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WOMEN IN THE BIBLE IV

MIRIAM

Sister, leader and a forgotten voice between salvation and rebellion

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Amram is a complex and multi-faceted figure. She first appears as a child and later as an old prophetess, and in between she moves between positions of leadership initiative, sacrifice, partnership and rebellion. Unlike other sibling couples in the book of Genesis who failed to create harmony, Miriam manages to establish and maintain a unique fraternal relationship over time but also pays a heavy price for her independence.

Miriam is the eldest of the three children of Amram and Yocheved. She is the only one of the children who is actually portrayed as an active nurse. While in the book of Genesis we witness repeated failures of sibling relationships: Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Miriam succeeds in building a different model. She does not compete with her siblings but complements them. She is the 'connector' between Moses and Aaron, between the private life and leadership. The brotherhood she leads is not based on hierarchy, but on sharing roles: Aaron the speaker, Moses the leader and Miriam, the feminine-prophetic voice, the responsible and generous emotion that connects the family.

Miriam is Yocheved's partner in the rescue project of Moses. She learned from her mother how not to obey the law without transgressing it. For Yocheved did indeed throw the child into the Nile as the king's law commanded. But in a basket, so that he would not drown. Miriam learns from her mother how to be clever in this difficult reality. And she is indeed an outstanding student. In the story of Moses's rescue from the Nile, Miriam is not passive. In the verse «And his sister stood at a distance» (Exodus 2:4), Miriam takes upon herself the dangerous part: the surveillance. She becomes the mother's 'eyes', the executive arm in the field. In doing so, she demonstrates intergenerational female cooperation: the mother initiates, and the daughter executes. And his sister stood at a distance to see what would be done to him. Miriam's observation post is a brave act. Yocheved, after sending her son, could not stay in a dangerous place. Miriam stays. She is alone in front of Pharaoh's palace, alone in the face of fate. Her gaze is strategic. It is not just watching, it is analysing reality and waiting for the right moment to act. It is a quiet leadership of presence.

At the climactic moment, Miriam demonstrates rare political and social resourcefulness. «And his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Go, and I will call you a nursing wife' (Exodus 2:7). This is a spontaneous suggestion. She identifies the need of Pharaoh's daughter and proposes a solution that serves both sides. As a result, Moses gets to suckle from his mother's milk. Miriam makes sure that the biological and cultural connection is not severed. It saves not only Moses' physical life, but also his identity. In this way, it states redemption without roots cannot be realised.

After the parting of the Red Sea, when Moses sings, Miriam answers. «And Miriam answered them, sing to the Lord» (Exodus 15:21). She is not satisfied with singing. «And Miriam the prophetess took initiative... She holds the drum in her hand, and all the women will come out after her with drums and dances». Miriam is the only prophetess who is explicitly defined as such before Deborah and Hulda. She leads a ceremony. It transforms the experience of redemption from a masculine-military experience into a communal-feminine experience of body, drum and dance. It gives place to women's voices in the national story. It translates the idea of redemption from slavery into an ecstatic personal physical experience of movement and sounds. These will remain in the bodily memory of all present. The experience of music and movement is an experience that can be preserved for future generations.

Miriam did not marry or have children. She devoted her life to fulfilling her little brother's mission. While Aaron married and even received the high priesthood, Miriam was not honoured in office and left no legacy.

In the story of the 'Black woman' (Numbers 12), there is a turning point. Miriam and Aaron speak of Moses. The text raises claims of leadership jealousy and the question of prophecy: «The Lord spoke not only through Moses, and he did speak to us also». Miriam guides the speech, and she is the one who is punished with leprosy. Important: She does not apologise or regret. The punishment comes without a confession. Only after Aaron's intervention does Moses pray to God to heal her. Miriam's silence in the face of punishment testifies to strength as well as vulnerability. She pays for daring to comment on the centrality of her younger brother.

This unique event shows also that they are human, even though they sacrifice their life for Moses and followed all their lives. There is a point of weakness, criticism that is inevitable.

«Immediately afterwards, Miriam died in the desert and was buried there» (Numbers 20:1). «The story connects between Miriam's death and the lack of water for the congregation». Chazal expounded: While Miriam was alive, the well was there. But after her death the well disappeared. «The congregation mourned Miriam for thirty days» (Numbers 20:29). The mourning of an entire month is a ritual later reserved only for Moses and Aaron. This fact indicates her status. Miriam was not a marginal figure. She was a pillar of the community. Her death created a spiritual and social void that the people immediately felt.

Miriam is a tragic figure in the classical sense: her greatness is also the source of her fall. She is the sister who knew how to build bridges, the prophetess who knew how to lead, and the woman who knew how to rebel. She oscillates between rescue and protest, between the dance drum and the disgrace of the leper, between birth and death. It is precisely because of this complexity that she is a critical figure for understanding the *Torah*: female leadership does not have to be quiet or submissive. It is complex and constantly tries to change the rules of the patriarchal society that works to keep women inferior.

SOMMARIO

La figura di Miriam, figlia di Amram, appare complessa e multiforme. Appare nella Bibbia prima come una bambina, e poi come una profetessa, passando attraverso esperienze di "leadership", sacrificio, solidarietà e ribellione. Diversamente da altre coppie di fratelli nel libro della Genesi, che non riescono a creare un'armonia, Miriam vuole stabilire e conservare una speciale relazione di fratellanza, che duri nel tempo, ma deve pagare un alto prezzo per la sua indipendenza.

ABSTRACT

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PAROLE CHIAVE

Miriam
Amram
Abele
Isacco

Ismaele

KEYWORDS

Miriam

Amram

Abel

Isaac

Ishmael

Contributo, come da regolamento, non sottoposto a procedura di referaggio “double blind”.