only through relentless Torah study. This is the *madreigah*, spiritual level, achievable by a man, upon whom there is a *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*. A woman, however, has no obligation to study Torah. How, then, was Miriam able to merit *missas neshikah*?

Here we derive a glimpse of Miriam's outstanding spiritual stature. Her outstanding devotion to Hashem, her consummate and unstinting perfection of her unique *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, was so special that she achieved a status equal to that which Moshe and Aharon accomplished through Torah study. Thus, by underscoring the fact that Miriam died as a result of Hashem's kiss, it would appear to undermine the exalted status of Torah study. Her unprecedented (for a woman) manner of leaving this mortal world implies that, indeed, another avenue exists, other than Torah study, for achieving *deveikus baHashem*. It is a *deveikus* that is so incredibly intense that one's *neshamah* falls away. This would denigrate the *kavod*, respect, attributable to Above, a reference to the Torah which has descended to us from Heaven.

The *Rav* now addresses the tragic incursion of feminism into the Torah camp. The very term feminism is secular in nature, since there is no place for innovative religion in Judaism that has not been transmitted via the *mesorah* from generation to generation. Nonetheless, we have been plagued (and I use the word plague by design) with feministic ideals that present a new way to align Judaism with the secular world. Sadly, some of these infractions have made inroads within the Orthodox camp (or at least among those who still call themselves Orthodox). We refer to the instance of egalitarian services with women reading from the Torah, chanting the *Haftorah*, dancing *hakafo*s with a *Sefer Torah*, even wearing *Talleisim*. (There are many examples, but I have chosen

only the most outrageous, out of respect for diplomacy).

Rav Schwab focuses on the meaning of *Havdalah*, separation, between holy and mundane, and even between holy and holy. When *Yom Tov* follows *Shabbos*, we recite the following *Havdalah* prayer: *Bein kedushas Shabbos l'kedushas Yom Tov hivdalta; v'Kidashta es amcha Yisrael b'Kedushasecha*, "You have separated and You have sanctified Your nation, *Yisrael*, in Your holiness." The prayer is concluded with the blessing of *Hamavdil bein kodesh l'koshesh*, "He Who separates between holy and holy."

Shabbos has *kedushah*, holiness, and so does *Yom Tov*, but the *kedushah* is not the same. Hashem has distinguished between the degrees of sanctity. Likewise, in the *Bais Hamikdash*, there were varied levels of *kedushah*. The *Heichal* was not as holy as the *Kodesh haKodoshim*; neither was the *Levi* on the same level as the *Kohen*.

Likewise, as members of the *am segulah*, treasured nation, we all possess a degree of sanctity unlike any other people. Hashem distinguished between the *kedushah* inherent in Jewish men and the *kedushah* inherent in Jewish women. To maintain their personal/individual level of *kedushah*, they have each been given gender-specific assignments. Men wear *Tzitzis* and *Tefillin*. Women were, instead, given a special mandate to emphasize the laws of *tznius*, modesty/chastity. (Thus, a woman who dresses in the manner appropriate for a *bas melech* is acting in her realm of *kedushah*, as does a man who puts on *Tzitzis* and *Tefillin*. If the woman, due to extreme insecurity decides to change the role, she transgresses the laws of *tznius*. After all, what greater lack of *tznius* is there than a woman who publicizes her insecurity by wearing a *Tallis* and *Tefillin* and attempts to "battle" and "conquer" the *kedushah* of the *Kosel Maaravi*?) Furthermore, while men wear their *Tallis* and *Tefillin* for a short time, these women are enjoined to adhere to the laws of *tznius* as a way of life. In the manner that they dress, they embody and declare to the world the *pasuk* at the end of *Krias Shema*, *V'lo sassuru acharei levavchem v'acharei eineichem*, "Stray not after your heart and after your eyes." Thus, *V'rau kol amei haaretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha*, "And the nations of the world will see that the Name of Hashem rests upon you." This will lead to *v'hayisem kedoshim l'Eilokeichem*, "And you shall be holy to your G-d."

Concerning the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*, it is true that women are not enjoined to study Torah diligently as men are commanded. This is especially true concerning *Torah SheBaal Peh* (which is another area in which those who would impugn the Torah have found a fertile spot to demonstrate their misplaced sense of values). Women also do not have the prohibition of *bitul Torah*, wasting time from studying Torah. They do, however, have the *mitzvah* to instill and infuse their husbands and children with *ahavas haTorah*, love for Torah. Without the female input which imbues the *ahavas Torah* – no learning is possible. One cannot possibly learn unless he has a deep abiding love for the Torah.

Rabbi Akiva, who rose to become the quintessential *Tanna* and leader of *Klal Yisrael*, would refer to his wife: *Sheli v'shelachem shelah hee*, "What is mine and what is yours is (actually) (from)

hers.” Did she teach them Torah? It was Rabbi Akiva who taught them. Did she teach Rabbi Akiva Torah? Also not. So why does she receive such adulation? It is because she had imbued Rabbi Akiva with her love of Torah. It was her love that served as the sparkplug that jumpstarted Rabbi Akiva’s learning and enabled him to learn so well.