

**Hespet (eulogy) at the funeral of Miriam Burke, August 2000 – written and read by Alexander Gordon**

With the permission of the Rav with the permission of the family. We are gathered together to honour and pay tribute to Miriam Bas Yehuda - Miriam Burke nee Karbatznick. A daughter, a sister, a wife – and a loving aunt and great-aunt.

The deeply felt sadness of losing our beloved aunt should not overwhelm her own wishes, voiced repeatedly in her final days, that we as a family should not grieve for her. In that spirit it is fitting that we should celebrate the long life that the Almighty granted her, and remember her with a smile and a fondness reserved for those closest to us.

Her name was derived from Miriam Hanevia – Miriam the Prophetess, Moses' sister and the woman who led the women of Israel in praise of the Almighty after the crossing of the Red Sea. She features at the beginning of Shemos, at the beginning of the story of the Exodus. When Moses was cast into the Nile by his mother to protect him from Egyptian wrath, the Torah tells us: '*Vataytatsayv Achoto Mayrachoc L'daya Ma-Ya'aseh Lo'* – "And his sister stood at a distance to know what would happen to him". Sforno, the great Italian medieval Rabbi, in his wisdom, tells us of Miriam that she watched over Moses out of a compelling love for him and paid no attention to her own position and the danger she posed herself as a Hebrew woman. This devotion to family seems a fitting encomium for Auntie Miriam, the woman who shared her name, who gave so much of herself for the benefit of her relatives.

The fifth child born into a still growing East End family, Auntie Miriam was fond of recalling her childhood days growing up with her parents and her brothers and sisters in a warm, loving and generous household, qualities that were instilled in her from an early age and which she herself displayed throughout her life. Denied a complete education because of the frugal circumstances that her generation endured, she entered the millinery business and continually applied her skill learnt during that time to her advantage throughout her life - in her pomp she was a smart woman with a sharp eye for fashion.

Throughout her life she was particularly keen that her nieces and nephews should benefit from the wisdom of her experiences and to that end she often retold of the harshness of the war years and the necessary fortitude with which one must bear the difficult challenges that life inevitably throws at us, always reminding us that Hashem has his reasons and the necessity of trusting in him.

Auntie Miriam sadly knew of the harshest of those challenges. After meeting and marrying Harry Burke, they ran a business together and photographs of the time show a handsome couple with a bright future.

Fate tragically intervened however, and she lost her beloved husband prematurely. After over forty years of widowhood she is again joined with him in *Olam Haba* and their souls now dwell together in eternity.

The enormity of the setback, together with the loss of a brother, did not though, undermine her personal vitality. An inner strength propelled her and she joined forces with my grandparents Sam and Dora, and together they ran a successful business until retirement.

Even then she did not rest, merely transferred her energies. She opened her flat in Golders Green to all who came with a warmth and genuine pleasure in the company of her family and friends, either round the dining or Kalooki table. A sumptuous spread and unending gifts were her hallmark. A visit from Auntie Miriam was accompanied by the equivalent of a large delivery from the grocers. As a child I remember her being a cornucopia of food, sweets and toys. She delighted in giving in abundance. Long before the contemporary discussion of genetically enhanced foods, Auntie Miriam's produce was outsize – grapes the size of plums, plums the size of oranges. Even recently that generosity did not wane – I recall the story of a plumber who had already paid her a visit to complete an odd job being asked to return by a family member and replying to the request, "This time I'd better not eat anything before I go."

Auntie Miriam rushed to be of assistance equally during times of celebration and times of crisis. There are many here I am sure, who have good reason to be thankful of her help and presence of mind at times of deep stress. It will be for the good times and her unfailing generosity that we will remember her most. No tea or birthday party was complete without the ubiquitous Auntie Miriam cheese cake or rum cake - creations of which any patissier would have been proud.

The famous tract from Proverbs which starts '*Eshes Chayil Mi Yimsa*' tells us of a woman of worth and how her husband wants for nothing. Robbed of the opportunity to fulfil that duty over an extended period of time, she completed the obligation through her family who never wanted because of her generosity.

She had a bright mind and a strong will. She was a woman of great inner strength who knew her mind and was, at times prepared to speak it. Above all else though, she gave all of herself to her family, her brothers, sisters, and in particular her nieces and nephews, whom she loved as children.

In the end the sheer struggle of living became too much for her and despite the daily visits and efforts of her family to ease her suffering, the Almighty in his infinite mercy relieved her of the burden. May he gather her up into his arms and grant her the peace and serenity she so richly deserves and may her memory always be for a blessing.

Amen