

Eulogy for Sara Goldberg July 9, 1997

Our Rabbis often find a connection between the day that a person passes away and the teachings we are studying in the weeks Torah portion. Although I knew Sara Goldberg only through her son Harry, who strived to ensure her comfort and dignity in her final years, I see that the lesson we learn from this week's Parsha, *Chukkat*, has relevance for all of us who may not appreciate the struggles of our parents and grandparents who sacrificed so much on our behalf.

The portion records the death of Moses' sister, Miriam, followed in the next verse with the familiar desert situation of no water. The people, as is their habitual reaction, complain bitterly. Moses and Aaron, anxious to quell the uprising, turn to God for help and in Numbers 20:8 He commands Moses: "Take the rod and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother and speak unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth water..."

But Moses' execution of God's command is not with his usual compliance. He takes up the staff, gathers the people, and speaks - not to the rock, but to the nation: "Listen now, you rebels, are we to bring you forth water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice, and water came forth abundantly..."

God's response is immediate: "And God said to Moses and Aaron, "You did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify me in the presence of the Israelites! Therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the land that I have given you."

Why did this infraction bring such a harsh penalty- that after leading the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt and through 40 years of wandering in the desert Moses and Aaron would be denied a chance to touch the earth of the promised land.

Rashi claims that it was the fact that Moses struck the rock and did not speak to it as God commanded, so that some may believe that it was Moses and not God that caused the water to flow. But surely even the striking of a rock which results in an abundant flow of water for the entire nation is in itself so extraordinary that it should in no way detract from the miracle and the sanctification of God's name.

Maimonides comments that Moses' sin is not so much that he struck the rock, as it is that he became unduly angry at his nation. What does him in is the verse "Listen now YOU REBELS, shall we produce water for you from this rock?"

Here is where I draw the comparison between Moses and Aaron and our parents. Imagine the combination of sorrow and frustration that Moses felt. Overwrought by the loss of his sister, he could no longer bear the murmuring of his people. Miriam must have meant a great deal to Moses. He owed his very life to her. When his mother had hidden him as a baby in the bulrushes of the Nile, it was Miriam who protected him and persuaded the Pharaoh's daughter to have him nursed at home.

She guarded him at birth and exulted with him at the Red Sea - in a way, Miriam's presence framed Moses' life - and when she died, he lost the poise and capacity to govern.

Unlike today, Moses did not have the benefit of a Shiva, where he can be left to mourn and accept the consolations of friends, or the shloshim where a change in lifestyle allows time for reflection and the opportunity to slowly return to everyday life.

Instead the responsibilities of leadership never stopped. Like babies crying for milk, unaware that their parents need sleep, the people demanded that Moses continue to exhibit his extraordinary capacity for compassion and self-sacrifice, his undying commitment towards and unqualified love for the children of Israel.

Moses was human. Moses snapped. His words were evidence that he had grown weary and callous. He had lost the ability to mediate between God and Israel.

As with Moses and the other leaders of our nation, our parents have seen both the high and low points that everyone blessed with long life experiences. Perhaps the memories of the good times make it harder to accept the infirmities of age, the loss of control over one's own life, and the ultimate dependence on others.

Sara Goldberg was granted long life, 88 years. She also journeyed a long way to reach her final home. Born in London, England, , the youngest of three children, she came to Canada as a young child with her family, settling first in Winnipeg and later Edmonton where she married Morris Goldberg on October 31, 1953.

Sara and Morris had a very happy marriage in their 30 years together. They traveled together and especially enjoyed several visits to San Diego.

Sara worked at Eaton's and Woodward's until her retirement and obviously neither of those two organizations have prospered since then.

Her greatest love was the time spent with her grand-sons Lindsay and Murray and particularly her four great-grandchildren. Sara was looking forward to their upcoming annual summer visits.

Sara was an independent, feisty and tenacious woman. Many of these traits became obvious during her latter years at McQueen Lodge. Only recently she was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation from McQueen and the Greater Edmonton Foundation in recognition of her Excellence in Volunteer Service. The contributions of the McQueen staff and the volunteer senior's executive group, of which she was a member, lent themselves to the improvement of living and social conditions at the lodge.

An enthusiastic and prolific knitter, Sara created numerous items for the McQueen Lodge annual craft sale. Bingo was another passion of Sara's and she often felt personally victimized when the caller did not announce the final number she needed to win a game. It was really her great grandchildren who suffered, unknowingly of course, as any winnings she did receive went to them.

More than anything Sara enjoyed dining out. She was especially delighted to be a part of the Friday night minyan at Swiss Chalet. Whether she preferred the chicken or the french fries we'll never know as she seemed to enjoy both immensely.

Sara was predeceased by her husband Morris, sister Olga Rollinger and brother Eric Bass. She will be mourned by Harry, Fran , grandchildren, great grandchildren, and many close friends.

Like Moses Sara enjoyed a full, satisfying life but did not live to see the ultimate peace promised to our people by God. In her memory and to the memory of all who have gone before us let us dedicate our lives to the spiritual and physical welfare of all mankind.