

## Hayyei Sarah 5782

### “You shall draw water with joy”

*U'sh'avtem mayim besasson mima'aynei hayeshua*  
*U'sh'avtem mayim besasson mima'aynei hayeshua....*

How many of us know this tune?  
 How many of us know this dance?  
 How many of us know who created them?

Not nearly as many, I bet.

It turns out that Emanuel Amiran-Pougatchov (8 August 1909, Warsaw – 18 December 1993, Israel) is credited with composing *Mayim Mayim*. You can still see his house in Tel Aviv - it's at Ha-Rav Friedman 39.

The dance was created in 1937 for a festival to celebrate the discovery of water in the desert after a seven-year search. The choreographer was Else I. Dublin. She wrote to *The Jerusalem Post* in 1972 remarking that when she'd not been credited in a program at an Israeli folk dance festival, the festival's convener pointed out that this was a compliment since “the first Israeli folk dance was born when the choreographer became anonymous.” (This didn't sit too well with Else Dublin either.)

This week's parashah is full of *mayim mayim*.

Abraham's servant's first stop at the city of Nahor is at the well;  
 We are specifically told that he arrives at the time the women draw water;  
 The test he creates for God to show him the ideal wife for Isaac involves water;  
 We are specifically told that Rebekah is carrying a water jar;  
 She 'waters' both the servant and his camels;  
 Laban, Rebekah's brother, comes out of the house to the spring;  
 There is water to wash the servant's feet - and the camels' feet too;

...and finally, we are told that Isaac settles at a place called Be'er le-hai roi.

Be'er le-hai roi means, 'The Well of the One who lives and sees me', and is the place where Ishmael was first named (Genesis 16:14).

Why is there so much water in this parashah?

Hayyei Sarah represents an exquisite tension of opposites. It begins with death (Sarah's) and ends with death (Ishmael's), with death in between (Abraham's). Yet somehow, happy endings are salvaged from this unpromising material.

And every happy event, as we can see from the list above, is marked by water.

By contrast, in this parashah, land represents death and dislocation. Land, in this parashah, represents death and dislocation. It opens with an awkward transaction for the cave in which Sarah is to be buried - a lot of "after you/no, after you." Abraham's servant Eliezer travels for many days with no certain outcome. In her turn, Rebekah does the same, without even knowing what Isaac looks like.

But water represents joy - the miracle of finding Rebekah, the power and consolation of Isaac and Rebekah's love, and the reconciliation represented by Isaac's settling in the place to which Ishmael was exiled while still in the womb - which, of course, is itself a place of water.

In this parashah which records Sarah's death, we may remember her wry words when she was told she would bear Isaac:

"After I have withered, shall I have pleasure?"

The answer is yes, because of the water. Sarah bears, Rebekah is found, Isaac falls in love. Water brings joy.

And perhaps this is why we find the 'real' words of *mayim mayim* in a place we might not expect. The tune and the dance were both created last century, but the words come from long before. They're from Isaiah chapter 12, and they are part of a prophecy of a perfected future. It goes like this:



*That day you will say:*

*“I will give thanks to you, Lord,  
for though you were angry with me,  
your anger turned away,  
that you might comfort me.*

*“Behold, God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and not be afraid;  
for the Lord God is my strength and my song,  
and has become my deliverance.”*

*3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of deliverance....*

We may not do the dance every week, but these are familiar words to us because they are placed in the Havdalah service.

As we ourselves look towards a future that's always uncertain, we invoke the joy that comes from water.

May we find it this week, for blessing.

Shabbat shalom.