

Over the past weeks, we have bid farewell to two pillars of our community, Howard Greene and Mel Seidenberg. Their enduring impact on our community, a legacy that will continue to shape us, is a testament to their dedication and service. As I enter this sacred space, our sanctuary, I am filled with memories of most recently connecting with Howard here in the building and knowing that Mel was participating in the service from home. Shabbat was an integral part of their connection to the community, and their legacy continues to inspire us.

So, this Shabbat, I thought it fitting to discuss the tremendous impact these two gedolim—great ones—had on our community and the invaluable lessons we can learn from them. Their legacies are not just a memory, but a source of inspiration and motivation for us all.

Every week, we immerse ourselves in our biblical texts - a rich educational cycle that we deeply value and rely upon. As a rabbi and darshan, I seek a message in the reading that is not only relevant but also authentic to our community. Some weeks and some parshiyot can be more challenging to find the message. The most famous is Tazria-Metzorah - that's the portion all about skin diseases. However, each of the parshiyot offers valuable lessons and insights that we can apply to our lives, fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth, a culture that Howard and Mel embodied and promoted.

However, other parshiyot seem to echo life in an exceptional way. And this week's reading seems to do just that. The Israelites shared many blessings and challenges throughout their journey. For much of the narrative we have explored recently, the Israelites enjoyed a comfortable and enriching life. And then, last week, there was the rebellion of Korach and his followers, followed by a plague. Despite the elevated moments, the Israelites complained frequently about their living conditions, food, and potential future.

Throughout their journey, the Israelites were blessed with access to water, even in the most remote places in the wilderness. This was truly miraculous, considering the harsh landscape. In Ginsburg's *Legends of the Jews*, he recounts a rabbinic understanding of the source of this water that sustained the Jewish people, highlighting the awe-inspiring nature of this divine provision.

He proposed:

*The water that flowed for them on this spot served not only as a relief for their present need but on this occasion; there was revealed to them a well of water, which did not abandon them in all their forty years' wandering but accompanied them on all their marches. God wrought this great miracle for the merits of the prophetess Miriam, also called "Miriam's Well."*

*It followed them on all their wanderings, uphill and downhill, and wherever they halted, it halted, too, and it settled opposite the Tabernacle. Thereupon, the leaders of the twelve tribes would appear, each with his staff, and chant these words to the well, "Spring up, O well, sing ye unto it; nobles of the people dug it by the direction of the lawgiver with their staves." Then the water would gush forth from the depths of the well, and shoot up high as pillars, then discharge itself*

*into great streams that were navigable, and on these rivers, the Jews sailed to the ocean on boats and hauled all the treasures of the world from that place.*

According to Ginsburg, the well was far more than a sustaining element that could provide the water required for living. Instead, the spring sent forth so much water that the people needed boats to travel from camp to camp—so much so that they could travel to the sea and obtain riches from the furthest reaches.

Through these waters, the people found sustenance, life, and riches. The prophet Miriam made all of this possible. The well dries up when Miriam dies, and the people must turn to other sources. This is where the water from the rock emerges.

In this week's parsha, Parashat Chukat, we read one of the most famous biblical narratives: Moses striking the rock to bring forth water. The rabbinic tradition associates the loss of Miriam with the need for a new water source, which provides us with a beautiful allegory. Namely, we sense a tremendous absence when we lose someone so dear to us, so enriching and nourishing. It is as if the well has dried up, and we must find a new source of sustenance, just as the Israelites had to find a new source of water when Miriam died.

Therefore, it is up to us to create a new source inspired by their work and lives—an echo of what they did, who they were—and who they will continue to be.

We know full well that there are those in our community who lift us and sustain our *kehillah* through their presence and efforts. At times, the Torah they shared rushed forth wide and far like the waters of Miriam's well. At other times, the Torah they shared fell gently like dew on the grass blade. In either circumstance, we found sustenance because they were who they were. For which we will be eternally grateful.

This is akin to the ship that sails beyond the horizon:

When someone we love leaves this earth, the soul is believed to ascend heavenward. A loved one's presence and eternal legacy is likened to a ship sailing upon the horizon. The boat sails along the waves beyond our vision, yet we sense its presence. The vessel is likened to a raft when we seek comfort during adversity. The ship may serve as a cruise liner when we have joyous experiences and 'Nachus' to share.

Although the waters distance us from seeing the actual ship, we know it exists. The ship's whistle in the wind reminds us of the still, small voice of those we lovingly remember. Their image, found in photographs and stories remembered, is likened to a ship sailing along the horizon. This symbolic ship contains a treasure chest of memories to cherish forever.

We will cherish Mel's and Howard's memories, which we know will be an eternal blessing.