

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
Vol. 8 #35, June 18, 2021; Chukat 5781; 8 Tammuz 5781

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

---

**Family and friends sponsor the Devrei Torah this Shabbat in loving memory of Iran Kohan-Sedgh, Iran Tova Bat David HaKohen z"l. Iran was the loving wife of Mehrdad Kohen, devoted mother of Joseph and Shirine, cherished teacher of many children in our community, and close friend to all who knew and loved her. Iran's family and friends honored her at Magen David on the first anniversary of her burial, 7 Tammuz. May Iran's name and memory always be for a blessing in our community.**

---

**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!**

---

Sefer Bemidbar opens with great hope as B'Nai Yisrael prepare to leave the base of Har Sinai for the final trip to the land that God had promised to our Patriarchs. When the people actually start the journey (chapter 11), everything starts going wrong. The week starting 22 Sivan is the climax, starting with Miriam's tzaraat (22 Sivan), then the uprising of Korach and 250 of his followers (some time later that week), and finally the departure of the Meraglim (29 Sivan), a disaster that concludes with the reaction to the majority report when they return on 9 Av. With intense displeasure, God decrees that all adults of the generation of the Exodus, except Calev and Yehoshua, will die in the Midbar (and thus not enter Israel).

Starting with chapter 11, death is a recurring theme. Chukat opens with the law of the Red Heifer, the ritual required to re-establish ritual purity (tahara) after contact with a dead body (chapter 19). While God presented this law to Moshe at Har Sinai, the Torah presents it here, in the midst of a discussion of the deaths of the adults of the time of the Exodus. The Torah then skips 38 years (as if nothing else involving the first generation is worthy of note) and resumes in chapter 20 with events of the 40<sup>th</sup> year. The theme of death continues, because the discussion opens with Miriam's death and its consequences. The Torah opens chapter 20 by announcing that the people have reached Midbar Zin. The absence of an opening Vav (= "and") indicates a new topic. The Torah normally opens new stories with a vav to indicate a connection from one to the next. The absence of the vav here is a strong signal that there has been a gap, and a new story is starting.

After Miriam's death, there is no more water. The people complain, and Moshe appeals to Hashem. God tells Moshe to take his staff, go to "the rock," and ask it to provide water. Moshe takes his staff, calls the people rebels, hits the rock, and water rushes out. God tells Moshe and Aharon that because they did not have sufficient faith to perform a Kiddush HaShem, they would not be able to enter the land. Commentators have debated for two thousand years trying to understand the nature of Moshe's sin. Yanki Tauber, in his Dvar Torah below (see p. 15), reviews the theories of numerous traditional commentators. In his parsha class this week, Rabbi Antine of Beth Sholom pointed to 20:12, where God tells both Moshe and Aharon that He is punishing both of them, because they both failed to provide a Kiddush HaShem in bringing forth water. Rabbi Antine stated that any explanation of the sin must explain why and how both Moshe and Aharon sinned at Mei Meriva.

As usual, Rabbi David Fohrman has compelling new insights on this puzzle. He notes that the sin at Mei Meriva appears in the Torah immediately after Miriam's death. The Midrash gives a second clue, the tradition that the rock that Moshe hit at God's command forty years earlier turned into a well that followed B'Nai Yisrael wherever they went until it dried up after she died. Miriam appears in every crisis involving water, starting when as a young child she watches over baby Moshe when he is in his teva in the Nile River. Miriam watches over Moshe at the Nile, at the Sea of Reeds, and later in the Midbar – each time Moshe is involved with a crisis involving water. Miriam watches, always confident that God will find a way to solve the crisis, even when she has no idea how He will do so. Miriam's lesson is that one must have complete faith that God will find a solution to save the Jews. This is the lesson that Moshe and Aharon should have learned from Miriam. This is the lesson that God wanted Moshe and Aharon to teach to the generation about to enter the land.

Rav Soloveitchik's famous Dvar Torah on Behaalotecha, where he argues that Moshe and Aharon failed to understand and provide optimal leadership starting with Bemidbar chapter 11, fits in with this interpretation. While Moshe was the greatest teacher in Jewish history, God apparently felt that Yehoshua was the better leader for the new generation as it entered Israel and met the challenges of starting a new phase of their history.

Without Miriam to guide him, Moshe displays his anger (and probably grief over having just lost his sister and very close friend), calling the people rebels (morim, in Hebrew, spelled with the same letters as in Miriam). When he shows anger and then hits the rock instead of gently asking it to provide water, Moshe misses the opportunity to teach an important lesson to the people about to enter the land. Since Aharon should have understood Miriam's faith, he should have alerted Moshe – thus God considers that he also should have helped teach this lesson.

For forty years in the Midbar, God has been protecting B'Nai Yisrael – often with obvious miracles, but also behind the scenes. The serpents that God no longer holds back from attacking fit in with this message (21:8). God's love and protection for B'Nai Yisrael includes hidden miracles, such as keeping snakes and serpents (very common in the desert) from attacking the people. God wants Moshe and Aharon to teach the people that God will always be with the Jews, even when they cannot see Him or His work – a very important lesson once they enter Israel and God will work without obviously violating laws of nature.

During the past more than 2000 years, no nation except Israel has been able to make the land produce successfully. One can go through the areas that have not been under Jewish control since 1948 and see stone boundaries that our ancestors made many centuries ago. The land not under Jewish control is largely barren. The Jewish areas are vibrant and incredibly productive. Military scholars state that they can explain the results of all wars in history – except that they cannot explain how Israel defeated the combined Arab countries in the various wars since 1948. Miriam understood – Jews with faith in Hashem have always known that God would find a way for the Jews to win back our land when the time came. This is the lesson that God wanted Moshe and Aharon to teach to B'Nai Yisrael at Mei Meriva. While Moshe does understand and teaches this lesson in Sefer Devarim, a few weeks before his death, it is too late for God. He decides that it is time for a new leader for B'Nai Yisrael – Yehoshua, whom Moshe has been training for forty years.

As we learn in Pirkei Avot, Moshe was the first Rebbe, and he passed on what he learned at Har Sinai to a never ending series of rabbis. My learning started with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, my beloved friend and teacher for nearly fifty years. With what I learned from him, I have been able to move on and learn more from other wonderful rabbis. May we all continue to learn and grow in our knowledge and mitzvot.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

---

**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

---

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

---

Hannah & Alan

---

**Drasha: Chukas: Chukas Pocus**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

The laws of the parah adumah, the red heifer, have enraptured mortals since the day it was commanded. There was no reason or rationale given for it. The nations of the world, baffled by it, mocked our observance of it. Even King Solomon, the wisest of men, claimed to be stupefied by its reasoning. And Moshe was the only mortal that understood the essence of its every nuance.

Its laws are complex, its symbolism mysterious, and the logic of its repercussions quite enigmatic. The red heifer's ashes purify those who have become tamei (impure), yet the administrating Kohen who was tahor (pure) becomes tamei! There is no logic behind that occurrence; yet that is the law. So sacred was the red heifer that Moshe and Aaron sacrificed, that its ashes were saved from generation to generation. Each additional red-heifer offering was added to the remnants of the previous, so that the new ashes would mix with the vestigial ashes of Moshe's original heifer. Hundreds of generations and thousands of Kohanim and Israelites who performed the mitzvah of parah adumah believed with unquestioning faith in the law's ritual divinity and power.

I have one simple question. Why were these complex, hidden, and very spiritual laws placed smack in the middle of the Book of Bamidbar? The enigmatical laws of purity and impurity are almost entirely relegated to Sefer VaYikra (Leviticus). That sefer discusses sacrificial offerings. It also details a host of physio-spiritual maladies, among them, the laws of tzora'as, zav, zavah, nidah, and so forth. Shouldn't the mystical requirements of the Parah Adumah join its counterparts together with the laws of the Kohanim? Why is it placed in the Book that recounts the stories of human folly -the malicious uprising of Korach, the miscalculations of the spies, the unfaithfulness of the sotah, the complaints against the heavenly fare of manna? What significance does the juxtaposition of these seemingly unexplainable rituals, obviously not congruent with mortal logic doing with the tales of error and miscalculation?

**One evening during World War II, Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee could not sleep. As chairman of the Senate appropriations committee, he could not understand why he should the administration was requesting some \$2,000,000,000 towards certain unusual scientific research.**

**He called Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and began to shout. "Do you expect me to sanction this tremendous appropriation without any idea as to where it is going!"**

**Stimson kept quiet. He pondered and hesitated, then he asked, "Can you keep a secret?" After McKellar assured him that he could, Stimson whispered, "We are about to split the atom."**

**McKellar exploded. "Are you crazy? This is a war! We have men out there! We need guns! We need planes! We need ammunition! And you guys are fooling around with some hocus pocus — splitting atoms!"**

**It was only months later that McKellar, along with the entire world learned the power of this seemingly incomprehensible and esoteric exercise. Perhaps there is no better place to expound the laws of parah adumah than in the middle of Sefer Bamidbar. For it is this Torah section that discusses a generation that thinks they are able to calculate and define everything. It tells of spies who return from Canaan and exclaim that according to their calculations there is no logical way that Israel will conquer the land. It tells of Korach, who complained that according to his calculations he should be the prince of the tribe of Levi. Its Midrash tells of Korach gathering 250 men and ranting that according to his logic a mezuzah is unnecessary in a room filled with sacred books. It talks about false leaders who would be satisfied if only the spirit of the law is fulfilled, even if the letter of the law is not. Bamidbar even contains the story of Miriam, who, according to her reasoning, spoke ill of her brother Moshe. It discusses Jews who wanted meat rather than manna.**

When humans make mortal calculations to redefine Torah law, there is no better time and place to talk about red heifers and the complex and esoteric laws thereof. The red cow and its laws represent the total omnipotence of Hashem, be it spirit, in logic, or in mechanics. It exclaims that though we may search for rhyme and reason of Torah, we still must observe the mitzvos He commanded, regardless if we understand them. For there will always be some aspect that may only appear to us as mysterious as hocus pocus. Yet with uncalculating faith we must realize that there is great method to the many aspects we cannot deem mortal. In that manner we shall merit to be totally committed to Hashem's Torah, and not our mortal vision of it.

Good Shabbos

---

## Can We Un-Stick Old Patterns?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

The transition into full adulthood, with its incumbent privileges and responsibilities, is often a long process. In recent years there has been increasing recognition of a stage of life between adolescence and adulthood; this stage has been called the "odyssey years." Imagine a young woman who, after leaving home, attends college, begins her career, and starts to form her own independent identity, separate from her parents and siblings. When she returns to her parent's home for the chagim, what happens? Is she able to retain her independent identity, her developed personality, or do she and her parents revert to their old relationship dynamics? It may take years before both parents and child fully adapt to her new life stage.

This dynamic is on full display in this week's parsha, Chukat. The Israelites have reached a transition point. It has been forty years since they left Egypt, and the older generation has died out. The new generation is now poised to enter Canaan. Both Miriam and Aaron die, and God decrees that Moses will not lead the people into the land. They will no longer be guided by Moses' leadership, as they were during their sojourn in the wilderness. This is a loss, but also a gain. From the moment they left Egypt until now, they have been overly reliant on Moses. He is still the father, and they are the dependent, whiny children. They will no longer have their needs provided for by abundant miracles: the heavenly protective clouds, the quail, and of course, the manna. They will soon have to sow, reap, and harvest in order to survive. They will have to become self-reliant, charting their own path and choosing their own leaders.

But that will take time. Now, while still in the Wilderness and in their "parents' home," as it were, the old dynamics are still in place. After 40 years, they may have learned on an intellectual level that God will provide. They have also experienced the disastrous consequences of complaining to God and to Moses. And yet, this knowledge does not translate into action. As long as they are still in the Wilderness, still with the same Moses who took them out of Egypt, they continue to behave as they always have done: they complain, they rebel against God, and God, predictably, exacts punishment. Following Miriam's death, when the people lack water, they yet again take up the refrain. "Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!" (Numbers 20:5). As they have done in the past, Moses and Aaron run to the Tent of Meeting to escape the people and to seek God's protection, rather than attempting to engage and reason with the people directly.

This is ultimately what Moses's sin of hitting the rock is all about. Why was this sin so grievous that it prevented Moses from entering the land—the very thing that he had worked for and dreamed about for 40 years? The truth is that the sin

itself was not so very bad. But it was terribly revealing. It made clear that Moses was the leader for the Wilderness, but he was not the leader to take the Israelites into the land.

Moses can't break out of old patterns. God tells him to speak to the rock; the circumstances are different than they were 40 years ago. And yet, he still automatically strikes it, just as he had done in the past. Moses puts the people in the same box he has always been putting them: "Hear now ye rebels" (Num. 20:10). They may still be children—to some degree because they are still being infantilized—but the same rebels of 40 years ago, they are not.

And the striking itself is symbolically significant. The way you lead, Moses is saying, is by beating rebellious, unwieldy children into submission. If you want water to come from a rock—if you want change—you have to use power and force. But the people don't need that type of leader anymore. They need a leader who is prepared to see them as adults. They need a leader who will talk to them when they are in error, who will attempt to persuade rather than to force, a leader who will engage and empower.

Change is in the offing for when they will enter the land of Canaan. And it begins even now. Once they internalize the deaths of Miriam and Aaron and they realize that Moses will not lead them into the land, the people begin to come into their own. When confronted with danger, the people themselves make a vow to God asking for deliverance: "And Israel vowed saying: If you give this people to me, I will ban their cities" (Num. 21:2). Upon encountering water, the Torah reports, "Then Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well—sing to it...(Numbers 21:17). This is markedly different than what happened forty years ago when they left Egypt: "Then sang Moses"—az yashir Moshe—Moses sang and the people followed. Now it is az yashir Yisrael: It is the people who take the initiative. It is the people who are leading.

Forging new dynamics and stepping into full adulthood is a difficult process. It takes time and it requires both parent and child to adapt and accept the new reality. Sometimes this may not be possible. We might have to be out of the house and physically away from the old settings if we don't want to regress. Hopefully, however, parent and child can work to change the patterns of old. They can learn to speak, respond, and react in a way that internalizes the fact that the child is now an adult, and that old dynamics must be replaced with a dynamic of empowerment and respect.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/06/can-we-un-stick-old-patterns/>

---

### **My Partner Knows**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2021 Teach 613

As humans we try to understand. We try to understand how gravity works, how plants grow, and how the digestive system works. Similarly, in life we try to see patterns, and we try to make sense of life events. But sometimes we just do not understand.

Even in Mitzvos, which are given by Hashem, we try to understand. In fact, the commentaries encourage us to try to understand the rationale and message of each Mitzva to the extent that we can. But, sometimes, we just do not know. A Mitzva that we just do not understand is called a "Chok."

The concept of a "Chok" is an important one. It means that there are limitations to our understanding, and that we are okay with that. Some maintain that this is why Jewish men cover their heads so diligently with a covering we call a Yarmulka. The covering symbolizes that there is a cap on our intelligence. "Yarmulka" is a slurred form of the two words "Yarey Me'elokay," meaning fear or reverence of Hashem. The covering symbolizes that we proceed in life even though we do not always understand everything.

This year, as I contemplated the name of the Parsha, "Chukas," I wondered if there was an example of this principle in the writings of the prophets. After all, the role of the prophets is to be conduits of Torah principles to the daily experience of life. The prophets were great mentors and teachers, connected closely to Hashem and to the people. I realized that there is indeed such an example of the "Chok" quality in the story of Elisha, the famous student of Eliyahu HaNavi.

In the book of Melachim (Kings) we find the description of how Elisha was hosted by an elderly couple, and how he blessed them to have a child. The child was born and then as a young boy, died suddenly. The woman went quickly to Elisha, and as she approached the prophet, Elisha sensed the urgency in her gait but declared, "Hashem has withheld from me, He has not told me," what her concern was. In other words, Elisha was accustomed to Hashem making him aware of what people's needs were, but in this case, it was withheld from him. Elisha knew for certain that Hashem knew her motive in coming; and realized that Hashem had not shared that with him.

In trying to understand the story we are struck by how odd it is that at one of Elisha's greatest moments, he was seemingly so unconnected, and unable to know what troubled the woman. It is at this time in his "career" as a prophet that he was about to do Techiyas Hameisim, resurrecting the dead child, an act that is considered to be a "Key" held by Hashem, Himself. Every estimation of this time would indicate that Elisha was totally connected. So, it seems surprising that at this moment, he would be so unconnected as to declare, "Hashem has withheld from me, He has not told me." I suggest that the dynamic that we see here is like that of partners in a business venture who trust each other implicitly. If one of the partners oversees sales, for example, and the other partner oversees the real estate bills such as taxes, electric, and water, then it is probable that if you asked the partner in charge of sales about the water bill, he would not know the answer. Remarkably though, this would not bother him, because he knows that that bill is in good hands. In fact, sometimes one partner will say "no" to a suggestion based on his knowledge base of his division of the partnership and his awareness of its ramifications, and the other partner will be okay with that and trust him.

The fact that Elisha is so candid and aware that he does not know why the woman has come does not indicate distance between him and Hashem. On the contrary, Elisha is at one of the highest moments of closeness with Hashem. He is aware that he does not know, and that Hashem does. He is intensely aware that it is up to Hashem to decide if He chooses to share the information with him. It is from this place that Elisha will be able to proceed to perform the miracle of Techiyas Hameisim, because he has ascended to a wonderous level of partnership with Hashem.

As human beings we strive to understand all kinds of things, including the rationale behind the Mitzvos that we do. But the concept of "Chok" is powerful. It is the concept that I do not need to know. The confidence that the reasons for some Mitzvos are known only to Hashem, and the explanation for certain life events is known only to Hashem, is something we are good with. We view Hashem as our loving partner. Since He is aware, we are good, because we know things are in good hands.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

\* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613. [RMRhine@Teach613.org](mailto:RMRhine@Teach613.org). Teach613, 10604 Woodsdale Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20901. 908-770-9072. **Donations welcome to help with Torah outreach.** [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org).

---

### Timely Leadership – Thoughts for Parashat Hukkat

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

The Torah portion relates the episode where the Israelites complain bitterly that they need water. They ask Moses why he took them from Egypt only to let them die of thirst in the wilderness. What kind of leader was he, if this is all he could do for them?

God told Moses: "take the staff and assemble the community, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock before their eyes that it may give forth its water." Moses gathered the people, called them rebels, and then struck the rock twice--rather than speaking to it, as God had commanded. Water did emerge, and the Israelites' thirst was quenched. Yet, because Moses hit the rock instead of speaking to it, God told Moses and Aaron they would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. They effectively became "lame duck" leaders.

Many commentators wonder why Moses and Aaron were punished so severely for a seemingly minor transgression. After all, the first time a similar event happened, Moses had hit the rock and water emerged--and this was a great miracle and was considered praiseworthy. Rabbi Hayyim Angel offered an interesting explanation. The first time Moses hit the rock was at the beginning of the 40 year period between the exodus and entry into the Promised Land. The people were still mired in a slave mentality. Hitting the rock symbolized a strong leadership; Moses needed strict discipline to keep the

people in order. But the second time Moses hit the rock, it was 40 years later. A new generation had arisen. The old-timers who had been slaves in Egypt had died off. God told Moses to speak to the rock, indicating that a new style of leadership was now needed for this new generation. Speaking and explaining will be more effective than forceful disciplinarian tactics. Yet, Moses did not fully grasp this message, and fell back on his traditional style of leadership--he hit the rock now, as he had done 40 years previously.

God thus realized that Moses and Aaron--who had been brilliant leaders for their generation--were no longer able to lead the new generation. They were still operating with their old assumptions and tactics, even though new assumptions and new strategies were needed. Moses and Aaron were not being "punished" for a sin, but were being replaced because different leadership was now needed for the new generations.

An indication of the change that had taken place within the Israelite community is evidenced in the song they sang at the well (Bemidbar 21:17-18.) "Then sang Israel this song..." When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea 40 years earlier, they had sung a song: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel..." In that earlier song, Moses had led the people and the people responded to his words. But now, 40 years later, "then sang Israel this song", the people were now able to sing their own song, without Moses leading them. They had become spiritually mature and independent. This is a singular testimony to the success of Moses as a teacher--that he raised a generation that was able to sing praises to God on its own, without needing him to spoon feed them the words and sentiments. Yet, Moses himself seems not to have recognized how well he had succeeded.

Leaders--and parents--need to know how to lead and teach their communities and their children in ways that are appropriate to the particular circumstances. They constantly need to reevaluate their methods of communication, and they need to be sure that they are flexible enough to adapt to new situations. The goal is to create communities and children who can grow, assume increasing responsibility, and ultimately stand on their own.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/timely-leadership-thoughts-parashat-hukkat> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

---

## Thoughts on the Teachings of Martin Buber

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

In his famous book, *I and Thou*, Martin Buber (1878-1965) pointed out that human relationships, at their best, involve mutual knowledge and respect, treating self and others as valuable human beings. An *I-Thou* relationship is based on understanding, sympathy, love. Its goal is to experience the "other" as a meaningful and valuable person. In contrast, an *I-It* relationship treats the "other" as an object to be manipulated, controlled, or exploited. If *I-Thou* relationships are based on mutuality, *I-It* relationships are based on the desire to gain functional benefit from the other.

Buber wrote: "When a culture is no longer centered in a living and continually renewed relational process, it freezes into the *It-world*, which is broken only intermittently by the eruptive, glowing deeds of solitary spirits" (*I and Thou*, p. 103). As we dehumanize others, we also engage in the process of dehumanizing ourselves. We make our peace with living in an *It-world*, using others as things, and in turn being used by them for their purposes.

The line between *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships is not always clear. Sometimes, people appear to be our friends, solicitous of our well-being; yet, their real goal is to manipulate us into buying their product, accepting their viewpoint, controlling us in various ways. Their goal isn't mutual friendship and understanding; rather, they want to exert power and control, and they feign friendship as a tactic to achieve their goals.

Dehumanization is poisonous to proper human interactions and relationships. It is not only destructive to the victim, but equally or even more destructive to the one who does the dehumanizing. The dehumanizer becomes blinded by egotism

and power-grabbing at any cost. Such a person may appear “successful” based on superficial standards but is really an immense failure as a human being.

I-It relationships are based on functionality. Once the function no longer yields results, the relationship breaks. I-Thou relationships are based on human understanding, loyalty and love. These relationships are the great joy of life. Buber is fully cognizant of the fact that human beings live with I-Thou and I-It realities. “No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I. But some men are so person-oriented that one may call them persons, while others are so ego-oriented that one may call them egos. Between these and those true history takes place” (Ibid., p. 114).

Buber speaks of another relationship beyond I-Thou and I-It: the I-Eternal Thou. Human beings not only stand in relationship to each other, but to God. “One does not find God if one remains in the world; one does not find God if one leaves the world. Whoever goes forth to his You with his whole being and carries to it all the being of the world, finds him whom one cannot seek. Of course, God is the mysterium tremendum that appears and overwhelms; but he is also the mystery of the obvious that is closer to me than my own I” (Ibid., p. 127).

Buber views the relationship with God as a human yearning, an imperfect search for ultimate Perfection. Faith is a process; it fluctuates; it is not something that, once attained, can be safely deposited in the back of one’s mind. “Woe unto the possessed who fancy that they possess God!” (Ibid., p. 155). Elsewhere, Buber elaborates on this point: “All religious expression is only an intimation of its attainment....The meaning is found through the engagement of one’s own person; it only reveals itself as one takes part in its revelation” (The Way of Response, p. 64).

Buber was attracted to the spiritual lessons of the Hassidic masters who refused to draw a line of separation between the sacred and the profane. Religion at its best encompasses all of life and cannot be confined to a temple or set of rituals. “What is of greatest importance in Hasidism, today as then, is the powerful tendency, preserved in personal as well as in communal existence, to overcome the fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane” (Hasidism and Modern Man, p. 28). The goal of religion is to make us better, deeper human beings, to be cognizant of the presence of God at all times. “Man cannot approach the divine by reaching beyond the human; he can approach Him through becoming human. To become human is what he, this individual man, has been created for. This, so it seems to me, is the eternal core of Hasidic life and of Hasidic teaching” (Ibid., pp. 42-43).

Buber finds inspiration in the Jewish religious tradition. The biblical heroes “do not dare confine God to a circumscribed space of division of life, to ‘religion.’ They have not the insolence to draw boundaries around God’s commandments and say to Him: ‘up to this point, You are sovereign, but beyond these bounds begins the sovereignty of science or society or the state’” (The Way of Response, p. 68). Israel’s genius was not simply in teaching that there is one God, “but that this God can be addressed by man in reality, that man can say Thou to Him, that he can stand face to face with Him....Only Israel has understood, or rather actually lives, life as being addressed and answering, addressing and receiving answer....It taught, it showed, that the real God is the God who can be addressed because He is the God who addresses” (Ibid., p. 179).

A central goal of religion is to place a human being in relationship with the Eternal Thou. Yet, Buber notes with disappointment: “The historical religions have the tendency to become ends in themselves and, as it were, to put themselves in God’s place, and, in fact, there is nothing that is so apt to obscure the face of God as a religion” (A Believing Humanism, p. 115). The “establishment” has become so engaged in perpetuating its institutional existence that it has lost its central focus on God. “Real faith...begins when the dictionary is put down, when you are done with it” (The Way of Response, p. 61). The call of faith must be a call for immediacy. When faith is reduced to a set of formulae and rituals, it moves further from face to face relationship with God.

People are greatly in need of a liberating religious message. We yearn for relationship with our fellow human beings; we reach out for a spiritual direction to the Eternal Thou. Our dialogues are too often superficial, inauthentic. It is not easy to be a strong, whole and self-confident I; it is not easy to relate to others as genuine Thous; it is a challenge to reach out to the Eternal Thou. Yet, without these proper relationships, neither we nor our society can flourish properly.

Buber’s writings had a powerful impact on many thousands of readers, including the Swedish diplomat, Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961), who served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations, from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961. These two remarkable men met at the United Nations not long after Buber had

given a guest lecture at Princeton University in 1958. Hammarskjold had written to tell Buber “how strongly I have responded to what you write about our age of distrust.”

Buber described his meeting with the Secretary General of the U.N. where both men shared a deep concern about the future of humanity. Will the nations of the world actually unite in mutual respect and understanding? Or will they sink into a quagmire of antagonisms, political infighting...and ultimately, the possible destruction of humanity through catastrophic wars?

Buber noted: “We were both pained in the same way by the pseudo-speaking of representatives of states and groups of states who, permeated by a fundamental reciprocal mistrust, talked past one another out the windows. We both hoped, we both believed that....faithful representatives of the people, faithful to their mission, would enter into a genuine dialogue, a genuine dealing with one another out of which would emerge in all clarity the fact that the common interests of the peoples were stronger still than those which kept them in opposition to one another” (A Believing Humanism, pp. 57-59).

It was this dream that linked Buber and Hammarskjold—a dream that diplomats would focus on the needs of humanity as a whole, and not simply hew to their own self-serving agendas. Indeed, this was the founding dream of the United Nations: to be an organization that would bring together the nations of the world to work in common cause for the greater good of humanity.

In January 1959, Hammarskjold visited Buber in Jerusalem. Again, their conversation focused on the failure of world diplomacy to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual cooperation. There were some steps forward, to be sure; but by and large, the harmony of the nations had not come to pass. “Pseudo-speaking” and “fundamental reciprocal mistrust” continued unabated. The representatives continued to “talk past one another out the windows.”

Hammarskjold believed that Buber’s teachings on the importance of dialogue needed as wide a following as possible. After Hammarskjold was killed in a plane accident, Buber was informed that the Secretary General of the U. N. was working on a Swedish translation of I and Thou on the plane. His last thoughts were about dialogue, mutual understanding, sympathetic interrelationships among human beings.

Hammarskjold died in 1961. Buber died in 1965. Did their dreams for the United Nations and for humanity also die with them? Has the United Nations become a beacon of hope for genuine human dialogue? Do the diplomats work harmoniously for the good of humanity? It would appear that instead of being a bastion of human idealism, the United Nations has become a political battleground where the fires of hatred and bigotry burn brightly.

We justly lament the viciously unfair treatment of Israel at the U.N. We justly deplore the anti-Americanism that festers within the United Nations. But these ugly manifestations of anti-Israel and anti-American venom are symptoms of the real problem: the United Nations has become a central agency for hatred, political maneuvering, and international discord. It has not lived up to the ideals of its founders; it has betrayed the dreams of Buber and Hammarskjold; it has become a symbol of so much that is wrong in our world.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-teachings-martin-buber>

---

### **Chukas – Forever Faith**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

We read this week of the fateful incident known as Mei Merivah – the Waters of Strife, when Moshe hits the Well of Miriam to provide water for the nation. Throughout the forty years in the desert, the Well of Miriam had provided endless water. When Miriam passed away, the well stopped. The nation came to Moshe and Aharon crying out in thirst and demanding water. Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to the rock and tell it to give forth water. When Moshe and Aharon err, hitting the rock instead, G-d takes them to task saying that they did not believe in G-d to sanctify Him and therefore they will not lead the nation into the land of Israel.

At face value, Hashem's challenge to Moshe and Aharon is difficult to understand. Where did they display a lack of faith in G-d by mistakenly hitting the rock instead of speaking to it? The Yalkut Shimoni (Remez 764) brings a puzzling Medrash regarding this lack of faith. The Medrash says that Hashem was telling them that they should have learned to have faith from the story of Hagar. When Hagar was sent away from Avrohom's house with her young son Yishmael, she ran out of water and feared for his life. Hashem then miraculously provided her with a well in the desert. If Hashem provided a well for an individual in the merit of his father Avrohom, then how much more so would Hashem provide a well for the Jewish people who have the merits of all of the forefathers, the merit of their own acceptance of Torah and the merit of their mitzvos!

This Medrash seems to indicate that the lack of faith was a lack of trust in Hashem's kindness. They were concerned that Hashem would no longer provide water for the nation. This statement in and of itself is an important lesson for us. As human beings, we can always fall prey to being affected by the reality we see with our eyes, no matter what we know in our hearts. Moshe and Aharon have now been living with G-d's miraculous protection and love for His people for forty years, beginning with the plagues in Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea. G-d now tells them directly that He is going to continue to provide water. Yet, somewhere within them there was a concern that Hashem's kindness had run out. Yet, this Medrash is still puzzling. How does this explain why they hit the rock instead of speaking to it? If they were concerned that the miracle of the well would not continue, hitting the rock would not work either.

Perhaps this Medrash is teaching us the importance of equilibrium. As they came to provide water for the nation, they harbored within their psyches a slight concern for the nation's survival. This concern left them unsettled and inhibited their ability to properly handle the pressures of the moment and determine the proper course of action. It was because of this lack of equilibrium that they erred in judgement and hit the rock.

Faith and trust in G-d's kindness is a valuable tool in life. Beyond the obvious benefit of faith in enabling one to have the strength to do what one knows is right, faith enables one to maintain calm and stay focused knowing that Hashem will provide. This enables one to better judge and handle their challenges.

This Medrash also provides us with an insight into how we can develop this faith in G-d's kindness. Even though Moshe and Aharon had lived through forty years of miraculous sustenance, they are being told that they should have studied the story of Hagar. Every story of G-d's Providence carries its own message and can add a new depth to our appreciation of the depth of G-d's love and kindness.

No matter how much we have personally experienced, or how deeply we have developed our faith and trust in G-d's kindness, we can gain from remembering and studying the stories in the Torah, and the many stories that abound throughout history. The more different examples we hear, the deeper and more complete will be our understanding of G-d's endless love and kindness. The more complete our understanding, the greater will be our ability to maintain our equilibrium and to think clearly even in difficult situations.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

---

### Gratitude That Some Things Don't Change

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

Have you ever woke up in the morning and exclaimed, "Thank God the forces of gravity still work today and the universe didn't collapse in on itself." Or "I'm so grateful the laws of aerodynamics are not as unpredictable as the quantum state of electrons, which would cause planes to fall from the sky."

Change is a buzzword if not the buzzword of today and a sign of an exciting life. But I'm grateful that some things don't change.

Our parsha describes the laws of the red heifer as a "chok." "Chok" means immutable or permanent. Something not subject to floating whims and fancies. Psalms also employs the term "Chok" when describing the laws of nature in Psalms 148:5-6. "Praise God," say the Psalms, "For by his commandment he arranged the heavens and placed them as a Chok so they cannot move from their place."

Our greatest religious personalities join our most advanced scientific thinkers in knowing that the immutability of the laws of nature should not be taken for granted. It didn't have to be this way. I had a Rosh Yeshiva named Rabbi Yechiel Perr who expressed amazement that people don't pray for their lives when flying on an airplane. "How can you be comfortable knowing you're suspended in air just based on a few laws of physics?"

Our Torah and spiritual life are the same way. So much is based on our dynamic relationship with Hashem, but some things (like the laws of the red heifer) never change.

We owe it to ourselves to identify what those things are. Doing so can help us know what we can change so we can comfortably add the proper spice and variety that makes our relationship with God so beautiful.

Here's a hint. Gefilte fish, while a memorable Jewish delicacy, is not a chok. Changing your regular Shabbos aperitif can be an exciting culinary adventure. Matzoh on Passover though...

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rabbi Moshe Rube

P.S. This thought was inspired by someone who came up to me after the rally against anti-Semitism this week, to thank me for singing the classic "Hinei-Ma-Tov" tune. In some situations, it's good to treat some tunes as a "chok" -- especially the Golden Jewish Oldies.

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

---

### Rav Kook Torah Chukat: Speak to the Rock

What is the meaning of God's instruction to Moses to speak to the rock? Can rocks hear us?

The short answer is — yes! Nature and all of its laws are listening. They listen for the call of redemption. They yearn for the redemptive light that preceded the creation of the universe. When this unifying light is revealed, the world's divided factions become linked and bound to their underlying foundation.<sup>1</sup>

As Moses approached to speak to the rock, all of creation was listening. Tragically, instead of speaking, Moses hit the rock. The waters, meant to revive and nourish the people, instead became Mei Merivah — "Waters of Dispute," bringing conflict and discord into the world. With his impatience and anger, Moses introduced a framework of coercion and force into the world, thus debasing the universe. The world was no longer ready to listen in attentive quietude to the inner voice of the Infinite.

The paradigm shifted from speaking to striking, from receptive listening to coercive force.

#### A World That Listens

This tragic discord will be healed through the Divine spirit that flows within the wisdom of Israel. The flowing waters of Israel's wellspring — the Torah — will heal the discord of Mei Merivah. Every Jewish soul has a part in revealing this wisdom. It will arise powerfully, enabling the living word of God to penetrate all hearts. The return to patient communication will awaken the world's latent state of listening in all its splendor.

*"You have opened my ears... Then I said, 'Behold, I have come, with a scroll of a book written for me.'" (Ps. 40:7-8)*

We yearn for a world that listens with open ears, ears that are able to hear the inner call. We aspire for a world where our inner truth, the light of the Life of the worlds, is expressed, not through force and coercion, but through words and literature. "Behold, I have come, with a scroll of a book written for me."

The Tikunei Zohar identifies the staff which Moses used to redeem the Jewish people as a pen. "The staff of God" — that is the pen." Moses' staff, used to strike the rock, will be transformed into a tool of communication and dialogue. And the art of literature will flourish, redeemed from its waywardness.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemonah Kevatzim, book VII, section 28.)

**Footnote:**

1 "Those who rule over themselves and cleave to their Creator, utilizing the world only to aid them in serving the Creator — they uplift themselves and the universe with them.... It is like the statement of the Sages, that the rocks united together [to form a bed for Jacob], each one saying: Let the tzaddik rest his head on me." (Mesillat Yesharim, chap. 1)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/CHUKAT64.htm>

---

## Healing the Trauma of Loss (Chukat 5776)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

It took me two years to recover from the death of my father, of blessed memory. To this day, almost twenty years later, I am not sure why. He did not die suddenly or young. He was well into his eighties. In his last years he had to undergo five operations, each of which sapped his strength a little more. Besides which, as a rabbi, I had to officiate at funerals and comfort the bereaved. I knew what grief looked like.

The rabbis were critical of one who mourns too much too long.[1] They said that God himself says of such a person, "Are you more compassionate than I am?" Maimonides rules, "A person should not become excessively broken-hearted because of a person's death, as it says, 'Do not weep for the dead nor bemoan him' (Jer. 22:10). This means, 'Do not weep excessively.' For death is the way of the world, and one who grieves excessively at the way of the world is a fool."<sup>[2]</sup> With rare exceptions, the outer limit of grief in Jewish law is a year, not more.

Yet knowing these things did not help. We are not always masters of our emotions. Nor does comforting others prepare you for your own experience of loss. Jewish law regulates outward conduct not inward feeling, and when it speaks of feelings, like the commands to love and not to hate, halakhah generally translates this into behavioural terms, assuming, in the language of the Sefer ha-Hinukh, that "the heart follows the deed."<sup>[3]</sup>

I felt an existential black hole, an emptiness at the core of being. It deadened my sensations, leaving me unable to sleep or focus, as if life was happening at a great distance and as if I were a spectator watching a film out of focus with the sound turned off. The mood eventually passed but while it lasted I made some of the worst mistakes of my life.

I mention these things because they are the connecting thread of parshat Chukat. The most striking episode is the moment when the people complain about the lack of water. Moses does something wrong, and though God sends water from a rock, he also sentences Moses to an almost unbearable punishment: "Because you did not have sufficient faith in Me to sanctify Me before the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land I have given you."

The commentators debate exactly what he did wrong. Was it that he lost his temper with the people ("Listen now, you rebels")? That he hit the rock instead of speaking to it? That he made it seem as if it was not God but he and Aaron who were responsible for the water ("Shall we bring water out of this rock for you?")?

What is more puzzling still is why he lost control at that moment. He had faced the same problem before, but he had never lost his temper before. In Exodus 15 the Israelites at Marah complained that the water was undrinkable because it was bitter. In Exodus 17 at Massa-and-Meriva they complained that there was no water. God then told Moses to take his staff and hit the rock, and water flowed from it. So when in our parsha God tells Moses, "Take the staff ... and speak to the rock," it was surely a forgivable mistake to assume that God meant him also to hit it. That is what he had said last

time. Moses was following precedent. And if God did not mean him to hit the rock, why did he command him to take his staff?

What is even harder to understand is the order of events. God had already told Moses exactly what to do. Gather the people. Speak to the rock, and water will flow. This was before Moses made his ill-tempered speech, beginning, "Listen, now you rebels." It is understandable if you lose your composure when you are faced with a problem that seems insoluble. This had happened to Moses earlier when the people complained about the lack of meat. But it makes no sense at all to do so when God has already told you, "Speak to the rock ... It will pour forth its water, and you will bring water out of the rock for them, and so you will give the community and their livestock water to drink." Moses had received the solution. Why then was he so agitated about the problem?

Only after I lost my father did I understand the passage. What had happened immediately before? The first verse of the chapter states: "The people stopped at Kadesh. There, Miriam died and was buried." Only then does it state that the people had no water. An ancient tradition explains that the people had hitherto been blessed by a miraculous source of water in the merit of Miriam. When she died, the water ceased.

However it seems to me that the deeper connection lies not between the death of Miriam and the lack of water but between her death and Moses' loss of emotional equilibrium. Miriam was his elder sister. She had watched over his fate when, as a baby, he had been placed in a basket and floated down the Nile. She had had the courage and enterprise to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and suggest that he be nursed by a Hebrew, thus reuniting Moses and his mother and ensuring that he grew up knowing who he was and to which people he belonged. He owed his sense of identity to her. Without Miriam, he could never have become the human face of God to the Israelites, law-giver, liberator and prophet. Losing her, he not only lost his sister. He lost the human foundation of his life.

Bereaved, you lose control of your emotions. You find yourself angry when the situation calls for calm. You hit when you should speak, and you speak when you should be silent. Even when God has told you what to do, you are only half-listening. You hear the words but they do not fully enter your mind. Maimonides asks the question, how was it that Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive. He answers, because he was in a state of grief, and the Shekhinah does not enter us when we are in a state of grief.<sup>[4]</sup> Moses at the rock was not so much a prophet as a man who had just lost his sister. He was inconsolable and not in control. He was the greatest of the prophets. But he was also human, rarely more so than here.

Our parsha is about mortality. That is the point. God is eternal, we are ephemeral. As we say in the Unetaneh tokef prayer on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we are "a fragment of pottery, a blade of grass, a flower that fades, a shadow, a cloud, a breath of wind." We are dust and to dust we return, but God is life forever.

At one level, Moses-at-the-rock is a story about sin and punishment: "Because you did not have sufficient faith in me to sanctify Me ... therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land I have given you." We may not be sure what the sin exactly was, or why it merited so severe a punishment, but at least we know the ball-park, the territory to which the story belongs.

Nonetheless it seems to me that – here as in so many other places in the Torah – there is a story beneath the story, and it is a different one altogether. Chukat is about death, loss and bereavement. Miriam dies. Aaron and Moses are told they will not live to enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies, and the people mourn for him for thirty days. Together they constituted the greatest leadership team the Jewish people has ever known, Moses the supreme prophet, Aaron the first High Priest, and Miriam perhaps the greatest of them all.<sup>[5]</sup> What the parsha is telling us is that for each of us there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter. "It is not for you to complete the task." Even the greatest are mortal.

That is why the parsha begins with the ritual of the Red Heifer, whose ashes, mixed with the ash of cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool and dissolved in "living water," are sprinkled over one who has been in contact with the dead so that they may enter the Sanctuary.

This is one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism. Death defiles. For most religions throughout history, life-after-death has proved more real than life itself. That is where the gods live, thought the Egyptians. That is where our ancestors are alive, believed the Greeks and Romans and many primitive tribes. That is where you find justice, thought many Christians. That is where you find paradise, thought many Muslims.

Life after death and the resurrection of the dead are fundamental, non-negotiable principles of Jewish faith, but Tanakh is conspicuously quiet about them. It is focused on finding God in this life, on this planet, notwithstanding our mortality. "The dead do not praise God," says the Psalm. God is to be found in life itself with all its hazards and dangers, bereavements and grief. We may be no more than "dust and ashes", as Abraham said, but life itself is a never-ending stream, "living water", and it is this that the rite of the Red Heifer symbolises.

With great subtlety the Torah mixes law and narrative together – the law before the narrative because God provides the cure before the disease. Miriam dies. Moses and Aaron are overwhelmed with grief. Moses, for a moment, loses control, and he and Aaron are reminded that they too are mortal and will die before entering the land. Yet this is, as Maimonides said, "the way of the world". We are embodied souls. We are flesh and blood. We grow old. We lose those we love. Outwardly we struggle to maintain our composure but inwardly we weep. Yet life goes on, and what we began, others will continue.

Those we loved and lost live on in us, as we will live on in those we love. For love is as strong as death,[6] and the good we do never dies.[7]

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] Moed Katan 27b.

[2] Maimonides, Hilchot Avel 13:11.

[3] Sefer ha-Hinnuch, command 16.

[4] Maimonides, Eight Chapters, ch. 7, based on Pesachim 117a.

[5] There are many midrashim on this theme about Miriam's faith, courage and foresight.

[6] Shir ha-Shirim 8:6.

[7] See Mishlei 10:2, 11:4.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See

<https://rabbisacks.org/healing-trauma-loss/>

---

### **Be Like the Disciples of Aaron: Reflections on Parshas Chukas**

By Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer\* © Chabad 2021

Nearing the end of the forty years in the desert, both Miriam and Aaron passed away, as explained in this week's parsha, parshas Chukas.

The Torah relates that the entire Jewish people mourned the death of Aaron. What was it about Aaron that made him so beloved by the Jewish people?

In chapter one of Pirkei Avos, the Ethics of our Fathers, the famed Hillel says, "Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and drawing them to the Torah" (P.A. 1:12).

Hillel, a halachic giant prominently discussed in the Talmud, was, like Aaron, known for his kindness and compassion. Once a convert brazenly asked Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Unfazed, Hillel easily answered, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Now, go and learn".

It is no wonder why Hillel charged his students to "be like the disciples of Aaron". Aaron was the quintessential peace maker, particularly in regards to shalom bayis, the relationship between husband and wife.

So important is shalom bayis in Judaism, that Hashem, Himself, modified Sarah's words when relaying them to Avraham to preserve their marital bond. When Hashem told Sarah she would have a child, she laughed and said, "But my husband is old!" When Hashem relayed this to Avraham, however, he quoted Sarah as saying, "But I am old!" sparing Avraham potential hurt from Sarah's words (Bereshis 18: 12-13).

In his time, Aaron was not above using this same tactic to bring peace not only between husbands and wives but also among quarreling friends. He would go to one party and say how sorry the other was. Then he would go to the other party and say the same. By the time the two friends met up again, they peacefully resumed their relationship.

That Aaron was the Kohen Gadol made his love of peace and kindness even more endearing to the Jewish people. Since he held such a lofty position, people felt special when he attended to them, thinking, "I must, indeed, be worthy if the Kohen Gadol took time out of his day for me!"

Aaron's compassion did not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. In fact, when praising Aaron in Pirkei Avos, Hillel uses an interesting expression, which alludes to this. Rather than saying the obvious, that Aaron had ahavas yisroel, love for a fellow Jew, Hillel wrote that Aaron had ahavas habreios, love for the "creatures". This can be understood that Aaron loved even those ruled by their animalistic natures.

Through his kindness and his living example, Aaron drew those he came in contact with closer to Hashem and the Torah.

It's perhaps not a coincidence that the parsha that speaks of Aaron's kindness and the Jewish people's love for him, falls out each year near the 3rd day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, the yahrzeit of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Surely through the thousands of stories told of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's ahavas yisroel and ahavas habreios, we can see that the Rebbe, indeed, was a disciple of Aaron. The Rebbe never turned away a single soul, Jew or Gentile, righteous or "wicked". Through his emissaries around the world and his many mitzva campaigns, the number of people the Rebbe brought closer to the Torah is immeasurable.

I'll end with a short story. Once there was a boy around age 8, who was a living terror. He rebelled in school, thumbed his nose at his parents, and respected no one. Basically, he acted like an unruly teenager at age 8! His frantic mother brought the boy to the Rebbe hoping that the Rebbe could straighten her son out.

The boy was not at all thrilled to be sent to yet ANOTHER rabbi in order to be told of the errors of his ways. He walked into the Rebbe's room, behind his mother, with his arms crossed over his chest and a scowl on his face.

The Rebbe addressed the boy, kindly. He inquired if the boy did well in school. The boy shouted back, "No!" Next the Rebbe asked the boy if he did his homework. Again, the boy's angry response was, "No!" Lastly, the Rebbe asked the boy if he listened to his parents. The boy, waiting for the upcoming lecture on his behavior again shouted, "No!"

The Rebbe stood up, smiled widely at the boy's mother, and said excitedly, "Emes! Emes!" Truth! Truth! The boy speaks the truth!

That boy, now in his late 60s, remembers his encounter with the Rebbe vividly. It was the first time that someone saw him for what he was, warts and all, and found reason to praise him. Like our forefather Aaron, that was the way of the Rebbe, to see the good in all people.

May we soon merit to again sit at the feet of these tzaddikim through the coming of Moshiach and the ushering in of an Era of universal peace and fellowship between all living beings.

[https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco\\_cdo/aid/5165143/jewish/Chukas.htm](https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5165143/jewish/Chukas.htm)

## Waters of Strife: The Price of Leadership

By Yanki Tauber\* © Chabad 2021

One of the most puzzling passages in the Torah is the story of the Waters of Strife, in the wake of which G d decreed that Moses would die in the desert and would not enter the Land of Israel.

A hundred generations of Torah scholars, beginning with Moses himself and continuing with the sages of the Midrash, the biblical commentaries and the chassidic masters, struggle with this enigmatic chapter. As we speak, someone is writing a “Parshah piece” that searches for some explanation of the event, or at least a lesson to be derived from it.

But first the facts (as related in Numbers 20:1–13):

*After traveling for forty years in the wilderness, the people of Israel arrive in Kadesh in the Zin Desert, on the border of the Holy Land. There is no water, the people are thirsty, and as they are wont to do in similar circumstances, they complain to Moses. It is not a pretty sight. “If only we had died,” they rage, “when our brethren died before G d! Why have you brought the congregation of G d to this desert, to die there, we and our cattle? Why have you taken us out of Egypt—to bring us to this evil place . . . ?”*

Moses calls on G d, who instructs him to “take the staff, and gather the people, you and Aaron your brother. You shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will give its water.” When all are assembled before the rock, Moses addresses the people: “Listen, rebellious ones! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” Moses raises his hand and strikes the rock twice with his staff. Water gushes forth, and the people and their cattle drink.

Whereupon G d says to Moses and Aaron: “Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation into the land I have given them.”

What did Moses do wrong? What was the sin that warranted such a devastating punishment?

The commentaries search the text for clues. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105) points out that G d instructed Moses to speak to the rock, while Moses struck it. Thus, he failed to “sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel” (extracting water by speaking would have been a greater miracle).

Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135–1204) has a different explanation: Moses’ failing was that he got angry and spoke harshly to the people (his “Listen, you troublemakers!” speech).

(The chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740–1810) has an interesting insight here: Rashi’s and Maimonides’ explanations, says the Berditchever, are two sides of the same coin. A tzaddik is not only a leader of his people, but also the master of his environment. These two roles are intertwined, the latter deriving from the former. If a leader’s relationship with his people is loving and harmonious, then the physical world, too, willingly yields its resources to the furtherance of their goals. But if his influence is achieved through harsh words of rebuke, then he will find it necessary to do battle with nature at every turn, and forcefully impose his will on the physical world.)

Nachmanides (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–1270) finds difficulty with both explanations. If Moses wasn’t supposed to strike the rock, he argues, why did G d tell him to take along his staff? The Torah repeats this fact, further emphasizing that “Moses took along the staff from the presence of G d, as He had commanded him.” In light of G d’s instructions to Moses on a previous occasion to extract water from a rock by striking it (see Exodus 17:6), was it not reasonable for Moses to assume that the staff was to serve a similar function in this case? (Unless G d was setting him up for this—but more on that later.) As for Maimonides’ explanation, there were other instances in which the Torah tells us (more explicitly than in this case) that Moses got angry, and for apparently less justification. If no punishment was decreed in those cases, why now?

Nachmanides offers his explanation: Moses erred in saying to the people, “Shall we then bring forth water for you from this rock?”—words that can be seen as implying that extracting water from a rock is something that Moses, rather than G d, does. The moment a leader assumes an identity of his own, and his accomplishments are attributed to him personally—the moment he comes to embody anything other than his people’s collective identity and their relationship

with G d—he has failed in his role. (Nachmanides finds support for his explanation in G d's opening words to Moses, "Because you did not believe in Me . . ." — implying that this was a failure of faith rather than a lapse of obedience or a surrender to anger.)

But there is one common denominator in these and the numerous other explanations offered by the commentaries: the implication that whatever the problem was, it wasn't really the problem. Basically, G d is getting Moses on a technicality. In his arguments with G d, Moses senses this, in effect saying to G d: "You set me up!"

The text supports his complaint. Forty years earlier there occurred the incident of the spies, in which the generation that came out of Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai revealed themselves to be unwilling and unable to progress to the next stage of G d's plan—to enter and take possession of the Holy Land. At that time, the Torah recounts, G d decreed that the entire generation (all males above the age of 20) would die out in the desert. With the sole exception of two men. "Except for Caleb the son of Yefuneh and Joshua the son of Nun," the two spies who resisted the plot of their ten colleagues (Numbers 14:30).

Moses, who craved to enter the Holy Land with every fiber of his being, was not guilty of the sin of the spies, so some other pretext had to be found. Since "with the righteous, G d is exacting to a hairsbreadth," it wasn't impossible to find a pretext. But G d had already determined 40 years earlier that the entire generation—Moses and Aaron included—would not enter the Land. "This is a plot that you contrived against me," the Midrash quotes Moses saying to the Almighty.

Indeed, why? If Moses was innocent of his generation's sin, why was it decreed that he share their fate? There is a poignant Midrash that offers the following parable:

A shepherd was given the king's flock to feed and care for, but the flock was lost. When the shepherd sought to enter the royal palace, the king refused him entry. "When the flock that was entrusted to you is recovered, you, too, will be admitted."

The original plan was that the 600,000 whom Moses took out of Egypt should enter the Land. But that generation remained in the desert. You are their leader, said G d to Moses. Their fate is your fate.

This message is implicit in G d's words to Moses immediately following his striking of the rock: ". . . therefore, you will not bring this congregation into the land I have given them." From this the Midrash deduces: "This congregation" you will not bring in; that congregation you will. "This congregation"—the generation whom Moses confronted at the rock—was not Moses' generation. His generation were buried in the desert.

When they will enter the Land, G d is saying to Moses—and they will, when the final redemption will redeem all generations of history—you will lead them in.

\* Former editor of Chabad.org.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/142432/jewish/Waters-of-Strife.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/142432/jewish/Waters-of-Strife.htm)

---

## Chukat: Walk on the King's Road

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

Moses asked the king of Edom to allow the Jewish people to pass through his land on the way to the Land of Israel. The Edomites refused, so Moses led the people southward, detouring around their territory.

### The Soul is Never in Exile

In his message to the king of Edom, Moses said,

*"We will walk along the king's road, turning neither to the right nor to the left until we have passed through your territory." (Numbers 20:17)*

Moses' message to the Edomite king is the same message that our Divine souls must convey to the material world so long as we are still in exile:

*"True, we Jews are physically the same as all people; we have physical needs that must be met by working and living in the physical world. Nonetheless, we will not let this fact obscure our true purpose in life: to fulfill our Divine mission of elevating and refining physicality. We will walk along our Divine King's road; we will not deviate from G-d's ways, either to the right or to the left!"*

By remaining true to both our inner selves and to our Divine mission, we will merit witnessing the ultimate redemption of the world and its transformation into G-d's true home.

\* *From Daily Wisdom #1*

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society  
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

---

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to [AfisherADS@Yahoo.com](mailto:AfisherADS@Yahoo.com). The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available.

#### Covenant and Conversation

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

#### Miriam, Moses' Friend

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20:10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (Num. 20:12)

The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I proposed in an earlier Covenant & Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17:6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some, but it tasted bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet. (Ex. 15:22-26)

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained. Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what he should do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17:1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why now on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different? The answer is stated

explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20:1)

Immediately after this we read: "Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron." A famous Talmudic passage[1] explains that it was in Miriam's merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam's death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses' response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses' own mother Yocheved. Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Num. 12:1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest prayer on record – five Hebrew words – "Please, God, heal her now." Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week's parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on their own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18:18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him; (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate; and (3) a soulmate or soulmates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, "The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well." [2]

Leaders need confidants, people who "will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations

spill back into the work arena.” A confidant cares about you more than about the issues. They lift you when you are low, and gently bring you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, “Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through.”[3]

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship.[4] He calls it the “friendship of trust” [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom “you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded,” hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses’ early life suggests that Miriam was Moses’ “trusted friend,” his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God Himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right, she was also one of her brother’s sources of strength.

Even the greatest cannot lead alone.

[1] Taanit 9a.

[2] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, 227.

[3] Ibid., 200.

[4] Maimonides, *Commentary to Mishnah Avot 1:6*.

### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

“God spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘This is the ordinance (chukat) of the Torah which God has commanded, saying, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring a completely red heifer, which has no blemish, and which has never had a yoke on it’’ [Num. 19:1-2].

Is it more important to devote oneself to personal, spiritual development or to work for the good of the nation? I believe that a good argument can be made that commitment to the nation takes priority over commitment to one’s own spiritual needs. And one such source is a Midrash (Shmot Rabah, Chap. 2:80), which links two kinds of animal slaughterings (not by blood, but by a common word—chukat). The Midrash has in mind the paschal lamb sacrifice of Exodus and the paradoxical ritual of the red heifer, (purifying the defiled, but defiling all those involved in its preparation), discussed in this week’s portion, Chukat, and quoted above.

In regard to the paschal sacrifice, the same word, chukat, appears. “This is the ordinance (chukat) of the pesach, no stranger shall eat of it” (Exodus 12:43).

Any law in the Torah called ‘chok’ has no rational explanation. Essentially a ‘chok’ is different from those commandments which are universally understood as ‘rational natural laws,’ like prohibitions against stealing, killing, etc. Rational laws are the key to a society’s survival, but a ‘chok’ is geared to the Jewish nation, religious ritual and is often mysterious, and beyond reason.

When it comes to the ‘chukim’ of the paschal lamb and the red heifer, their interpretation by the Midrash, focuses on two distinct approaches to Jewish life and practice.

Interpreting the verse, “May my heart be wholehearted with your statutes (chukim) in order that I not be ashamed,” (Psalms 119:80), the Midrash explains that this refers to the ordinance (‘chok’) of the paschal sacrifice and the ordinance (‘chok’) of the red heifer. Concerning the first we read, ‘zot chukat hapesach,’ (Ex. 12:43), and concerning the second we read ‘zot chukat haTorah’ (Num. 19:2). Once on a track of linking the two statutes (choks), the Midrash ponders which of the two is the greater and more important ordinance?

The analysis takes on the form of an analogy. If two identical women go out walking, how do we know which of the two is greater? Explains the Midrash that if one of the women is accompanying the other, is following behind the other, the one who is in front is the greater figure. Paralleling the case of the identical women, the Midrash guides us back to the case of the identical ‘chukim’ and the original question. Which is greater, the paschal sacrifice or the red heifer? Obviously, it is the one which is accompanied by the other, the one which is leading the other; and although they appear to be similar in stature, the red heifer always accompanies the paschal lamb, following behind. Before we can eat from the paschal sacrifice we must first be purified, and it’s the red heifer which provides the means of ritual purity, which must be activated before we are enabled to participate in the paschal sacrifice.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of blessed memory, my rebbe and mentor, takes this Midrashic conception a step further. The red heifer enables a person to participate in ritual ceremony—those commandments which link the individual with God. Thus the red heifer represents individual, spiritual purity.

On the other hand, the paschal sacrifice represents the national commitment of the Jewish people. The commandment to bring the ‘pesach’ was given just when we emerged as a nation, struggling to escape the claw of slavery. When the Torah commands the Jewish

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

people to bring the paschal sacrifice, it tells us, in the very same verse, that a non-Jew is forbidden to eat of it. Any male who does not carry the indelible mark of being a Jew, circumcision, cannot join in. The entire character of the paschal sacrifice demonstrates how it’s not for individuals, how it may not be eaten by an individual, but must rather be eaten within a familial and national context. And since every single Jew in the community of Israel was commanded to take part, this ritual united every Jew to his fellow Jew.

If the red heifer is about individual ritual and religious purity, and the paschal sacrifice is about national commitment, it becomes indubitably clear that when one’s own spiritual development comes into conflict with a national issue, then our national commitment must come first; the national commitment is the purpose for the spiritual cleansing.

The paschal sacrifice is the goal, the red heifer is the means. Indeed, there is even a halacha which states that if the whole community is ritually impure, and if a red heifer can’t be found, the people are permitted nevertheless to participate in the paschal sacrifice, symbolizing to the nation that our national unity and wellbeing transcends individual purity.

Consequently, we see how one’s own spiritual development is only a means to the communal experience of the nation. Klal Yisrael comes first.

If we look at prayer, we see how its observance in Jewish practice teaches us something unique about our priorities. More often than not, prayer is an occasion when an individual trembles before God, an individual beseeches, an individual hopes. But for Jews, prayer is closely linked to a public moment. Individual prayer is consigned to a lower spiritual potential than when a group of at least ten, a minyan, pray together and that minyan is representative and symbolic of the Jewish nation. And, indeed, even when we pray alone, our prayer is always in plural, for the entire nation: “heal us, O God, so that we may be healed; see our affliction; restore Jerusalem to us....”

Alone, many of the most important prayers cannot be said. This doesn’t mean that in Judaism an individual’s self-realization is always sacrificed for the greater good of the whole. Rather, a dialectic and a tension exists between being a we-oriented people or an I-oriented people. At times, one must zealously, and even selfishly, prepare oneself for ultimate greater service to the Jewish community by shutting out the needs of the world, but the overriding goal of the individual must be to contribute to the needs of the nation so that we may indeed be a kingdom of priest-teachers to perfect the world.

**The Person in the Parsha**  
**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

**Discovering Our Mortality**

It was at a house of mourning, and she was saying something that I had heard many times before. In fact, I had said it myself when I was sitting shiva for my own mother.

She is a friend of long-standing, and a member of my former congregation. I hope that I am not being unchivalrous by describing her as late middle-aged. She had just lost her own mother, having lost her father several years ago.

"It is not just that I feel orphaned," she said. "It is that I feel vulnerable. As long as even one of my parents was alive, it was as if there was a kind of buffer between me and death. Now that they are both gone, it begins to feel that it is my turn. No one to protect me. I face the malach hamavet (angel of death) directly, face to face, head on."

We all deny our mortality, and as long as the older generation is around we feel that they, and not we, are the ones on death's frontlines. We are insulated from death's claws by them. It is their turn and not yet ours. But once we lose our own parents, we can no longer deny our mortality. It is our turn.

There is an excellent book by my esteemed colleague, Rabbi Marc Angel, entitled *The Orphaned Adult*. I often recommend this book to mourners, particularly those who are fortunate to have entered adulthood, even late middle age, with both parents alive, and experience their deaths only after having long ago reached adulthood. Their feelings are unique and very different from those who experienced the trauma of a parent's death at an earlier stage of life. Rabbi Angel also describes this sudden sense of mortality, of vulnerability. With the death of parents, these older people finally must surrender their comfortable denial of their own inevitable demise.

In this week's portion, Chukat, we read of the death of two beloved leaders of the Jewish people, Miriam and Aaron. Both of them were parent figures, albeit not actual parents, of the Jews in the years of their wandering in the wilderness. Instructively, a period of vulnerability ensues immediately upon their respective deaths.

We read first of Miriam's death. "The Israelites arrived at the wilderness of Zin... Miriam died there and was buried there." And then, immediately, "The community was without water." (Numbers 20:1-2)

As long as Miriam was alive, she was a source of water, a source of life. While she was alive, the be'er Miriam (well of Miriam) provided water for the people. With her death, and in her case, the well immediately dried up, the water ceased, and the people were vulnerable.

Without "mother" Miriam, death by thirst threatened the people.

Soon afterwards, we read, "...and Aaron died there on the summit of the mountain." And then, this time not immediately but after thirty days of mourning, "When the Canaanite king of Arad heard... he engaged Israel in battle and took some of them captive..." (Numbers 20:28-29 and 21:1) "Father" Aaron died, and peace and security were shattered. War and that worst of fates, captivity, reared their ugly heads.

It seems that it is more than mere psychological reality that with the passing of its leaders, a nation faces calamity. With the death of ones parents, one's own well being is threatened. No wonder that when the young sister-in-law of the 18th century sage Rabbi Yonasan Eibshitz lost her husband, the Rabbi cautioned her, in a letter which has come down to us, to take special care of her own physical well being and the health of her young children. As our sages put it in the Talmud, "When one member of a group perishes, the entire group needs to be anxious."

How apt are the words of the Psalmist, "When my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will take me in" (Psalms 27:10). When our parents "abandon" us and leave this world, we are bereft in many ways, and our positions in life become precarious. We need God at those moments, and turn to Him, confident that He will "take us in."

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**An Answer for Which I Waited Over Fifty Years**

I finally found an answer to something that has been bothering me for over fifty years! When I was in the eighth or ninth grade, our Hebrew teacher assigned us a term paper. The class members were supposed to summarize the opinions of a list of commentaries as to the nature of the sin of Mei Merivah. I believe there were over twenty different explanations as to what Moshe Rabbeinu did wrong at Mei Merivah. My assignment was to research the opinion of Rav Yosef Albo in his Sefer Halkrim.

Rav Yosef Albo's opinion is as follows: Moshe Rabbeinu faced a crisis: His sister Miriam just died. The Rock was no longer giving water. The people were crying, "We are going to die of thirst." What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? He went to ask a 'shaylah' to the Ribono shel Olam – "What should I do?" The Ribono shel Olam told him to speak to the Rock. Moshe Rabbeinu hit the Rock. According to some commentaries, that was the sin. The Sefer Halkrim has another opinion.

Rav Yosef Albo says that Moshe Rabbeinu had a golden opportunity here. There was no water. He should have taken the bull by the horn. He should have gone over to the Rock and said: "Rock – Give water!" Why should he have

**Likutei Divrei Torah**

thought that would work? Because of the principle that "A Righteous person decrees and the Holy One Blessed Be He will fulfill his decree." There is a rule "Tzadik gozer, v'HaKadosh Baruch Hu Mekayem." Eliyahu HaNavi did this. He decreed that fire come down from heaven and consume his offering. Did he ask G-d beforehand? No. He did it on his own. Yehoshua bin Nun said, "Sun in Givon stand still, and the moon over the Valley of Ayalon". He did not ask for advice or permission from the Almighty beforehand. He decreed and the Almighty fulfilled the Tzadik's decree. According to the Sefer Halkrim, that was the sin of Moshe Rabbeinu. He had the opportunity to sanctify G-d's Name by showing that the Almighty fulfills the decree of the Tzadik. He did not take advantage of this opportunity. In effect, that is a desecration of G-d's Name.

It always bothered me—that is a Chillul Hashem? Moshe Rabbeinu—if you look at his record—never did anything on his own. He did not bring the Plague of Blood on his own, he did not bring the Plague of Frogs on his own, and he did not turn his staff into a snake on his own. Everything Moshe Rabbeinu did was always based on the Command of G-d. So, what is the complaint here? Moshe could answer back, "That is not the way I operate. That is not my modus operandi. My modus operandi is that I ask the Ribono shel Olam: What should I do? The Ribono shel Olam always tells me what to do."

This question has bothered me for fifty years! Not so many things have bothered me for fifty years. This year, I found a Meshech Chochma that explains the deeper intent of this Sefer Halkrim. The Meshech Chochma asks: Why in fact did Moshe Rabbeinu never perform miracles on his own? There are Biblical figures who did miracles on their own, such as Yehoshua and Eliyahu. There are Talmudic figures who did miracles on their own, such as Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who put his heel on the hole of the snake. There are such stories throughout the Talmud! Moshe Rabbeinu never did anything on his own.

The Meshech Chochma explains that this was because Moshe Rabbeinu was different than every other prophet. When every other prophet received their prophecy from the Almighty, they literally fell into a trance. They lost bodily control. They were no longer in charge. So, when the Navi said something, everyone knew that it is not the Navi talking, it is G-d talking. The person could be lying on the floor having convulsions. He was not in charge—he was a conduit.

On the other hand, Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy was "Aspaklaria haMeira". He spoke "mouth to mouth" with the Almighty as a person talks to his friend. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu was afraid that if he would dare to "call the shots on his own," he might be deified. He was afraid that people would make

him into a god. By the other prophets, it was obvious they were not in control. Moshe Rabbeinu was in control, so he never ever did anything on his own, lest the people say, “He is G-d!” (We know that such things have happened in history.) Therefore, he did not act independently.

There is only one time in Moshe Rabbeinu’s career that he “took the law into his own hands” and acted on his own. That was in last week’s Parsha. Korach challenged Moshe Rabbeinu, “the entire congregation is holy, why do you take it upon yourselves to rule over the congregation of Hashem?” There, without asking the Ribono shel Olam, without seeking guidance from Above, Moshe Rabbeinu proclaimed, “If like all other men these men die, G-d has not sent me...” He proclaimed on his own “I am going to make a miracle. These people are going to die an unnatural death. The ground is going to open up and swallow them.”

Here he deviated from his methodology. Why? The Meshech Chochma says it was because at the time of Korach’s rebellion, there was no fear that the people would deify Moshe. On the contrary, he was being attacked, “Who are you? You are no better than anyone else!” No one could be accused of harboring thoughts that Moshe was a god when they were proclaiming that he had no better status than the rest of the nation.

Here Moshe was prepared to say, “Okay, I will show you! I am going to make a miracle on my own to prove that what you claim is incorrect.” That was Parshas Korach. However, next is Parshas Chukas and the people now realize that Moshe can take the law into his own hands and can change nature by his own decree. Suddenly, Miriam dies and there is no water, people are in the desert dying of thirst and they say to Moshe Rabbeinu, “We need water.” Moshe’s response is, “Nu, I need to ask the Ribono shel Olam what to do.” The people became disillusioned. “Oh, is that so? Last week in Parshas Korach when your honor was on the line, you did not ask any questions. You were concerned about your own kavod, so you made a miracle on the spot! Now when we are all thirsty, you suddenly need to stall and ask the Ribono shel Olam? There was a popular complaint against Moshe Rabbeinu.

That is what the Sefer Halkrim means that this was a Chillul Hashem. “Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify my Name before the Children of Israel.” Just like by Korach, when your honor was on the line, you took nature into your own hands and made an open miracle, now that we are suffering and dying of thirst, you hold back your power... This, says the Sefer Halkrim, was the complaint and was a desecration of G-d’s Name, for which Moshe was punished.

## Dvar Torah

### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Some of the greatest blessings are wrapped up in a curse. An example of this can be found in Parshat Chukat. The Torah tells us how Hashem had sent a plague of fiery serpents among the people. The nation called to Hashem for mercy and in reply he said to Moshe, “Place a fiery serpent at the top of a pole, “vhaya im hashach hanachash et ish,” – “and it shall come to pass if any person had been bitten by a snake,” – “vihibit el nachash hanechoshet vechai” – “that person should just look at the fiery serpent on the pole and he would live.”

Notice that this statement starts with the word, “vhaya,” and there’s an alternative word in Tanach which is, “vayehi” and they mean the same thing.

According to the Gemarra in Masechet Megila, a statement starts with vayehi when it introduces bad news. However if a statement starts with vhaya, according to the Midrash in Bereishit Rabba, that’s a sign that good news will follow.

So surely this was a ‘vayehi’ moment and not a ‘vhaya’ scenario? Somebody had been bitten. The person’s life was in danger. Others around them had died. And yet the Torah says, “vhaya”?

The Meshech Chochma explains beautifully. He points out that just before this there is another ‘vhaya’: “vhaya kol hanashuch vra’ah otot v’chai.” This would follow for every person who had been bitten.

The Meshech Chochma says, this includes even somebody who was already ill and now on top of this a snake had bitten them. So if somebody were suffering from a terminal illness and during the course of that illness they were bitten, they had only to look at the snake on the pole and they would be cleared of their entire illness. They had a total refuah shleimah. What started out to be a double plague for them ended up opening the door to them becoming fully healed.

And so it is often in life. We see what for us appears to be a ‘vayehi moment’. We are full of dread and yet, in reality, it provides a great opportunity, good things follow. And on the contrary, sometimes we appear to be facing a ‘vhaya scenario’ where everything looks wonderful, but actually, there is a lot that we should be concerned about.

And that is why in our Rosh Chodesh bentsching at the beginning of every month we pray to Hashem: please give us “chayim sheyimalu mishalot libenu letova” – we add the word ‘letova’ for good. Please God, answer all of our prayers for the good. Don’t give us all that we ask for because sometimes we might be praying for the wrong thing. Please

## Likutei Divrei Torah

channel our prayers in the right direction so that what we ask for will always be a blessing, recognising that sometimes the best of blessings are wrapped up in a curse.

### OTS Dvar Torah

#### The Red Heifer

#### Rabbanit Naama Frankel

We’re in the Book of Numbers, and the Jewish people are closer than ever to the entrance to the Land of Israel. With immense excitement, they stand in formation, according to their flags and tribes – for “... at Hashem’s command shall they travel, and at Hashem’s command shall they camp.” They are moments away from entering the land... but it was not to be. Like any other maturation process, all the more so when an entire nation is maturing... there are crises. The nation’s faith has fractured, and those fractures must heal slowly.

Inferno. Greed. Spies. Korach. Complaints. Bitterness. Great difficulty...

Some commentators would claim that a “short circuit” had occurred in the people’s faith in Moshe, and in their faith in Hashem.

Others would say that suddenly, a certain understanding had set in: that everything depended on the people, and now, the people were responsible for building and leading. The people must fight and work diligently... This understanding, which isn’t easy to digest, also leads to crisis.

The first two years in the desert take up the first ten chapters of the Book of Numbers. Suddenly, when we reach chapter 20, we skip forward to the fortieth year. Thirty-eight years have gone by, and we haven’t a clue about what happened during that time. All we know is that the generation that had been slaves in Egypt would perish in the desert, and that a new generation would rise up.

Parashat Chukat occurs between the second and the fortieth year, with the command of the red heifer. When we reach this point, we find a different generation. Unlike the previous one, which was constantly skeptical, this generation had started believing in itself. It’s a generation that was going through a process, and grieving the loss of its leaders, Aaron and Miriam, moved by a profound recognition of who these personalities were for them. It’s a generation of brave warriors, one that understands that it holds the keys to its future. It fights King Sichon. It’s a generation that sinned, is punished, and takes responsibility for its actions through the “copper snake”.

Let’s take a moment to understand why the passages on the red heifer are located directly between these two generations.

Verse 2 of chapter 19 of the Book of Numbers states the following: “This is the ritual law that Hashem has commanded: Instruct the Israelite

people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid."

This commandment is well-known. We are to take a red heifer, burn it, and use its ashes to produce a liquid that would purify an individual of the greatest impurity of all. The impurity incurred by coming into contact with a corpse.

We could argue that the reason this subject is located at this point in the text is that in Parashat Korach, which we read last week, we read of halachot meant to fortify our "safeguarding of the Tabernacle", and the commandment of the red heifer is concerned with safeguarding the purity of the Tabernacle.

Another possibility is to regard this passage as an introduction to future chapters, in which the nation becomes impure due to coming into contact with corpses, before entering the Land of Israel, after the death of Miriam and Aaron, and the imminent wars of conquest that could cause them to touch dead bodies.

We might also argue that both possibilities are correct, and that this parasha serves a bridge between the impurity of the dead bodies of those who left Egypt, who died in the desert, and the dead of the future, which we will encounter during the fortieth year. The commandments concerning the red heifer, which teach us how to purify ourselves of the impurity of death and restore the purity of life, lift us out of this reality and instill hope, moments before we enter the land.

Not all commandments merit this special appellation – "This is the ritual law...". If we revisit the commandment itself, we would immediately recall the words of our sages, quoted by Rashi:

"What is this command and what reason is there for it', it (Scripture) therefore uses the term 'chuka' (חֻקָּה) in this regard, implying: It is an decree from before Me; you have no right to criticize it" (Yoma 67b; cf. Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 7).

In other words, according to Rashi, this commandment is considered an "ordinance of the law", since the very foundation for the existence of the entire Torah is full faith in Hashem, and accepting His words without question.

What is it, then, about this commandment? We know that thanks to this commandment, a person who had experienced the greatest possible defilement – impurity caused by contact with a corpse – can be purified and reenter the Tabernacle.

HaKuzari teaches us that all impurities have one thing in common – death. Leprosy occurs when one of the afflicted person's organs dies, to some extent. Likewise, sperm departing

from the body and losing the potential to produce new life is also a form of death. This obviously applies to the case of impurity caused by contact with a corpse.

We can see that all impurities distance us from certain things. Some impose a distance between people and the Tabernacle, while others impose a distance between people and the rest of society, or even between a husband and wife living in the same house. Impurity keeps people away from intimacy. It distances them from their closest and highest connections.

The red heifer purifies those defiled through contact with the dead. It brings with it a new hope and life – and it must be perfect. Rashi interprets this as follows:

"Perfect" — in allusion to the Israelites who were perfect but through it (the calf) became morally maimed: let this perfect animal come and atone for them so that they may regain their state of perfection."

The Sin of the Golden Calf still lingers in the background. Later, Rashi will tell us:

"This is like a handmaid's child that defiled the king's palace. They said: Let the mother come and wipe up the excrement. Similarly here: since they became defiled by a calf, let its mother (a cow) come and atone for the calf."

This link between the Sin of the Golden Calf and the red heifer isn't incidental. Even though Rashi believes that this is an ordinance that has no logical reason, and that we are required to carry it out without understanding it, he also finds a link between it and the great sin that occurred moments before the Torah was given. The Golden Calf isn't meant to provide a rationale for the commandment of the red heifer. Instead, it is there to teach us that the people sinned because they weren't able to cope with the unknown and with things they didn't understand, "for that man Moshe, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him." When the Israelites follow the commandments concerning the red heifer, they are rectifying the sin of the Golden Calf and proving to themselves and Hashem that we know how to live our lives and keep the Torah's commandments, even when we don't understand them.

The red heifer is what purifies us, because of the simple and unquestioned faith it exemplifies – that it personifies proximity and belonging. This is the simple, innocent faith that the spies and those who complained at the beginning of Numbers lacked. There was still hope that the people entering the land would internalize this faith, taking it into the deepest reaches of their souls. When an impure individual goes through a process of purification, he or she demonstrates faith and perfect love, which makes it possible to

## Likutei Divrei Torah

achieve intense proximity later, bringing entire worlds into existence.

### Learning to Recognize Hidden Miracles Shoshana Winter Magid

Throughout the books of Shmot and Bamidbar there are numerous stories of Bnei Yisrael complaining about a lack of food or water in the desert.

These stories, for the most part, follow a set formula. Bnei Yisrael complain, Moshe prays to Hashem and Hashem performs a miracle. Some examples of these miracles are Moshe throwing a log into bitter water to make it sweet (Shmot 15:25), God sending the manna (Shmot 17:4), Moshe striking a rock with his staff in order for water to come out (Shmot 17:6), and God sending a strong wind which brings quail to feed the nation (Bamidbar 11:30).

One such story, found in Parshat Chukat, strays from the expected formula:

"And the people spoke out against God and against Moshe, 'Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water and we have come to loathe this miserable food.'" (Bamidbar 21:5)

This time, before Moshe has a chance to pray, Hashem sends fiery serpents that bite and kill a large number of Bnei Yisrael.

In her commentary on the parsha, Nechama Leibowitz points out a grammatical nuance which gives great insight into the story of the serpents. She notes that the verb used to describe Hashem sending the fiery serpents is "va-yih-shalach", the active intensive (פִּיעִיל) form of the verb נָלַשׁ and not "va-yeeshlach", the active simple (לְקָרָב) form of the verb.

She explains that the active simple form of נָלַשׁ means to actively send, while the active intensive form means to release or no longer constrain.

The same active intensive verb is used when Moshe tells Pharaoh "לְשַׁלֵּחַ אֶת עָם" – let My people go (Shmot 5:1) – i.e. release them from captivity. This seemingly small grammatical lesson is crucial to understanding the story of the serpents.

The Torah is teaching us that snakes did not miraculously appear, but rather Hashem had been continuously protecting Bnei Yisrael from being harmed by snakes during their many years of travel in the desert, and now removed His protection and released the snakes to roam free and bite, as they would naturally do without God's intervention.

According to many commentators, Parshat Chukat takes place in Bnei Yisrael's fortieth year in the desert, when the nation is on the brink of entering the Land of Israel. Earlier in the parsha, Moshe is informed by God that he

will not be leading Bnei Yisrael into the Promised Land.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, in his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar, says that the main theme of this sefer is the shift from a supernatural existence to a natural existence. It is the start of a new era.

With this in mind, Hashem is teaching Bnei Yisrael that they should no longer expect Moshe to show up with his staff and make food and water miraculously appear in response to their complaints. Bnei Yisrael have to learn to adapt to their new reality and prepare for their lives in Israel in which Hashem will most often work through nature.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that what prompted Bnei Yisrael's complaints in Parshat Chukat was their lack of recognition of Hashem's presence and involvement in their everyday lives.

Therefore, as Nechama Leibowitz explains, God responded by releasing the snakes which He had been protecting them from for forty years in the desert, in hope that Bnei Yisrael would learn to recognize the ways in which Hashem works through nature. It is of course most difficult to notice and appreciate Godly action, which is hidden and not an open miracle, and Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to master this.

Unlike in similar stories, here the Torah does not tell us if or how Bnei Yisrael received food and water, demonstrating further that the supernatural miracles of the past forty years in the desert are no longer the focal point. The important message is Bnei Yisrael's shift to a natural existence.

Bnei Yisrael understood that they sinned and turned to Moshe for help –

"We sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord to take away the snakes from us." (Bamidbar 21:7)

Moshe prayed to Hashem as per Bnei Yisrael's request, but Hashem did not remove the snakes; there was still an additional lesson that Bnei Yisrael had to learn. Hashem told Moshe to build a giant copper snake and place it on top of a pillar. Anyone who looked up at the copper snake after being bitten by a serpent would be cured.

Rashi interprets this to mean that Bnei Yisrael looked up toward the copper snake in the direction of heaven which reminded them to direct their hearts to God. When entering the Land of Israel, Bnei Yisrael would need to pray directly to God and not rely on an intermediary for their prayers to be answered as they had in the desert.

The Jewish people have long since learned to pray directly to God and this has become a

central part of Jewish practice. However, the lesson of recognizing God's subtle hand in everyday life is something that requires constant attention to incorporate into our lives.

For example, during the recent Hamas attacks against Israel, a single rocket landed in a parking lot, which is the only spot in my neighborhood that is not within thirty meters of a house or building, and this was clearly recognized as a tremendous miracle.

On the other hand, in times of peace, it is easy to overlook the miracle of being able to live quiet, ordinary lives while God continuously protects us from our surrounding enemies. This is but one example of God's discrete intervention in this world. It is up to us to work on recognizing all that God does through the guise of nature and to appreciate His hand in our day-to-day lives.

#### Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

##### **Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

##### **"Holy Cow! It's Torah!"**

Parshas Chukas begins with three mitzvos concerning death, impurity that ensues there from, and the purification process of sprinkling the ash of a parah adumah mixed with water after three and seven days in order to attain purification. Today, unfortunately, we do not yet have the eifer ha'parah for the sprinkling of a parah adumah.

The Torah does not explain tumas meis - the impurity that is emitted from a deceased person. Perhaps it could be explained that just as in life there are levels of holiness and sanctity, similarly in the absence of life there is a vacuum and a spiritual void commensurate with the degree of holiness that an individual had achieved. The more holiness, the greater the observance of Torah and mitzvos and the greater one's personal interaction with their fellow man, the more tumah - impurity will be created after death.

The Shelah Hakadosh (in Derech Chayim on Parshas Chukas) teaches that in the absence of the parah adumah, the learning and living of Torah serves as the purifying factor in our lives. He explains that in addition to the literal understanding of the sprinkling of the parah adumah water on the third and seventh days, the Torah was given on "day three" and enables us to attain "day seven". This comment of the Shelah is referring to the teaching of the Ramban (Bereishis, beginning of chapter 2) where he broadens our mystical horizons and demonstrates that the six days of creation correspond to the six millennia. On the third day, that is, in the third millennium of world history, we received the Torah and it enables us to attain immortality of the soul, symbolized by the seventh day of total Shabbos.

That "Torah is life" may be seen from many references in the Chumash. The Torah says, "you shall observe My decrees and My laws,

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

which man shall carry out and by which he shall live - I am Hashem" (Vayikra 18:5). Rashi and the Targum both understand this verse to refer to life in Olam Habah. This is akin to the Talmud's (Eruvin 22a) explaining the passuk, "hayom l'asosam" (Devarim 7:11) to be teaching that today, i.e. this world, is for performing mitzvos, and tomorrow, i.e. the world to come, is for receiving reward.

The Gra (in Aderes Eliyahu) understands the verse cited above (Vayikra 18:5) to refer to this world. The Torah is therefore teaching that even though the very nature of Torah and mitzvos sustains life, one is not to perform them with a personal, physical benefit of attaining life in mind, but rather as the verse ends, "Ani Hashem - I am Hashem", do it because I commanded it. Similarly, he says given the reality highlighted by the text of every bracha recited prior to performing a mitzvah, "asher k'dishanu b'mitzvosav - Who has sanctified us with His commandments", one might be excited to perform the mitzvah to receive holiness and spirituality, therefore the text continues, "v'tzivanu - and He commanded us", instructing us to do the mitzvah for no ulterior motives, be they physical or spiritual.

In Nefesh HaChayim (book 4, chapter 29) the primary student of the Gra, Reb Chaim of Volozhin, quotes the Zohar saying that the 613 mitzvos correspond to the 613 physical components of the body (limbs, sinews, etc.). When one fulfills a mitzvah he sanctifies and invigorates that corresponding organ and part of the body. He follows in the path of his rebbe and understands "v'chai bahem" most literally.

It is interesting to note that the world as we know it is functioning in the b'dieved - second best, or plan B - mode. Initially, man was to be eternal, and the phenomenon of death was not to be in this world. Adam and Chava sinned, however, and death became part of life. We were given a second chance at Sinai, as the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 22b) teaches that at Sinai "paska zu hamasan - the impurities and negative consequences of sin were removed from them." Upon receiving the Torah the nation of Israel was, "kulach yaffa ra'ayazi u'mum ein bach - beautiful my beloved, blemish free." This is understood by Chazal to mean that all the sick were healed at Sinai and the Torah literally revitalized them. Had they not sinned with the golden calf, man could once again live eternally. Such is the power of Torah.

In addition, not only does Torah fill the void of spirituality that sets in as a result of death, thereby emulating the eifer ha'parah (the ash of the parah adumah that was to be sprinkled on the third day), but it also serves as the vehicle for future resurrection. The Gemara (Kesubos 11b) cites Isaiah (26:19), "hekitzu v'ranimu shochnei afar ki tal oros talecha - awake and shout for joy you who dwell in the dust, for your dew is like the dew on fresh

ground" and homiletically explains it to mean that your light, Torah, is what will resurrect you and once again give you life. The Talmud states quite unequivocally that a Jew who is not connected to Torah will not be resurrected. When the Torah says (Devarim 30:20), "for He is your life and length of your days" this is no exaggeration!

The Gemara (Brachos 61b) relates that when it was decreed by the Romans that the Jewish people should not study Torah, Rabbi Akiva defied the edict by teaching Torah publicly. He offered a parable to explain what this situation may be compared to: a fox was walking along a river saw fish gathering from place to place as if constantly fleeing. The fox asked them who they are running from to which they responded that they are fleeing the nets that people bring to capture them. The fox said that the fish should come onto dry land and be safe from the nets. The fish replied that the fox can't be the most clever of the animals, rather he is but a fool. If in the natural climate, water, that sustains a fish's life, they are afraid, then certainly they cannot live on land without water. So too, Rabbi Akiva said, we must continue to engage in Torah which is chayecha v'orech yamecha - our life and length of days, and if we desist from Torah, we would be all the more in danger.

It is no coincidence that we find in the midst of the laws of tumas meis regarding how impurity is transmitted to people, food and utensils, the statement (19:14), "zos haTorah, adam ki yamus b'ohel - this is the law regarding a man who dies in the tent." On the surface the introductory words, "zos haTorah" seem extraneous. The Gemara (Berachos 63b) learns from this a very essential point for the study of Torah: "the words of Torah are only retained by one who kills himself for it" i.e. by one who sacrifices for Torah. Torah is not to be studied casually over a cup of tea.

The Torah frames the purification process by saying, "he shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day." Torah, given on the third day-millennium purifies one and sets the stage for the seventh day of eternity of the soul. "But if he will not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not become pure."

The parsha begins with "zos chukas haTorah" even though it really should have said "zos chukas haparah." I believe that an additional level of understanding in this passuk is that only "zos chukas haTorah" is going to keep us tahor as a people throughout the millennia.

---

**Torah.Org Dvar Torah**  
**by Rabbi Label Lam**

#### **Our Hope**

This is the (Torah) law of a man who dies in a tent, anyone entering the tent and anything in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. (Bamidbar 19:14)

We have here the laws of TUMA – the spiritual impurity associated with a dead body. Our sages see something else in these words as well. "This is the (Torah) law of a man who dies in a tent..." They say, "The Torah is only maintained by someone who kills himself over it." This statement is filled with riddles. The Torah is called by King Solomon, not less, "A Tree of Life to those who grasp!" We are admonished to multiple times and emphatically by the Torah itself to choose life, and live in the Mitzvos, and not we are being told to kill ourselves over the same Torah that tells us to live. What's the meaning here? Obviously, killing ourselves over Torah is not meant to be literal but then what is the expectation? There are many approaches but let us try one.

The flying instructors who taught the 911 terrorists how to fly a plane realized only afterwards that they should have realized that "something was up", when their students wanted to learn only how to fly a plane, and not how land one. Similarly Rabbeinu Yona in Sha'arei Teshuvah (Chapter 2) is thunderstruck and left with a big wonderment why when a person reaches the age of 35 he does not move automatically into the mode of doing Teshuvah. After all King David records in Tehillim that "the years of man's life are 70". So we may be cruising at an altitude of 30,000 feet now, but when the fuel gauge indicates that the tank is half full, then that is a major message. Perhaps, to avoid the "crash course" it might be worthwhile considering learning the art of how to land this life gracefully.

Rabbeinu Yona quotes a seemingly odd statement from Mishne Derech Eretz, "If your desire is not to die, then die until you do not die!" This one is an enigma, wrapped in a secret, and enveloped in a mystery. What could it possibly mean? Perhaps we already have enough information now to begin to unravel it.

Bilaam foolishly declared his longing, "Let my soul die the death of the righteous!" What's so great about dying the death of the righteous and what's so foolish about wanting it for himself? My father in law used to say over a joke about a fellow who enters a diner where they are advertising, "The Second Cup of Coffee Free" and he asks for the 2nd cup of coffee. Of course the waiter explains to him that he can only give him the 2nd cup after he has paid for the first. He would say that the same applies to being a grandparent. Somebody once whimsically and absurdly said, "If I only knew how great it was to be a grandparent, I would have skipped being a parent, and I would choose to become a grandparent right away." Silly! I know of a few ambitious businessmen who are working hard all the time on their 2nd million, but unfortunately they have not gotten their 1st million yet. Implicit in the order of the universe is that some things must come first and certain things can only come second.

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

I have been have struggled with the language of this Mishne in the 4th Perek of Pirke Avos for years and this past week in a Chabura, the fellow sitting next to me gave such a beautiful explanation, I was left wondering, "Where have I been all my life!?" The Mishne states, Rabbi Chavtai says, "Be very-very humble because the "TIKVA" the hope of man is worms!" Who hopes for worms? He explained, "All of a person's material ambitions, dreams, and hopes, even if he achieves them eventually crumble and return to the earth." That's what happens to the HOPES! Later I saw that Rebbe Nachman says, "Either a person's possessions are taken from him or he is eventually taken from his possessions."

Place a man in a vault filled with treasures and challenge him to take out what he can in 24 hours. Would he, should he waste his time playing video games and lounging in the spa!? No! Torah and Mitzvos are diamonds whose currency is only realized in the 2nd world that comes after laboring to collect them in the 1st world. In this we can place our hope!



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io  
From: cshulman@gmail.com

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHUKAS - 5781

**25th Anniversary** – [parsha@groups.io](mailto:parsha@groups.io) / [www.parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) - in our 26th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to [parsha+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:parsha+subscribe@groups.io). Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com. A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

Sponsored in memory of **R' Yisrael Yaakov (Halpert)** ben Dovid Chaim z"l

Sponsored in memory of **Nachman Daniel z"l** ben Aryeh Tzvi

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@parsha.net  
(proceeds to tzedaka)

from: Yeshiva.org.il <[subscribe@yeshiva.org.il](mailto:subscribe@yeshiva.org.il)>

date: Jun 17, 2021, 6:54 AM

subject: Why don't we always appreciate G-d's kindness?

Chukat

**Why don't we always appreciate G-d's kindness?**

**Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon**

Moses struck a rock twice and water issued forth. Once in Parshat Beshalach and again in Parshat Chukat. In Parshat Beshalach G-d desired a physical strike – even commanded it. In Parshat Chukat, though, G-d didn't want the latter but rather that Moses speak to the rock (according to Rashi). If the miracle in Parshat Beshalach was effected via striking the rock, why 40 years later, here, in Parshat Chukat, was the miracle not to be carried out in the same way?

Though we can answer this in a number of ways, let us adopt one approach. Since the miracle of striking the rock had already occurred & was well known, its repetition, despite the passage of 40 years, would not have had such a great impact. Thus there was a need for a different miracle.

This principle I learned from the Meshech Chochmah in a different context – that of Splitting the Reed Sea. The Midrash says that in the future G-d will perform more miracles for Israel in the World to Come than He did at the Splitting of the Reed Sea. The Meshech Chochmah is puzzled – were the latter miracles insufficient? He answers that after the Israelites had seen these miracles, there was a need for greater miracles to arouse their wonder. He gives the example of the telegraph, explaining that once people became accustomed to it, they weren't all that impressed with the telephone which followed it.

The Mechilta at the end of Chapter 11 comments on (HaShem) does wonders. He did wonders for the fathers and in the future will do so for the children, as it says "As in the days of your coming out of the land of Egypt, I will show him wondrous deeds." (Micah 7:15) – I will show him what I did not show the fathers. A wonder – a miracle – means something which boggles the mind, which a person cannot credit until he sees it with his own eyes. Thus with the invention of the telegraph – it amazed the beholders' imagination. It was

indeed a wonder. Afterwards, with the invention of the telephone, which required far greater expertise, people were not as amazed as they had been with the telegraph.

So, with the miracle of the Sea Splitting and the wonders of the Manna and the Slav, everyone was amazed. The Navi now says that since the splitting of the Sea and the Manna were already known as the fathers had them, in the future G-d will do things which will awe the children anew. Then the Sea splitting and the Manna will be like the natural order. Thus afterwards there will be no comparison between what the fathers saw with what the children will see. From my grandfather Harav Chananya Zt"l.

And so too in our Parsha. The miracle of bringing forth water by striking the rock was indeed most impressive, but after the Children of Israel saw this miracle, they were not so amazed when it repeated itself again. So there was a need for a greater miracle – one of speech.

We experience so many miracles, so much Divine goodness in so many things, we often fail to appreciate the enormity of the salvation which G-d brings us, all the time. Occasionally we need to go back and observe, to feel all of G-d's kindness "For Your wonders and favors are with us in every season" and from observing G-d's kindness, we will always remember "It is good to thank G-d".

---

from: [torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org)

to: [weeklydt@torahweb.org](mailto:weeklydt@torahweb.org)

date: Jun 17, 2021, 1:23 PM

subject: **Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg** - For the Love of Torah  
Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

**For the Love of Torah**

"This is the Torah (the teaching) regarding a man who dies in a tent..." (Chukas 19:14). Chazal (Brachos 63b) interpret this posuk homiletically to mean that words of Torah make a lasting impression only on one who figuratively "kills" himself in the tent of study. The Taz (Orach Chaim 46:1) explains that this refers to someone who exerts much effort and toil (ameilus) to understand the depths of Torah. At first glance, this statement of Chazal seems puzzling. Studying Torah with extraordinary ameilus is certainly praiseworthy. But why should investing effort to understand the Torah automatically lead to a better retention of the Torah that is studied?

The Mishna (Avos 6:1) states, "Reb Meir says that one who engages in the study of Torah for its own sake (lishma) merits many things." The first of these is that he is called a rei'ah ahuv (beloved friend) of Hashem and the Torah. What does it mean to be a "beloved friend"? Reb Chaim of Volozhin (Ruach Chaim, ibid) suggests that there are two types of friendships. Some friendships are formed out of selfish considerations. A person might want to benefit from another's wealth, services, or position of prominence, or he might simply want to feel the honor of being the friend of such a distinguished individual. Such a friendship is not deeply rooted and sincere; it is superficial and utilitarian, and will last only as long as it remains beneficial for the parties involved. About such a relationship Shlomo HaMelech warns, "Do not frequent your friend's home too often lest he become satiated with you and he will hate you" (Mishlei 25:17). When a friendship is pursued for the sake of convenience, there is always the concern that the other individual might feel that he is being taken advantage of, and the relationship might sour. Maintaining a healthy distance is key to preserving such a relationship.

But there is a second type of friendship, and that is one which is based on mutual respect and admiration. Such a relationship is enduring because it is motivated not by selfish concerns but by an appreciation of the character and the inherent qualities of the other person. Friends of this type enjoy each other's company and the more time they spend together the stronger the bonds between them become. This is what Reb Meir refers to as a "beloved friend". When someone appreciates the value of his friend and he cherishes their relationship for its own sake, he becomes beloved in the eyes of his friend, and the friend will reciprocate that love in return.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin explains that this is why a chosson and kallah are referred to as reiyim ahuvim (beloved friends) because the ideal marriage

relationship is one in which the husband and wife are not looking to advance their own interests, but rather are willing to sacrifice of themselves for the benefit of the other. Such a relationship which is based on mutual respect and selflessness will only strengthen over time and will make each person more beloved in the eyes of the other. Similarly, one who engages in Torah study not to receive honor or to make a living, but rather for the sake of the Torah itself is called a "beloved friend" of the Torah and of Hashem because through his learning he demonstrates his unconditional love for the Torah, and in return the Torah and Hashem love him as well.

Perhaps this is the deeper meaning behind the statement of Chazal that words of Torah make a lasting impression only if one "kills" himself in studying them. The more effort a person invests in Torah study and the more he is willing to sacrifice in order to learn Torah, the more he demonstrates his love for the Torah, and that emotional bond which he develops with the Torah will cause him to remember the Torah that he studied. Moreover, when a person shows his love for the Torah, the Torah and Hashem reciprocate that love, and the individual is blessed with extra special powers of retention. As Chazal comment (Eiruvin 54a) on a later posuk in Parshas Chukas (21:18) "And a gift from the desert" - one who makes himself ownerless (hefker) like a desert...will remember his Torah." One who sacrifices his own needs and selflessly pursues the study of Torah receives an extra gift of Torah. He is blessed with additional siyata dishmaya (divine assistance), and that enables him to retain his Torah more easily.

Hard work and effort are necessary prerequisites to acquire any type of knowledge. But when it comes to the study of Torah these ingredients pay extra dividends.

Copyright © 2021 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved. Weeklydt mailing list Weeklydt@torahweb.org  
[http://torahweb.org/mailman/listinfo/weeklydt\\_torahweb.org](http://torahweb.org/mailman/listinfo/weeklydt_torahweb.org)

---

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: Jun 17, 2021, 7:39 PM

subject: Rav Frand - The Power of One to Purify the Many  
Parshas Chukas

The Power of One to Purify the Many

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1167 – "If Hashem Saves Me, I Make A Neder to..." Good Idea or Not? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Chukas begins with the laws of Tumas Mes, where we learn that if a person comes in contact with a dead body (or is merely under the same roof as a dead body) he is given the status of a 'Tameh Mes' and the only way for him to become tahor (pure) is for him to be sprinkled with the water of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer) on day three and day seven of a seven-day procedure.

The pasuk reads, "And the pure one shall sprinkle on the impure one on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall purify him on the seventh day; then he shall immerse his clothing and immerse his flesh in water and be pure in the evening. [Bamidbar 19:19]. There is an interesting passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud) which certainly requires further exposition. Rav Yehoshua ben Kafrai said "My whole life I read this pasuk 'the pure one shall sprinkle on the impure one...' and I assumed that a single tahor individual needed to sprinkle the Parah Adumah water on a single impure individual." Rav Yehoshua ben Kafrai then says, "This was the case until I learned otherwise from 'Otzroseha shel Yavneh' (literally – the storehouse of Yavneh) that a single tahor individual can even sprinkle on many tameh individuals."

The question is, what does it mean he learned this law from the "Otzros of Yavneh"? What does the Talmud Yerushalmi mean by the term storehouse of Yavneh? Rav Meir Shapiro, the Lubliner Rav and the founder of the Daf

Yomi concept, was also a powerful orator. He presents a homiletic exposition to this passage of the Talmud Yerushalmi.

What happened in Yavneh? At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai met Vespasian, the Roman General who later became Emperor of the Roman Empire. Vespasian granted Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai three wishes. One of the three things Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai asked for was "Yavneh and her Sages." Yavneh was a city on the Mediterranean Coast of Eretz Yisrael. It had a Yeshiva. Rav Yochanan pleaded that this Yeshiva be spared so that despite the great Destruction that was coming to the Temple and the Jewish population in Jerusalem and other parts of the country, he would have a few remaining Talmidei Chachomim who would preserve Torah and Judaism for future generations.

The Talmud (Gittin 56b) suggests that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai may have made a mistake. Perhaps one of his requests of Vespasian should have been to spare the Beis HaMikdash. Be that as it may, Rav Meir Shapiro suggests that the Yerushalmi, in referring to the "Otzros of Yavneh," was indeed referring to the lesson learned from the Yeshiva of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai in Yavneh!

The Torah that we learn here today, and the fact that there are still people who learn Torah throughout the Jewish world, is the result of the few Talmidei Chachomim left in Yavneh after the Churban HaBayis who literally saved the world of Torah. Had they been wiped out, Torah would have been forgotten.

So, what do we see from the "Otzros of Yavneh"? Rav Yehoshua ben Kafrai was saying, "I see from Yavneh the power of one individual. One person—and certainly a few good people—can make a difference, can save the world! I always thought that one tahor person can sprinkle on one other tameh person and have a one-on-one affect. But from Yavneh I see that one tahor person can affect hundreds of people."

We have seen in our lifetime individuals who have revolutionized the world. It is his homiletic insight, so we can cite him as an example. Consider Rav Meir Shapiro himself. It is mind-boggling to think of the zechus Rav Meir Shapiro has for coming up with Daf Yomi—now in their 14th cycle of daily Talmud study, completing Talmud Bavli once every seven-and-a-half years by synchronized study of a Daf a Day! Thousands and thousands of people worldwide learn Daf Yomi. Rav Meir Shapiro did not live 2,000 years ago or even 200 years ago. He lived in the 20th century. He came up with an idea that revolutionized the world. There are people like that.

There are others as well—Rav Aaron Kotler, the Vilna Gaon, the Ramban and the Rambam—people that revolutionized the Torah world. But even people like us can make a difference. One person can make a difference. For example—this is not a plug, but it comes to mind—The Ner Israel Rabbinical College, which many in my audience had the zechus to attend, started in 1933 with four students. Those four boys came to a nothing of a Yeshiva—it hardly even existed. But because four people came, it came into existence. Those four people who 'took the plunge' in 1933 can take at least partial credit for all the thousands of people who have passed through the portals of Ner Israel in all the subsequent decades of its flourishing development. They made a difference. This is what the Gemara means when Rav Yehoshua ben Kafrai says, "This I learned from the 'Otzros of Yavneh'." This is why one pure person can effectively purify many tameh individuals.

The Ultimate Battle Between the Sechel and the Lev

The pasuk in this week's Parsha says, "The Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel had come by the route of the spies, and he warred against Israel and captured a captive from it." [Bamidbar 21:1]. So, who is this? There is a very interesting Rashi here. He explains that this Canaan nation who lived just south of the southern border of Eretz Yisrael who attacks Klal Yisrael is actually none other than our old nemesis Amalek, because it says about Amalek [Bamidbar 13:29] that they dwell in the land of the South.

If this nation is Amalek, what does our pasuk mean when it calls its leader "the Canaan"? He is not a Canaan but is an Amalek? Rashi explains: They

disguised their language to speak the Canaanite language (rather than the Amalekite language) in order to trick the Jews. The plan was to mislead Bnei Yisrael to pray to Hashem “to deliver this Canaanite nation into our hands” when in fact they were not Canaanites! Their strategy was to deflect the prayers of the Jews by having them pray for the wrong thing!

Rashi, however, notes that there was a major flaw in their “battle plan”. The Jews noticed that they were dressed like Amalekites, even though they were speaking the language of Canaan. The Jews therefore became suspicious and were unsure whether they were dealing with Canaan or with Amalek. That is why, Rashi continues, Bnei Yisrael offered a generic prayer without mentioning a specific nationality: “If You will deliver this nation into my hand...” [Bamidbar 21:2].

Let me ask a question: These Amalekites are so wise and so perceptive that they realize that if a Jew davens to the Ribono shel Olam, it is going to be effective. They are even so knowledgeable that they know if a Jew davens to Hashem and he utters the wrong Tefilla, it is not going to be effective. They know the Almighty listens to prayer and that it is effective and how precise it must be. Furthermore, they knew that the Jews already did battle with Amalek once (at the end of Parshas B’Shalach) and they knew the Jews realized Amalek was a fierce enemy. The Jews recognized that defeating Amalek would require dedicated and focused prayer. Part of Amalek’s plan was to pretend they were only Canaanites. The Jews would think they were doing battle with a pushover nation, so their davening would not be as intense. Less intense davening will not be as effective.

One might ask: If Amalek knows all this, the power and effectiveness of prayer and the existence and omnipotence of Hashem, then why do they remain Amalek? Why do they persist in their evil ways? Why don’t they say, “Listen, Hashem Elokim Emes”? How can one remain an Amaleiki if he knows all of this? Why not throw in the Amaleki towel and say “I give up. You are right” and convert to Judaism?

The answer is that their seichel (intellect) may have told them that, but whatever their tayvos (lusts) and lifestyle had been was not compatible with being a Jew or being a Shomer Mitzvos. I can see something as clear as day right in front of my hand, but there is a long distance from a person’s brain to his heart. They may have known it with their minds. The point could have been proven to them intellectually and rationally, but if it does not fit in with a person’s personal agenda, he may not make that final leap. He will twist and turn and rationalize and be in denial, but will refuse to honestly confront the truth.

This is not only the story with Amalek. This is the story with all of us. We know the Emes. We know that the Ribono shel Olam knows everything we do. We know what He expects of us. But from time to time, we do things that we should not be doing. Ay, we know the truth? We know that one day we will need to pay a price for this? But there is a big difference between the Seichel (intellect) and the Lev (heart).

We see another example of this in this week’s parsha. There is a big dispute among early authorities regarding the exact aveira (sin) of “Mei Meriva.” What did Moshe do wrong? Rashi and other commentaries learn that he hit the rock, when he should have spoken to it. The Rambam in Shmoneh Perakim offers a different explanation. He says the aveira was that Moshe Rabbeinu lost his temper. He said “Hear ye, you rebels.” [Bamidbar 20:10]. There must be fifteen different interpretations as to what the aveira was. The Ramban here cites an explanation of Rabbeinu Chananel, which he endorses. He explains that their aveira was in verbalizing the question “Shall WE EXTRACT for you water from this rock?” implying that it was within their power, not that of the Almighty, to perform such a miracle. Moshe’s aveira was giving the nation an opening by which they might not fully believe in the powers of Hashem.

Let us ask the following question: Chazal say that all of Klal Yisrael, which numbered in the millions of people, all stood around the rock and saw the rock. But how could that be? It is impossible to fit two million people into a ten square foot area. Rashi explains that it was a miracle. “This is one of the places where a small area (miraculously) held a great number of people.”

Furthermore, Chazal say that once this Rock opened up, all the rocks in the area began spouting water. Another miracle!

Thus, there could absolutely be no denying that they were witnessing miracles from Heaven. There was no way anyone could err and believe it was some kind of trick that Moshe was doing though sleight of hand. And yet, Chazal say that from the fact that Moshe used the expression “WE SHALL EXTRACT for you water” – people could rationalize and say “It is not from G-d, it is from Moshe Rabbeinu.”

This is yet another example of the phenomenon that something undeniable can be staring a person in the face, and yet, if the person wants to rationalize and wants to ‘make a mistake’ and deny, he can deny: “No! Moshe Rabbeinu had some kind of trick up his sleeve.” It is the same principle: Something can be as clear as day, but if for some reason psychologically we don’t want to believe and we don’t want to accept, we will find an excuse.

I once said over the following story, but it bears repeating. It is another classic example of this same idea:

A story occurred with Rav Yechezkel (Chatzkel) Levenstein, the mashgiach of Yeshivas Mir in Europe, and later of Ponevezh in Eretz Yisrael. An irreligious cab driver who was driving Rav Chatzkel remarked that he had once witnessed an open miracle.

When secular Israelis complete their army service, they typically unwind by touring some exotic location. After his army service, this cab driver decided to tour a mountainous region in Africa with some of his army buddies. One night, they awoke to hear one of their friends screaming in terror. The young man was enveloped by a huge boa constrictor, which was squeezing the life out of him.

They had no idea how to free their friend, and they were afraid to do anything to the snake, lest they antagonize it and make it squeeze even harder. Facing what seemed to be the inevitable, one of the friends said, “I know that when Jews are about to die, they recite Shema. Maybe you should recite it now.”

As soon as the ex-soldier screamed, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad,” the snake unwound itself and slithered away into the darkness of night.

“That miracle changed my friend’s life,” the cab driver concluded. “He vowed to become a baal teshuvah, and he kept his word. He traveled directly back to Israel and is now a thoroughly religious Jew.”

Rav Chatzkel turned to the cab driver and asked, “U’mah itcha—and what about you?” “Me?” the driver responded in a quizzical tone. “The Rav doesn’t understand. The snake wasn’t wrapped around me; it was wrapped around my friend. ‘He had the snake around his neck – what does that have to do with me? Let him become frum. Why should I change my lifestyle? What do you want from me?’”

Now, you might think that if someone witnesses such an event, it should have a personal impact on him. He should react. He should say “Look at this!” The answer is that if someone wants to deny, he can be staring at a miracle and still deny. A person can see two million people in a small area, a person can see water coming out of stones, a person can believe in the power of prayer like Amalek did – but if a person wants to continue living the life that he has been living, then he will continue to do so no matter what.

This is the ultimate battle between the Seichel and the Lev. Our job is to see to it that our Seichel overpowers our Lev.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD  
dhoffman@torah.org

This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail [tapes@yadyechiel.org](mailto:tapes@yadyechiel.org) or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Jun 16, 2021, 2:15 PM

subject: Miriam, Moses' Friend (Chukat 5781)

Miriam, Moses' Friend

Chukat (Numbers 19:1-22:1)

Jun 13, 2021

by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt'l

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20:10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (Num. 20:12) The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I proposed in an earlier Covenant & Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17:6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some, but it tasted bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet. (Ex. 15:22-26)

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained.

Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what he should do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17:1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why now on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different?

The answer is stated explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20:1) Immediately after this we read: "Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron." A famous Talmudic passage<sup>1</sup> explains that it was in Miriam's merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam's death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses' response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses' own mother Yocheved.

Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Num. 12:1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest prayer on record – five Hebrew words – "Please, God, heal her now." Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week's parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on their own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18:18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him; (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate; and (3) a soulmate or soulmates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, "The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well."<sup>2</sup> Leaders need confidants, people who "will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena." A confidant cares about you more than about the issues. They lift you when you are low, and gently brings you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, "Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through."<sup>3</sup>

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship.<sup>4</sup> He calls it the "friendship of trust" [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom "you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded," hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses' early life suggests that Miriam was Moses' "trusted friend," his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God Himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right, she was also one of her brother's sources of strength.

from: Chabad.org <learntorah@chabad.org>

reply-to: feedback@chabad.org

date: Jun 16, 2021, 12:12 PM

subject: TORAH STUDIES: Parshat Chukat

Chukat

### Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Chukat begins with an account of the Red Heifer, a strange practice whose object was the purification of those who had become contaminated through contact with the dead. The heifer was burned, and its ashes, mixed with water, sprinkled on those who had become defiled. But the paradox was that though it purified them, it made impure all those who were involved in its preparation. Thus it is called, in the Sidra's second verse, a chukah ("ordinance")—a technical term meaning, "law for which no reason can be given." Rashi gives this explanation for the word, but his comment has some unusual features which the Sicha first points out, and then explains, showing that it is intelligible only if we distinguish two different kinds of chukah.

#### 1. Rashi's Comment Analyzed

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: This is the ordinance (chukat) of the Torah which the L-rd has commanded...."<sup>1</sup>

Rashi interprets the phrase, "this is the ordinance of the Torah" thus: "Because Satan and the nations of the world provoke Israel, saying, 'what is the meaning of this commandment to you and what is its reason?,' therefore it is described as an 'ordinance' it is a decree about which you have no right to speculate."

But there are difficulties here:

(i) From the words of Rashi—"therefore it is described as an 'ordinance'"—it is apparent that he intended not to explain the meaning of the word "ordinance" itself—which he has already done previously on many occasions.<sup>2</sup> (And even though he has not done so previously in the book of Bamidbar, it is not as if he suspected that readers of his commentary would have forgotten his earlier explanation, because the word "ordinance" occurs earlier in Bamidbar<sup>3</sup> and passes without comment from Rashi.) Rather, Rashi wants to explain the fact that it appears to be superfluous, since the phrase "this is the law" would have been sufficient.

And if this is so, since the reader already knows the meaning of "ordinance," a brief explanation would have served. Why then does Rashi add, at length, the comments about Satan and the nations of the world, which he has already made several times previously?

(ii) Also, there are several differences between Rashi's answer here, and in earlier places, which require understanding.

In earlier comments the agent provocateur is the "evil inclination"; here it is "Satan."

In these earlier places, he is represented as "raising objections"<sup>4</sup> or "caviling"<sup>5</sup>; Here, as "provoking."

And in one earlier comment, one is said to be forbidden to "exempt oneself"<sup>6</sup> from the ordinances; here one is forbidden to "speculate about them."

(iii) If our earlier reasoning is correct, Rashi's comment applies only to the seeming superfluity of the word "ordinance." Why then should it bear the heading<sup>7</sup> "this is the ordinance of the law," as if Rashi intended to explain the whole phrase?

#### 2. Within Reason and Beyond

The explanation is as follows:

The wording of the phrase, "this is the ordinance of the law" suggests that the law of the Red Heifer is the only ordinance in the Torah. But surely there

are other ordinances (mentioned as such by Rashi), like the prohibition of eating the meat of pig or wearing clothes made of a mixture of wool and linen.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we are forced to say that there is a special class of ordinance, of which the Red Heifer is the only example; that is, that there are two kinds of ordinance:

(i) those which could in principle be understood by human intelligence, but details of which are beyond comprehension;

(ii) those which are entirely beyond the scope of human understanding.

The phrase "this is the ordinance of the law" is thus intended to indicate that the law of the Red Heifer is alone in belonging to the second category. Therefore when Rashi brings examples (in Vayikra<sup>9</sup>) of ordinances, he mentions the prohibitions of the meat of the pig and of clothes made of wool and linen mixture, and the waters of purification, but he does not include the Red Heifer, since that belongs to an entirely separate category.

The "waters of purification" (water mingled with the ashes of the Red Heifer) is something whose principle can be understood rationally. For, just as purification through immersion in a Mikvah is a notion which Rashi never classifies as an "ordinance," because it is quite reasonable that waters of the Mikvah have the power to cleanse spiritually; similarly, the "waters of purification" can have equal effect. Their only peculiarity lies in the detail that only a few drops of it suffice to purify, whereas the Mikvah requires total immersion.

Hence the waters belong to the first class of ordinances—decrees which are partially intelligible.

But the laws of the Red Heifer itself are entirely beyond understanding. It cannot be construed simply as a kind of burnt offering, since:

(i) no part of the Red Heifer was offered up at the altar;

(ii) all the actions involving the Red Heifer were to be done "outside the three camps";<sup>10</sup> whereas all the offerings were made specifically within them;

(iii) the Red Heifer is not even analogous to the goat of Azazel<sup>11</sup> which, (besides its preliminaries being conducted within the camp,) was something for which a partial explanation was given ("and the goat shall bear forth on it their iniquities unto a desolate land"<sup>12</sup>).

And it has the following exceptional features that the goat of Azazel did not:

(i) it was to be carried out by the Deputy High Priest;<sup>13</sup>

(ii) its blood was to be sprinkled seven times towards the front of the Ohel Moed;<sup>14</sup>

(iii) it was called a "sin offering" to show that it was similar to holy things.<sup>15</sup> In short, the Red Heifer does not belong to the first category of ordinance for it cannot be even partially understood.

#### 3. G-d and Man

In the light of this, we can understand why Rashi uses expressions here ("Satan" as opposed to "evil inclination": "Provokes" in place of "raising objections"; and "forbidden to speculate" instead of "forbidden to exempt oneself from them") which do not occur in his other explanations of the word "ordinance."

It is clear that G-d's intellect surpasses man's, so that if we are told by G-d that a given commandment cannot be humanly understood, there is no ground on which the evil inclination can argue from its unintelligibility to its non-Divine origin. For, why should finite man be able to comprehend infinite G-d?

But when a commandment is partially open to human understanding, the evil inclination and the nations of the world do have (albeit fallacious) grounds for "arguing" or "raising objections" that it is not Divine: For how could G-d command something which on the one hand was accessible to human reason and on the other hand was inaccessible to it? They would therefore argue that they are not Divine, and not binding on the Jew.

But since the Red Heifer is entirely inaccessible to reason, it cannot be "refuted" by the evil inclination or the nations of the world. All they can do is to "provoke" the Jew by saying "what meaning has this commandment for you, and what is its reason?" Admittedly you have to obey the word of G-d,

but in doing so you are doing something which to the human mind is completely meaningless and irrational.

Thus Rashi uses the word “Satan” instead of the “evil inclination”—for the skeptical voice seeks here only to trouble<sup>16</sup> a Jew at the moment of acting, not to dissuade him from it at all.

And thus he does not say, “it is forbidden to ‘exempt yourself’ from the command” (for a case cannot be made out for exemption); but, that “it is forbidden ‘to speculate’ about its rationale,” and instead perform it with joy as if one understood it completely.

The reason is (as Rashi continues), that the Red Heifer is a “decree” of G-d: That is, that G-d Himself is telling us not to be perturbed by the absence of a rationale, and to do it simply because G-d so decrees. This is the only way that it can be properly fulfilled.

We can now understand why Rashi cites the whole phrase “this is the ordinance of the law” as his heading: For it is this phrase which makes it clear that this ordinance is different from all others; and this is what underlines the nuances of Rashi’s explanation.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VIII pp. 123-7)

FOOTNOTES 1. Bamidbar 19:1-2. 2. E.g., Bereishit 26:5; Shemot 15:26; Vayikra 18:4. 3. E.g., Bamidbar 9:3,12,14; 15:15. 4. Bereishit 26:5; Vayikra 18:4. 5. Shemot 15:26. 6. Vayikra, Ibid. 7. Rashi’s comments are prefaced only by the word or phrase in the text which he wishes to explicate. 8. Cf. e.g., Rashi, Bereishit 26:5. 9. Ibid. 10. Cf. Rashi, Bamidbar 19:3. 11. Cf. Vayikra ch. 16. 12. Ibid., v. 22. 13. Cf. Rashi, Bamidbar 19:3. 14. Ibid., v. 4. 15. Rashi, Ibid., v. 9. 16. The word satan means to trouble, to make uncomfortable (cf. Bamidbar 22:22; Ibid., v. 32; I Kings 11:14).

from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org>

to: rabbiwein@torah.org

date: Jun 17, 2021, 8:03 PM

subject: Rabbi Wein - Handing Over the Mantle

Parshas Chukas

Handing Over the Mantle

The fate of the generation that left Egypt and came to the Sinai desert is finally sealed in this week’s Torah reading. Even though we already read in last week’s Torah portion about the disaster and eventual demise of that generation because of the slanderous report of the Spies that visited the land of Israel, Moshe somehow was convinced that he himself would escape their fate. He appears to be confident that he will yet lead his beloved people into the promised land of Israel.

However, as we read in the Torah, the Lord informs Moshe that he also will not enter the land of Israel. The Torah does give us a reason for this harsh decree against the greatest of all prophets and leaders. Moshe chose to strike the rock to bring forth water instead of complying with the heavenly order speak to the rock. At first glance, we are certainly troubled by this seemingly asymmetrical form of judgment and punishment. The retribution for this sin seems to be far too harsh, especially when we consider the decades of service, sacrifice and loyalty that Moshe previously exhibited in his relationship with the Almighty. Simply put, it seems unfair. The punishment does not seem to fit the crime.

This issue has vexed Jewish minds over the ages. It is almost as though the Torah is purposely writing a real cause-and-effect relationship regarding Moshe and the land of Israel. Because of this intuitive feeling of uneasiness about the true nature of this incident, many varied explanations and commentaries have been offered over the ages.

Maimonides described the real crime as being the tendency to become angry, and anger always leads to a ruptured relationship with the Almighty and eternity. Others have pointed out that it was not so much the behavior of Moshe, as it was that this was the appropriate time when Joshua should have taken over the mantle of leadership. Every generation has its leaders, and leaders of previous generations, no matter how great they may have been, are not destined to serve as leaders of later generations.

It is this rule of history and of human nature that governs this situation. The fact that Moshe struck the rock is not the essential reason that some commentators believe that a new generation demanded new leadership to be successful. Another nuance added to this explanation is that the leader of each generation is responsible for what happens to that generation.

Therefore, it is obvious that if the generation that Moshe redeemed from Egypt and led through the desert of Sinai was not going to merit entering the land of Israel, then its leader, no matter how great and noble a person he may have been, must share the same fate of the generation that he so faithfully led.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> to: [weekly@ohr.edu](mailto:weekly@ohr.edu) subject: Torah Weekly Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights For the week ending 19 June 2021 / 9 Tamuz 5781

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

**Parshat Chukat**

**Show Me the Waze To Go Home**

“Come to Cheshbon” (21:27)

I well remember, before setting off on a trip, pulling out my somewhat dog-eared maps and carefully planning my route. I carefully considered the prevailing traffic at my estimated times along journey, and committed to memory the route, jotting down the names or numbers of the highways that I would need to take.

Who’d a-thought that just a few short years later, my maps would be gathering mold at the bottom the trunk of my car, and a satellite miles above me in the sky would be guiding me to my destination on a screen in my car? And not only that, but if the traffic situation changed, it would reroute me as I was driving!

Waze sure is a wonderful invention. Only problem is if the satellite doesn’t work, or your phone can’t pick up the signal.

A few years ago, one of my sons was attending a Yeshiva in the south of Israel, and my wife and I made several trips to visit him. I jumped in the car, fired up Waze, and off we went. We must have made the journey at least five or six times, when one day I realized that Waze had gone “on the blink.” I suddenly started to pay attention to the road signs and cast my eyes to the left and the right, trying to recognize the scenery.

I had absolutely no idea where I was.

Or how to get to where I wanted to get.

Our lives are full of labor-saving devices that can make our lives full of labor.

When the personal computer first came out, I suggested that every computer that left the factory should have a little sticker on it saying, “You can waste your life saving time.”

One of the most dangerous things in life is to travel through it on “auto-pilot.” Although we may have traveled through similar situations in the past, life choices require constant reevaluation. The “Negative Drive” is a master of misrouting. And what may have been a necessary strategy in the past — or even a mitzvah — now, on this particular journey, the road that we are on may take us far from our goal.

“Come to Cheshbon.”

The Talmud (Bava Batra 78b) expounds this verse in this manner: “Therefore, the allegorists say, ‘Come to Cheshbon.’ … Those who rule over their negative drive say, ‘Come and evaluate the cheshbon (“balance sheet of the world”) — the loss of a mitzvah versus its gain — and the gain of a transgression versus its loss…’”

When we fail to do life’s essential map work, we may find ourselves far “awaze” from where we want to be.

© 2020 Ohr Somayach International

from: Daniel Keren <keren18@juno.com>  
date: Jun 16, 2021, 8:41 AM  
subject: **Shabbos Stories** for Parshas Chukas 5781

The Local Rav and the Vilna Gaon

### Rav Moshe and the Ridiculous Question

By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

A story is told of a group of mischievous boys who decided to make some prank phone calls to various Rabbis. One of the boys was given the “assignment” to call Rav Moshe Feinstein very late at night and to ask him a totally ridiculous halachah question.

When he called Rav Moshe in the middle of the night and woke him up, he asked his question expecting the Rabbi to get annoyed and simply hang up. But instead, Rav Moshe calmly answered the question, and then started a conversation with the boy.

He asked him what school he was in and which Gemara he was learning. When the boy mentioned that he wasn’t doing so well in school, Rav Moshe stayed on the phone with him and reviewed the Gemara with him, explaining it to him from beginning to end until he fully understood it.

Rav Moshe then gave encouragement to the boy and told him, “I am going to tell you a very strong question that was asked on this Gemara, and I’m going to give you the answer. Tomorrow I want you to ask your Rebbe this question, and if he doesn’t know the answer, you can tell him the answer that I told you.”

The next day, the boy asked the question and his Rebbe was amazed that this student, who never even participated in class, was now asking such a powerful question. When the boy then said the answer to the question, the Rebbe began to see him in a different light and gave him encouragement to put more effort in his learning. In the end, the boy became one of the top students in the class.

And this all came about because Rav Moshe treated him with patience and dignity. This was a true kidush Hashem. Instead of reacting harshly when the boy woke him up and asked him a silly question, he succeeded in turning the boy around simply by showing him respect and speaking kindly to him.

While we are not on the level of Rav Moshe, we all have opportunities to bring glory to Hashem’s name. If we study Torah and do misvot, we are often viewed by others as representatives of the Torah. Our actions are often scrutinized, and any slight misstep can lower the value of Torah study in their eyes. Our behavior is not just a reflection on us, but it is a reflection on the entire Torah and its values.

Whether we like it or not, we are ambassadors of Hashem. We should be conscious of this and do our best to always greet others with a smile and treat them with respect. This will help to sanctify Hashem’s name and bring glory to those who serve Him. May we always succeed in sanctifying Hashem’s name in everything we do.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

*Shema Yisrael Torah Network*

*Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Chukas*

*פְּרִשְׁתַּת הַקָּתָת שְׁפָא'*

*ותמתה שם מרים ותקבר שם ולא היה מים לעדנה*

**Miriam died there, and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly. (20:1,2)**

*Chazal* (Taanis 9a) explain the juxtaposition of *Klal Yisrael*’s lack of water upon Miriam’s death with the miraculous well that accompanied them throughout their forty-year journey. This well, duly dubbed *be’erah shel Miriam*, Miriam’s well, gave water in the *zechus*, merit, of Miriam *HaNeviah*. Thus, when she died, the well dried up. The *Zohar HaKadosh* (Emor 103B) attributes the miracle of Miriam’s well to her standing at the banks of the Nile River to ensure the safety of her infant brother, Moshe (*Rabbeinu*), who had been placed in a reed basket, hidden from the Egyptian

soldiers who were bent on murdering Jewish male infants. Due to this one act of caring, Hashem miraculously provided the Jewish nation with water for forty years in the wilderness.

Another woman performed a heroic act at the same time that Miriam stood at the river. Bisyah, Pharaoh’s daughter, saw the basket containing the infant Moshe in the water, and she stretched out her arm to pull it in. She went on to raise Moshe in the palace. She named him Moshe to bring to mind that he was *mashui*, drawn from the river. *Chazal* teach that Moshe had as many as ten names. Yet, the name by which he is recognized for all posterity is Moshe, the name Bisyah gave him. She saved Moshe’s life. Thus, she receives the naming rights for the young Moshe. By comparison, Miriam’s reward seems to eclipse the reward received by Bisyah. The question that confronts us is: Whose act deserves greater recognition? Bisyah, for saving Moshe? Or Miriam, who waited patiently by the water’s edge?

Understandably, actually saving a human life should be viewed on a higher level than merely standing by and watching what would occur. If so, why did Miriam warrant such an outstanding reward?

*Horav Noach Weinberg*, zl, derives from this that when Bisyah saved Moshe, she had no idea of the infant’s identity. All she knew was that a child needed to be saved. She stepped in and did what was expected of her. Miriam’s concern was for *Klal Yisrael*. Therefore, one can say that she was waiting to see how things would play out – how Moshe would be saved growing up in Bisyah’s home. Miriam was able to see things that others did not. Thus, she was privy to Moshe’s illuminating their home at birth; she knew from day one that Moshe was destined to be the redeemer who would take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Miriam was not merely watching a Jewish child (which certainly, in its own right, warrants distinctive merit); she was waiting to see how things would materialize for the future leader of the Jewish people. Bisyah, on the other hand, was acting on behalf of one Jewish child. Given her pedigree, this was an amazing act of selflessness, of courage and self-sacrifice for Judaism. At the end of the day, we have two women standing by the water: one is acting to ensure the survival of the entire Jewish Nation; the other is protecting one Jewish child.

*Rav Weinberg* underscores their discrepant intentions, and the consequent future ramifications. Bisyah’s intent was to save one Jewish child. She succeeded, and the name that he carried was the name she gave him. This was her reward. Miriam’s intent transformed her individual deed into a much greater act. She was thinking of *Klal Yisrael*, thus the nation was provided with water for their forty-year journey, compliments of the well/rock that carries her name.

Our intentions define our actions. *Rav Weinberg* posits that his idea is especially relevant with regard to prayer. When one prays, he should broaden the scope and focus of his prayer. Rather than pray for himself and his immediate family, he should pray for his community, for all of *Klal Yisrael*. One’s intentions are transformative, having the ability to alter himself. One whose deeds are focused inward will become a better person, but he will remain a singular individual who lives for and transforms himself. This is wonderful. It does not, however, compare to the individual who acts on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*, whose every activity is intended globally. He becomes a *Klal Yisrael* *mentch* – like Miriam, like all the leaders of *Klal Yisrael*. We do not live for ourselves. We live for – and serve at – the pleasure of Hashem. Thus, our intentions should focus on the larger picture – *Klal Yisrael*.

*יאאכיד לך שם שמעו נא המרים הנק הוה נוציא לך נומם.*

**“Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” (20:10)**

Miriam *HaNeviah* passed away. The water that had sustained *Klal Yisrael* for forty years was in her merit. Following her death, the water stopped flowing. When people have no water to drink, they react. They complained to Moshe *Rabbeinu* that they were thirsty. Moshe struck the rock, and it provided the necessary water. Hashem told Moshe, “Since you have not trusted in Me to sanctify Me before the People... you will not lead them in the Land.” Imagine, the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael* made one wrong decision,

which is beyond our ability to comprehend, and he received a most harsh punishment. His dream of entering *Eretz Yisrael* was shattered. Had he led the people to the Land, we would never have lost the *Bais HaMikdash*, no exile – nothing – but an idyllic life in *Eretz Yisrael*. One error, and everything was forever changed. The commentators struggle to find a suitable reason for such an onerous punishment. The reasons that they give obviously only touch the surface, because Moshe's “sin” is such only on the most elevated spiritual level that he had achieved, and on this level every action is studied under the scrutiny of a powerful spiritual microscope. *Rashi* asserts that it was because he struck the rock, rather than speak to it – as Hashem had instructed him. *Rambam* contends that it was because he became angry and spoke harshly to the people. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes that Moshe referred to the people as *ha'morim*, fools/rebels, which denigrates the descendants of the Patriarchs. *Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchev*, *z'l*, observes that, on the surface, these explanations do not concur. If one delves deeper into the matter, however, the two infractions are one and the same, since one catalyzed the other. He explained that two forms of rebuke exist: gentle; and not so gentle. When one reproaches gently, he shows the sinner the great privilege of being a member of *Klal Yisrael* and the ensuing special relationship that he has with Hashem. He is told that his soul is a spark of the Divine, hewn from the *Kisei HaKavod*, Throne of Glory. He is given to understand the immense satisfaction that Hashem derives whenever the simplest Jew scrupulously performs a *mitzvah*. He is told of the great joy that permeates all of Creation when a Jew fulfills his destiny in this world. When someone hears such “rebuke,” he is only too happy to return to Hashem's embrace with all his heart. A person who rebukes in this manner truly deserves to be a leader of the Jewish people.

The other form of rebuke is sharp and harsh. Its purpose is to shame the sinner into submission, to break his arrogance, to get him to fulfill his obligations. This type of rebuke is not based on coddling, but on telling it like it is and having the sinner experience the full wrath of what his actions have spawned. A person who rebukes in this manner does not bring the people to the fulfillment of their destined roles; rather, this rebuke is based upon browbeating and arm twisting, when, in fact, the sinner's heart is not in it. Such a person does not meet the requirements demanded of a Jewish leader.

When Moshe spoke with anger at the Jewish People, he was not inspiring them to return to Hashem. They had erred. Their behavior left much to be desired. When a people acts recalcitrantly, however, they will not be convinced to change with brow beating and stern rebuke. The rock was not willing to give up its water willingly. When Moshe spoke harshly to the people, the rock picked up on his tone. As a result, it refused to give up its water willfully. Consequently, Moshe had to strike the rock to give up its water. Had he spoken kindly to the people, it would have left an impression on the rock. When he spoke in anger, it likewise left an impression on the rock – a negative impression. In this manner, the various explanations coincide.

A student of the revered *Bobover Rebbe*, *z'l*, *Horav Shlomo Halberstam*, related the following story (quoted in “Stories that Warm the Heart”). At ten years of age, this student studied in the *Bobover Yeshivah* under the guidance of the *Rebbe*. Urban *yeshivos* were situated in urban areas which were populated by various cultures and establishments that catered to these diverse cultures. What is entirely acceptable to the non-Jewish liberal world is frequently an anathema to the Orthodox Jewish world. Thus, areas that were frequented by non-Jewish young men and women who were expressing their right to be non-Jewish liberals, unrestricted by the moral code and compass which exemplifies our young men and women, are understandably prohibited to our children. Nonetheless, as young boys will do, a small group of boys from the *Bobover Yeshivah* spent a half hour in a park that was on their *yeshivah*'s restricted list. They had a grand time and returned to the *yeshivah* laughing – thinking that they had broken one of the *yeshivah*'s rules and gotten away with it. How shocked they were to be greeted by the *Rebbe* himself. The young boy who (now as an adult) related the story was the

defacto leader. The *Rebbe* sternly beckoned him to his office. As the leader, he would be the sacrifice for the group. Trembling, he entered the *Rebbe*'s office.

The *Rebbe* sighed, “I am sorry, Avraham, but I will have to give you a *potch*, slap, for disobeying the rules. Avraham swallowed deeply, closed his eyes and waited for the slap (I must interject at this point. The boy did not fear the pain of the slap nearly as much as the accompanied shame of being slapped by the *Bobover Rebbe*.)

Avraham stood there and waited for the slap to come, squeezed his eyes tightly shut (as if that would relieve the pain). Suddenly, he felt the *Rebbe*'s soft hand caress his face. He opened his eyes and looked at the *Rebbe*, who was looking at him with the love and compassion of a father to a son (which he was to all of his *chassidim*).

“This is your *potch*. Now go back to class and learn well!”

This was a “slap” that Avrohom remembered his entire life. It was this form of rebuke, couched in fatherly love, that personified the *Bobover Rebbe*.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים וְיַעֲשֵׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר-אָמַרְתָּ וְיַעֲשֵׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר-אָמַרְתָּ

**And he struck the rock with his staff twice; abundant water came forth, and the assembly and their animals drank. (20:11)**

Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to speak to the rock. He also told him to fetch his staff – which he had earlier used to strike the rock that had previously provided the nation with water. Who knows? Clearly, whatever infraction was involved in Moshe's striking the rock is beyond us. The mere fact that so many early commentators weigh in concerning the sin is a clear indication that the sin was esoteric and of the minutest form of misconduct. In other words, when one must search, dispute and delve into the action that represents the sin, it demonstrates that it is on a level which is beyond our comprehension. Nonetheless, we may derive powerful lessons from this incident. Indeed, *Horav Moshe Tikuchinsky*, *z'l*, observes that the one who was baffled most by the Heavenly reaction to the incident is none other than Moshe *Rabbeinu*. He certainly would not have deviated from Hashem's instructions had he felt that doing so would be a violation. What should we say?

*Horav Reuven Dov Dessler*, *z'l*, takes a *Kelmer* approach (which focuses on perfection and how something imperfect is deficient) towards the sin and its effects. Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to the rock. Rather than speak, he struck the rock. When we think about it, striking a rock or speaking to the rock which then produces enough water to quench the thirst of five million men, women and children is a miracle by any standard. Does it really make a difference if one speaks to the rock or strikes it? Does the magnitude of the miracle make the difference irrelevant? *Rashi* explains that had the rock been spoken to rather than struck, the nation would have drawn the intended lesson, “If a rock which does not speak or hear and that does not require sustenance, carries out the word of G-d, so should we.”

*Rashi*'s statement is baffling. Imagine if the people would not have derived this lesson, would they have had license not to serve Hashem? Certainly not! Furthermore, the people of that generation were so spiritually elevated that the simplest woman was on a higher level of prophesy than *Yechezkel HaNavi* who described the workings of the Heavenly Sphere. Was the nation's obligation to Hashem for saving and sustaining them until that moment not sufficient reason for them to serve Him? Would a simple lesson make that much of a difference in the obligation to the Almighty? The answer is, explains *Rav Dessler*, it could have been better – manifesting greater *shleimus*, perfection. Perhaps one Jew out of the entire five million might have been increasingly inspired. This is what did not transpire as a result of striking the rock: perfection. It could have – and should have – been perfect.

We can accept that perfection is a requisite that must not be ignored, but does this warrant that Moshe received such a harsh punishment? He carried forty years of leadership, often under the most difficult and trying conditions, with challenges to his authority, constant complaining and bickering, a lack of appreciation and even less gratitude – and, to boot, he was not allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. Does the punishment correspond to the sin? A

relationship should exist between crime and punishment, whereby the disciplinary action one receives in some way, on some level, coincides with the infraction. On the surface, this criterion appears to elude us. Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s dream was to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He offered his prayers to Hashem that the decree against him be rescinded, thus permitting him to enter the Land. Let us imagine the following dialogue that hypothetically ensued between Moshe and Hashem. Hashem asked, "What is it that you lack in the *Midbar*, wilderness? You are sustained by the *manna*, drink water from Miriam's well, study Torah every waking moment, are the quintessential *Rebbe* who teaches Torah all the time to *Klal Yisrael*. You have achieved the highest level of prophecy, crowned as the king of the Jewish nation. You are the most praised and fortunate Jew. What else could you have? What do you lack?"

"It is all true... but in *Eretz Yisrael* it will all have greater *shleimus*, perfection."

"If so – if it is all about perfection, if this is your concern, can you say emphatically that your action of striking the rock, rather than speaking to it, was an act of *shleimus*?"

We can have no counter response to this question. In situations in which one seeks perfection, he must put in the effort towards achieving that perfection. Ostensibly, the above is not presented *chas v'shalom* as a critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, but of ourselves. When we think about it, what really is the primary focus of our supplication of Hashem? We ask that what we already have be better, more perfect. We want to be healthier, have greater sustenance, greater peace, lasting relationships. We ask for *shleimus*. Can we say that our prayers and spiritual activities represent *shleimus*? Does our *tefillah* have perfect *kavanah*, intention/devotion, without talking? Is our learning that perfect? In other words, to ask for and hope for and expect perfection, it must at least be tit for tat. One cannot expect something in return for that which he did not give.

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com  
from: **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig** <genesis@torah.org>  
to: rabbizweig@torah.org  
subject: Rabbi Zweig

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University  
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig  
Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of  
Faiga bas Rav Nachum, sponsored by Mrs. Channah Finkel and Family.  
Sneaky Snake

...Moshe made a snake of copper and placed it on the pole; so it was that if a snake bit a man he would stare at the copper snake and live (21:9).

This week's parsha recounts a fascinating incident, one unlike any other in the Torah: Bnei Yisroel are exasperated about retracing their steps and subsequently moving further from entering *Eretz Yisrael*. They begin to attack Hashem and Moshe, and complain bitterly about the manna and lack of water. This in and of itself doesn't seem particularly unusual; after all Bnei Yisroel tested Hashem's patience time and time again while in the desert. What makes this story unique is what happens next.

Hashem sends incredibly venomous snakes to attack Bnei Yisroel and many die. Almost immediately, the people go to Moshe, beg his forgiveness, and ask him to pray for them. Moshe acquiesces right away, at which point Hashem tells Moshe that he should fashion a snake and place it on a pole and that those who had been bitten can look at the snake and live. Moshe created the snake, and so it was that anyone who had been bitten and would stare at the copper snake would live. Rashi (ad loc) explains; could a snake (made by Moshe) cause death or give life? Rather, as long as Bnei Yisroel casts their eyes upward and subjects their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would be cured and if not they would waste away.

There is also a similar story at the end of Parshas Beshalach; when the Amalekites came to attack Bnei Yisroel Moshe lifted his hands toward heaven and as long as his hands were raised Bnei Yisroel were winning, and

when his hands lowered Bnei Yisroel faltered. Yet, if all Bnei Yisroel needed was Moshe to lift his hands towards heaven, why didn't he simply do the same here? Why did Hashem instead tell him to fashion a snake and have people stare at it to be cured? Creating a snake that cures seems contrary to our Torah values. In fact, the very same snake that Moshe created was later called Nechushtan and used as idol worship in the time of King Ahaz (before being eventually destroyed and burned by the righteous King Hezekiah). Seemingly, Moshe could have accomplished the same here by simply pointing his fingers heavenward once again.

The Torah uses a curious word to express the concept of "staring" at the snake: "Vehibit el Hanachash." Rashi (in his comments on Bereishis 15:5) explains that the word yabit refers to looking downward. Hashem is expressing a profound lesson for Bnei Yisroel to internalize. They are being asked to examine the snake within themselves – the part of them that desires to be independent from Hashem. That is what it means to look down at the snake: examine this internal conflict and understand that it is causing a separation between the individual and Hashem. Once one chooses to sublimate the yetzer hora within, Hashem provides a cure for the snakes on the outside.

#### A Giant Debt

...Og, king of Bashan, went out against them, he and his entire people, to do battle in Edrei. Hashem said to Moshe, "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him..." (21:33-34)

This week's parsha ends with the tale of the remarkable encounter between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Og, the giant-king of Bashan. Og had been one of the "Nephilim" (those that fell – "fallen angels" see Rashi on Bereishis 6:4); a race of giants from the time before the "great flood." He was known as "the escapee" because he survived the destruction of the "great flood" (see Rashi on Bereishis 14:13). The possuk tells us that Moshe was worried about meeting Og in a war.

At first glance, this seems a little odd. Bnei Yisroel had just soundly decimated Sichon king of Cheshbon, who had a reputation as one of the mightiest warriors in the world. Why was Moshe suddenly worried about fighting Og? Rashi (21:34) explains that almost 500 years prior Og had done a favor for Avraham Avinu. Moshe was afraid that the merit of this kindness to Avraham Avinu would stand for him and, perhaps, render him invulnerable.

What kindness had Og done for Avraham? In Parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 14:1-12), the Torah relates some of the details of the epic war that embroiled nine kingdoms. Four kings went to war against five kings and soundly defeated them and many other nations that were in their path. One of the nations that was utterly destroyed was the Rephaim, a nation of giants, and Og was the lone survivor ("fugitive"). In addition, one of the five kings who was defeated was the king of Sodom, where Avraham's nephew, Lot, resided. Og came to Avraham to inform him that his nephew had been taken captive by the four kings. This was the kindness that Og did for Avraham Avinu, which had Moshe concerned about meeting Og in battle. However, this is difficult to comprehend. Rashi (Bereishis 14:13) very clearly states that the reason Og came to inform Avraham what had happened to Lot was for his own selfish reasons. He desired to marry Sarah; one of the most beautiful women to have ever lived, according to the Gemara (Megillah 15a). Og hoped that Avraham would feel impelled to enter the war, and in the course of the fighting he would be killed; thereby clearing a path for Og to be with Sarah. Thus, Og had very selfish reasons for giving Avraham Avinu news about his nephew – so how is this act considered such a great merit for him?

Imagine for a moment that someone is attacked by a mugger and struck upon the head. Following this unfortunate event, the victim heads to the nearest hospital to be examined. The doctors decide to perform a CT scan of his head to be sure that there isn't any more extensive damage. Miraculously, the CT scan reveals that while there is no permanent damage from the mugger's blow, there is a tumor that is slowly growing inside the skull that must be removed. This tumor might have very likely killed this person and perhaps

not have been caught in time had he not been mugged. Does this victim now owe a debt of gratitude to the mugger?

Of course not. In the case of the mugger, the victim never wanted to suffer a severe blow to the head. That it, providentially, happened to work out is really just the hand of Hashem. However, in the case of Og, Avraham was well aware of risks he was taking by entering a war with the four kings. Yet, Avraham desired to have the information that Og was providing. The fact that Og had his own agenda doesn't lessen the kindness to Avraham; Og was providing Avraham a service that he wanted. Doing a kindness for someone as great as Avraham Avinu was reason enough to give Moshe pause. Hashem therefore had to reassure him.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson in hakaras hatov, as well as in something most of us strive hard to avoid. We see from this story that we must feel indebted to someone who does us a kindness even if he has his own reason for doing it. Often, we work very hard to try to ascribe a motivation to a benefactor that would seem to paint them as self-serving, or in the very least as not totally altruistic. Naturally, we do this to lessen our feeling of obligation to this person. This is wrong. The Torah is teaching us that we must appreciate any kindness that is done for us, irrespective of the benefactor's motivation.

...Talmudic College of Florida Rohr Talmudic University Campus  
4000 Alton Road, Miami Beach, FL 33140

---

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

[http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/insights\\_into\\_halacha/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha/)

Ohr Somayach

### Insights into Halacha

#### Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 19 June 2021 / 9 Tamuz 5781

#### Forgotten Fast Days: Zos Chukas HaTorah

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

On Motzai Shabbos Korach 5774, our dear, close family friend, Reb Chaim Daskal a”h, was niftar, after a prolonged and painful battle with cancer R”L. Never one to complain, Reb Chaim M’Yerushalayim (as he was commonly known) still exuded Simchas Hachaim and gratitude to Hashem even in his weakened and pain-filled state, the last time this author had the zechus to see him, merely a week and a half prior to his untimely passing. In fact, his tza’ava, will, reflected this as well, including how he wanted his own levaya, kevura, and shiva to be held.

One of the maspidim (eulogizers) at the levaya (at 1:45 A.M.!), Elimelech Lepon, mentioned that Reb Chaim passed away only after Shabbos was over, averring that the Malach HaMaves could not take have taken him on a Shabbos. You see, with an open house and a multitude of guests weekly, Shabbos was truly Reb Chaim’s special day. In fact, Mr. Lepon revealed that it was exclusively due to the merit of Reb Chaim’s extraordinary and warm Shabbos hospitality that won him over to personally begin keeping Shabbos properly.

When my father, renowned Kashrus expert Rabbi Manish Spitz, heard the tragic news of the passing of his Yedid Nefesh of almost 40 years, he enigmatically exclaimed ‘Zos Chukas HaTorah’! His intent was that the week of Parashas Chukas is ‘mesugal l’puraniyos’, a time that has seen much hardship and tragedy for our nation. Therefore, it was fitting that only after Shabbos of Parashas Korach had ended and the week of Parashas Chukas officially began, that such an incredible man, in the prime of his life, passed away.

Yet, there is no mention in the Gemara of the week of Parashas Chukas being one of tragedy, nor is it mentioned by the Rambam, Tur, or Shulchan Aruch! Not even in the Siman where tragedies and proper days to fast are mentioned, Orach Chaim 580! In fact, most are wholly unfamiliar with anything specifically attributed to this week. Yet, the Magen Avraham, citing the Sefer HaTanya[1] (referring to Sefer Tanya Rabbasi; a far earlier source

that the famous Kabbalistic work of the Shulchan Aruch Harav), tells of a terrible, albeit fascinating, historical tragedy.

#### Friday of Fire

The Magen Avraham prefaces his terrible tale by quoting certain writings[2] explaining that it is “worthwhile for every Jew to cry for the burning of the Torah”. He then proceeds to tell of a customary annual fast specifically for this purpose, on Erev Shabbos Parashas Chukas. On that day, in the year 1242, twenty wagonloads (however the original versions state 24 wagonloads)[3] filled with Gemaros and Talmudic literature (including many works of the Baalei Tosafos), were burned in Paris by agents of the Church and King Louis IX of France.

#### Talmud on Trial

The pretext to this mass burning was a public debate (later known as “The Disputation of Paris”) beginning in 1240 featuring Nicholas Donin, an apostate-Jew-turned-Franciscan-monk who petitioned Pope Gregory IX to prosecute the Talmud for 35 purported affronts to Christianity. The Pope ordered the banning and confiscation of all known manuscripts of the Talmud. King Louis IX, nicknamed “the monk king” due to his religious zeal, and later leader of the failed Seventh and Eighth Crusades, decided to put the Talmud ‘on trial,’ with Donin as the prosecutor.

Several of the most eminent rabbinical authorities in France were tasked to defend the Talmud: Rabbeinu Yechiel M’Paris, Rav Moshe M’Coucy (the Sma”G), Rav Shmuel M’Falaise, and Rav Yehuda M’Melun; the official verdict against them a foregone conclusion.[4] King Louis gleefully executed the “judgment” by publicly burning the 24 wagonloads of confiscated Talmudic literature on this “Friday of Fire.”[5]

The impact and importance of this loss was tremendous. Keep in mind that this occurred over 200 years before the printing press was invented, and each of these volumes was a priceless, handwritten manuscript.[6] In fact, this was considered such an enormous loss for Klal Yisrael, that the famed Maharam M’Rothenburg,[7] an eyewitness, composed an elegy for our loss, ‘Sha’ali Serufa Ba’Aish’, deemed so essential, that it is incorporated into the Kinos recited every Tisha B’Av (Kinah 41).[8]

#### I Had a Dream...

The great rabbis at the time, at a loss to understand the extent of the tragedy, inquired of Heaven by means of a dream (known as a she’elas chalom) to discover whether this terrible event had been so decreed by Hashem. The heavenly reply was a succinct three words ‘Da Gezeiras Oraysa’. This is the Aramaic translation (see Targum Onkelos) of the opening verses to Parashas Chukas, “Zos Chukas HaTorah, These are the decrees of the Torah” (Bamidbar Ch. 19:2). The Rabbanim understood from this cryptic reply that the burning of the Talmud was indeed Heavenly decreed. Moreover, they gleaned that it was due to the proximity of the Parasha that the tragedy transpired, and not the day of the month.[9]

Therefore, and as opposed to every other fast on the Jewish calendar, instead of a specific day established as a fast day, this one, designated a Taanis for Yechidim (fast for individuals), was set annually on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parashas Chukas. For those fasting, Asarah B’Teves would not be the only Taanis Tzibbur that practically occurs on a Friday.[10]

#### Retribution for the Rambam?

Rav Hillel of Verona, a talmid of Rabbeinu Yonah, and another eyewitness to these events, wrote a famous letter[11] in which he considered the burning of the Talmud as a clear sign of Divine anger and retribution for the burning of the works of the Rambam, in the exact same place in Paris not even forty days prior!

After the Rambam’s passing (in 1204), many great scholars who did not agree with his philosophical observations in his ‘Moreh Nevuchim’ and ‘Sefer HaMada’ banned his sefarim, with a tremendous controversy erupting throughout the Torah world.[12] Eventually, a number of his detractors submitted copies of his work to the monks of the Dominican Order to determine whether the Rambam’s works contained heretical ideas.

The Dominican Friars, naturally, summarily concluded that the Rambam’s writings were not only false, but blasphemous. In 1234, in Montpellier,

France, they publicly collected and burned all copies they found of 'Moreh Nevuchim' and 'Sefer HaMada'. Similarly, in 1242, a fanatical mob burned many of the Rambam's writings in Paris. Less than 40 days later, at the exact same site, the 24 wagonloads of the Talmud were burned, on Erev Shabbos Parashas Chukas.[13]

According to Rav Hillel's letter, the famed Rabbeinu Yonah, one of the Rambam's primary opponents, took the Talmud burning as a Divine sign, and publicly and vociferously denounced his former position and opposition against the Rambam's writings and instead emphatically concluded "Moshe Emes V'Toraso Emes, V'Kulanu Bada'in! - Moshe and his Torah are true (here referring to the Rambam), while we all are liars".[14] He planned on traveling to the Rambam's grave (in Teverya) and begging forgiveness. Some say this tragic incident was the catalyst of Rabbeinu Yonah's writing what came to be known as his Magnum Opus, 'Shaarei Teshuva'.

#### Further Grounds for Fasting

After discussing the burning of the Talmud, the Magen Avraham offers another reason for fasting. On this very day, Erev Shabbos Chukas, two entire cities of Jews were brutally decimated, as part of the Gezeiras Ta"ch V'Ta", the Cossack massacres led by Bogdan Chmielnitsky ym"sh[15] in 1648-1649, as recorded by the Shach.

Although most know of the Shach as one of the preeminent halachic authorities due to his extensive and authoritative commentary and rulings on the Shulchan Aruch, yet, few know that he also wrote a sefer titled 'Megillas Eifa',[16] detailing the horrific and barbaric slaughter of tens of thousands (he puts the total at over one hundred thousand!) of Jews, and hundreds of entire communities during these terrifying years. Among his entries he relates (in graphic detail) how two cities were totally wiped out on this same day in the year 1648 (5408). Hence, the Magen Avraham avers, that it is proper to fast (Taanis Yachid) on Erev Shabbos Chukas, due to both of these tragedies happening on this same day in history.

#### 20th of Sivan

However, that was not the first of the tragedies of Gezeiras Ta"ch V'Ta". That occurred on the 20th of Sivan, 1648 (5408), when the Cossacks attacked Nemirov (Nemiriv), in the Ukraine, and destroyed the Jewish community, numbering over 6,000. Several hundred Jews were drowned; others burned alive. The shuls were ransacked and destroyed, with even the Torah parchments desecrated and used as shoes. Since this horrifying catastrophe was unfortunately the first of many to come in the following years, the Shach, at the conclusion of his 'Megillas Eifa', declared a personal fast on the 20th of Sivan for himself and his descendants.[17]

This was soon codified as public fast by the Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos, the halachic and legislative body of all Lithuanian and Polish Jewry.[18] Indeed, the Magen Avraham concludes his passage that in many places in Poland, the custom is to fast on the 20th of Sivan for this reason. Additionally, the Shach, the Tosafos Yom Tov, and Rav Shabsi Sheftel Horowitz,[19] as well as several other Rabbanim of the time, composed specific Selichos to be recited on this day annually.

#### The First Blood Libel and Massacre

However, the 20th of Sivan was not chosen as a fast day exclusively due to the annihilation of the hundreds of Jewish communities during Gezeiras Ta"ch V'Ta". It actually held the ignominious distinction as being the date of one of the very first blood libels,[20] in Blois, France, almost 500 years prior, in 1171(4931)!

According to one of the Selichos recited on that day, 'Emunei Shelumei Yisrael', attributed to Hillel ben Yaakov, which lists the place and year of the tragedy, the King offered the 31 innocent Jewish prisoners (some listed by first name in the Selicha!), including several Gedolim and Baalei Tosafos, the chance to convert. When they refused, he ordered them burned alive! The martyrs recited Aleinu L'Shabayach in unison as the decree was being executed. Although, as detailed in the Selichah, as well as recorded by an eyewitness to the atrocities, Rabbi Efraim of Bonn in his 'Sefer HaZechira', which was later appended to Rabbi Yosef Hakohen HaRofei of Avignon's sixteenth century 'Emek HaBacha', a chronicle of the terrible devastation of

the Crusades (starting in 1096/4856; known as Gezeiras Tatn'u).[21] the martyrs' bodies did not burn, still, this tragedy foreshadowed and portended future cataclysmic events for the Jewish people. In fact, this terrible libel was a major factor in the expulsion order of Jews from France a mere ten years later.

The great Rabbeinu Tam and the Rabbanim of the time instituted the 20th of Sivan as a fast day, even exclaiming that this fast is 'akin to Yom Kippur'![22] The Selichos established for 20 Sivan, aside for the one mentioned previously which actually describes the horrendous pyre in Blois, were authored by the Gedolim of the previous generations regarding the destruction of many Jewish communities during the Crusades (known as Gezeiras Tatn'u; many Kinos of Tisha B'Av are recited in commemoration of these tragedies as well), including Rav Shlomo HaBavli,[23] Rabbeinu Gershom (Me'or Hagolah), and Rav Meir ben Rav Yitzchak, the author of Akdomus. Interestingly, several of the Selichos, especially the one titled "Elokim Al Dami L'Dami", strongly reference and invoke the idea and essence of Korbanos in their theme; comparing the self-sacrifice of the Kedoshim of these decimated communities who gave up their lives Al Kiddush Hashem, to Korbanos offered in the Beis Hamikdash.

#### Re-Establishing the Fast

In fact, it is due to the dual tragedies that occurred on this day that the Shach declared the 20th of Sivan a fast day.[24] In other words, he didn't actually set a new fast day; rather, he re-established the 20th of Sivan as a fast day, as it already had the distinction of a day that went 'down in infamy' almost 500 years previously. Therefore, it was only fitting to commemorate the unspeakable Cossack atrocities with a fast, on this very same day, the day that the first Jewish community was destroyed as part of Gezeiras Ta"ch V'Ta".

Chronicles of the disastrous occurrences of this day do exist and can still be found. Aside for the Shach's 'Megillas Eifa', there is also Rav Nossen Nota of Hanover's 'Yavein Metzulah', Rav Avraham ben Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's 'Tzar Bas Rabbim', Rav Gavriel ben Yehoshua of Shusberg's 'Pesach Teshuva', and Rav Meir ben Shmuel of Sheburshen's 'Tzok HaItim', all written by eyewitnesses to the carnage and wanton destruction.[25] [26]

Although nowadays it seems not widely commemorated or even known about,[27] nevertheless, the 20th of Sivan is still observed among several Chassidic communities, mostly of Hungarian origin. During the Holocaust, Hungarian Jewry was R'L decimated mainly over the span of the months of Iyar, Sivan, and Tamuz in 1944. Therefore, Rabbanim of Hungary re-established the 20th of Sivan as a fast day for Hungarian Jewry.[28] Recent events have proven to us the timelessness of the dictum of 'Zos Chukas HaTorah' - where tragedies beyond our understanding happen to the Jewish people in exile. Our pain and tears over the years have driven home the point to us that throughout our long and protracted exile there have been no dearth of reasons to fast. May we soon welcome Moshiach, and have no further need for fast days.

The author wishes to thank Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz for his assistance in clarifying much of the historical content of this article.

[1] Magen Avraham (O.C. 580, end 9), quoting the Sefer Tanya Rabbasi (end 58, Inyan Arba Tzomos pg. 63b). This version of the tragic events is also later cited by the Elya Rabbba (ad loc. 4), Aruch HaShulchan (ad loc. 4), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 31). The Tanya Rabbasi is an early halachic work written anonymously by a Rishon who was a colleague of the Shibolei Haleket and Maharam M'Rothenburg. Nowadays, it is generally attributed to Rav Yechiel ben Rav Yekusiel M'Mishpachas Ha'Anavim, of the Chachmei Roma (see the recent Mossad Rav Kook edition of the sefer). Interestingly, the Tanya Rabbasi was merely quoting the Shibolei Haleket's account; ergo, it is unclear how slight variations crept into the Magen Avraham's retelling. [2] The Oz V'Hadar Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16) references this to be referring to the teachings of the Arizal (Shaar HaKavannos of Rav Chaim Vital, Drushei Tikkun Chatzos 1 and Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar Tikkun Chatzos Ch. 3). [3] Indeed, the Biurei Mahersha'h (on the Tanya Rabbasi ad loc. 8) points out that there must have been a ta'us sofer in the Magen Avraham's writing, as the original he was quoting, it explicitly states 24 wagonloads and not 20. [4] The full proceedings of this debate was recorded by one of the Rabbanim who defended the Talmud, Rabbeinu Yechiel ben Yosef, the Rosh Yeshiva in Paris and father-in-law of Rav Yitzchak M'Corbeil, author of the SMa'K, in a sefer titled 'Vikuach Rabbeinu Yechiel M'Paris.' For more background on this tragedy, see ArtScroll's Kinos and Tefillot for Tisha B'Av (Introduction to Kinah 41). [5] For his leading role in this pivotal event amid a lifetime of royally advancing the banner of Catholicism, Louis IX is the only French king to have been posthumously canonized as a "saint." [Hence, there are many cities named after him around the world, including one with a famous "Gateway Arch" in Missouri.] The papal edict against the Talmud was overturned by Gregory IX's more tolerant successor, Pope Innocent IV in 1247. Disapproval from his peers notwithstanding, Innocent IV wrote letters to King Louis IX effectively ordering that henceforth the Talmud should be censored rather than burned. [6] See Shu't Menachem Meishiv (vol. 2, pg. 262, 62; part of the sefer Tziyon L'Menachem) who cites that approximately 12,000 individual volumes were burned! [7] Aside for the Kinah he wrote, the Maharam referenced

this great loss in his responsa (Teshuvas Maharam M'Rothenburg 250), citing the reaction of Rav Shmuel M'Falaise, one of the Rabbanim who unsuccessfully attempted to defend the Talmud from being burned. On a historical sidenote, the Maharam M'Rothenburg was niftar in captivity after being unjustly imprisoned for seven years in Ensisheim Fortress, in order to force the resident Jews to pay an exorbitant ransom to fill the king's (Rudolf I of Germany) depleted coffers. The Maharam refused to allow himself to be ransomed, fearing that it would set a dangerous precedent of rulers holding Rabbanim captive and forcing the unfortunate Jews to pay the price. Indeed, a short while after his passing, the king attempted to do the same for the Maharam's prized pupil, the Rosh, who only narrowly avoided capture, escaping to Spain. Tragically, the Maharam's body was only allowed to be buried fourteen years later, when a ransom was paid by Alexander ben Shlomo Wimpfen, who was subsequently laid to rest beside the Maharam, in the Jewish cemetery of Worms, Germany (also known as "Heiliger Sand"), nowadays commonly considered the oldest surviving Jewish cemetery in Europe. [8] An interesting side point, the Goren Dovid (Shu"t O.C. 41) utilizes this tragedy as a reason to explain why nowadays Yom Tov Sheini is still observed. Unfortunately, throughout our long and bitter Golus we never know when a government might make a gezeira ra'ah and all halachic literature lost. How then will we be able to properly calculate the months and years to know when are the correct days to observe? He explains that this was a fulfillment of the Gemara's warning (Beitzah 4b) to keep Yom Tov Sheini "Hizharu B'Minhag Avoseichem B'Yadeichem", "You should still be vigilant with the custom of your forefathers that has been handed down to you because there might be times when the local government will issue a decree and it will cause confusion". For more on this topic see recent articles titled "Rosh Hashana: The Universal Two Day Yom Tov (and Why Yom Kippur is Not)" and "One Day or Two? What is a Chutznik in Eretz Yisrael to Do?" [9] The Shibolei Haleket (263, Ha'arugah HaTishi'i is Seder Taanis, Din Arba Tzomos, whom other sources are ostensibly based on) cites this as well, albeit with slight variations. First of all, from his writing it seems that he was also an eyewitness. Second, he refers to it as 24 (and not 20) wagonloads filled with "Sifrei Talmud, V'Halachos V'Hagados", similar to the Maharam M'Rothenburg's version. Third, according to his version, the heavenly response received was "Va'Da Gezeiras Oraysa", "And these are the decrees of the Torah". Accordingly, the Rabbanim understood the response to mean that Yom Vav (the sixth day) of Parashas Chukas specifically was the gezeira. This 'vav' is understandably not present in our Targum Onkelos on the pasuk of "Zos Chukas HaTorah", as the pasuk does not state "V'Zos". As mentioned previously, this account is also the version in the original Tanya Rabbasi, as he was citing the Shibolei Haleket. Other variations include the Sefer HaTadir (32, Hilchos Taaniyos pg. 233-234) who cites that 24 wagonloads were burned like the other Rishonim, but writes that the Heavenly response was "Da Gezeiras Oraysa" (without the 'vav') similar to the Magen Avraham's version, and the Korei HaDoros (pg. 23a-b s.v. ukaf) who writes that 21 wagonloads were burned, but places the date of the Talmud burning 62 years later, right before the Jews were actually expelled from France. Interestingly, the Maharam M'Rothenburg makes no mention of the she'elashalom in his Kinah dedicated to this tragedy. Neither does the Mishna Berura (ibid.), who summarized the reasons for the fast. However, in a different vein, in his recently published manuscript, Rav Chaim Paltiel, a Rishon and talmid chaver of the Maharam M'Rothenburg writes (Perushei HaTorah L'Rabi Chaim Paltiel, Introduction to Parashas Chukas, pg. 527; thanks are due to Rabbi Avrohom Goldstone of England for pointing out this source) that the minhag in France was to fast annually on the 6th of Tamuz, as that was the date that the Talmud was burned. And a siman for this is "Zos Chukas HaTorah," which the Targum is "Da Gezeiras D'Oraysa," meaning that on that date there was a gezeira on/against the Torah. It seems that both the Maharam, as well as Rav Paltiel were unaware of the she'elashalom, and Rav Paltiel understood that the fast to commemorate this tragedy was set as an actual date and not on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parashas Chukas. Since his manuscript was only first published some 30-odd years ago (5741), it is understandable why none of the Acharonim quoted his version of the events. For more on the topic of She'elos Chalamos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's Lekutei Eliezer (pg. 59-63) and Rabbi Mordechai Zev Tremp's recent Magic, Mysteries, and Mysticism: Illuminating Insights on Esoteric Torah Topics (pg. 76-78 and 235-239). [10] For more on this topic and why Asarah B'Teves is the only Taanis Tzibbur that can fall out on a Friday, as well as the halachos of a Friday fast, see article titled "Fasting on Friday" - Asarah B'Teves: Not Your Ordinary Fast Day". [11] This letter is brought in Chemdah Genuzah (pg. 18), as well as Oztar HaGedolim (vol. 7, pg. 105), and cited in Torah L'Daas (vol. 2, Parashas Chukas pg. 280-281) and Kuntress Peninei Gevuros Akiva (Parashas Chukas pg. 3). Perhaps somewhat apocryphal, but certainly evocative, Rav Hillel mentions that the ashes of the burnt sefarim of the Rambam mixed together with the ashes of the burnt Talmud. [12] These letters, back and forth between the great scholars of the time, have been collected as the third volume of Kovetz Teshuvos HaRambam V'Igrosav, titled "Igros HaKina'os". [13] For more on the historical aspects of this see Rabbi Avraham Meir Weiss's recent Mishnas Chachamim (pg. 265, footnote 50) and the ArtScroll Kinos and Tefilos for Tisha B'Av (Introduction to Kinah 41). [14] This is a paraphrase of the quote Chazal attribute to Korach after he was swallowed up by the earth at the conclusion of his ill-fated rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu! See Gemara Bava Basra (74a), Midrash Rabba (Parashas Korach Ch. 18, end 20), Midrash Tanchuma (Parashas Korach 11), and Kli Yakar (Parashas Korach Ch. 16, 34 s.v. nasu). [15] A genocidal and bloodthirsty mass murderer who could have given Adolf Hitler ym'sh a run as most notorious Anti-Semitic in history, Chmielnitsky ym'sh is nevertheless still considered a national hero in Ukraine for being the father of Ukrainian nationalistic aspirations. The Cossacks' sheer brutality and scale of their atrocities was unsurpassed until the Nazis. According to noted historian Rabbi Berel Wein, the only reason why the Cossacks did not manage to kill as many Jews as did the Nazisym'sh, was that there were no mechanized weapons to enable easy mass murder back in the 1600s. It was not due to lack of trying, R"l. [16] Although this author could not find this sefer among the works of the Shach, I was able to locate it annexed to the back of Rav Shlomo Ibn Varga's Shevet Yehuda, a fascinating (and unfortunately horrifying) work detailing the trials and tribulations Klal Yisrael has gone through in different lands over the millennia of our prolonged exile. Although Rav Varga died over a hundred years prior to Gezeiras Ta'ach V'Ta", the Shach's shocking account and vivid descriptions of the massacres were later included in this important work. Essential reading on Tisha B'Av! [17] The Shach added an additional reason why he chose this date (also cited in Shaarei Teshuva - O.C. 580, end 9): 20 Sivan cannot fall out on a Shabbos in our calendar, ensuring and enabling fasters to be able to do so on that day every year. The Shach (as well as later the Yaavetz in his Siddur Beis Yaakov and as mentioned in the special aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamim' recited on that day for the Harugei Kehillos T'ach [V'Ta"]; reprinted from an old manuscript that was printed in the Shach's lifetime) especially mourned the loss of the city's Chief Rabbi, Rav Yechiel Michel, a tremendous Talmid Chacham. Interestingly, a few short years earlier, the famed Tosafos Yom Tov, Rav Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, served as the town's Rav. [18] Pinkas Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos, cited by the Taz (O.C. 566, 3; although he quotes it as the Vaad Shalosh Ha'Aratzos) and Shaarei Teshuva (O.C. 580, end 9), as well as Rav Nossin Nata of Hanover's "Yavei Metzulah", Rav Avraham ben Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's "Tzar Bas Rabbim" (Reshumos vol. 3, pg. 279), and the Tosafos Yom Tov's Hakdama to his "Selichos L'Kaf Sivan". See also Yad Shaul (Y'D 228, end 136), Daas Torah (O.C. 580, 4), Siddur HaShlah, Siddur Bais Yaakov (of the Yaavetz), Siddur Derech HaChaim (of the Chavas Daas), Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah (Shaar 9, Ch. 11) and the introduction to sefer 'Yesh Manchilin'. This fast is also mentioned by several other authorities including the Magen Avraham (ibid. and in O.C. 568, 10), Elya Rabba (O.C. 566, 3), Maadanei Yom Tov (ad loc. 1; aside for the Selichos he wrote), Pri Megadim (ad loc. M.Z. 3), Eshel Avraham (Butchatch, O.C. 580; at length), Mishna Berura (ibid.), and Kaf Hachaim (ibid.). [19] He was the son of the Shlah and Av Bais Din of Prague, as well as the author of Vavei Ha'Amudim. His Selicha was printed in the Siddur HaShlah. In the aftermath of these tragedies, the Tosafos Yom Tov (cited in the end of Shaarei Efrain, Hilchos Krias HaTorah) also composed a famous Tefillah against talking in Shul. [20] The ignominious distinction of very first blood libel seems to have occurred in 1144, Norwich, England, after a boy, William of Norwich, was found dead with stab wounds in the woods. Although his death was unsolved, the local community of Norwich attributed the boy's death to the Jews. William was shortly thereafter acclaimed as a saint in Norwich, with 'miracles' attributed to him, with a cult established in his name. However, in this case, the local authorities did not convict the Jews due to lack of proof and of legal jurisdiction. Although this sordid affair marked the first official 'Blood Libel', on the other hand, Blois in 1171 was the first recorded time and place such baseless accusations were actually acted upon, concluding with a gruesome massacre of the town's Jews, HY"D. Thanks are due to Stephen Posen for pointing out these details. [21] For this reason alone, the Taz (O.C. 493, 2), although maintaining that one need only keep the restrictions of

Sefirah only until Lag B'omer, nonetheless, exhorts us to continue with the prohibition on weddings even after Lag B'omer until shortly before Shavuos due to the horrific tragedies perpetrated by the Crusaders to many Ashkenazic communities during the second half of Sefirah (Gezeiras Tat'u). See previous article titled 'Switching Sefirahs? - Understanding Your Minhag and its Ramifications'. [22] In fact, according to this source, the tragic events in Blois distressed Rabbeinu Tam so much that he passed away a mere 14 days later, 4 Tamuz 1171 (4931). However, Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi (Alpha Beta Tinyeisa D'Shmuel Zeira vol. 1, pg. 391) posits that this was not referring to the famous Rabbeinu Tam who was Rashi's grandson, but rather his talmid, Rav Yaakov of Orleans who was called Rabbeinu Tam M'Orleans. He adds, citing that Ohev Yisrael of Apt (end Parashas Mattos) that although not mentioning the terrible pyre on that day, related an astounding drush that the 20th of Sivan is the beginning of Yom Kippur. He adds a Biblical allusion to this from Parashas Ki Sisa (Shemos Ch. 17:16): "Ki Yad al Keis Kah" - Keis (Kaf-Samach) stands for Kaf (20) Sivan and Kah (Yud - Hei) stands for Yom Kippurim. [23] Rav Shlomo HaBavli is referred to by the Rishonim with great veneration. For example, he is quoted by Rashi (Parashas Terumah Ch. 26:15 s.v. v'asisa) and the Rosh (Yoma Ch. 8, 19). The Maharshal (Shu"t Maharshal 29) writes that Rabbeinu Gershom, teacher of all Ashkenazic Jewry, learned Torah and received his mesorah from Rav Shlomo HaBavli. [24] Shach, in the conclusion of his 'Megillas Eifa', also cited by the Shaarei Teshuva (O.C. 580, end 9) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. end 31). This double catastrophe on the same day as part of the cheshbon to renew the fast of the 20th of Sivan is also mentioned by the Tosafos Yom Tov in his Hakdama to his Selichos L'Kaf Sivan, and in Rav Meir ben Shmuel Shebursen's 'Tzok HaTaitim'. [25] Be forewarned: Much of the content is quite graphic and gruesome in its explicitness. The Cossacks' sheer depravity, cruelty, brutality, and bloodlust, was simply unprecedented in scale and scope, R"l. [26] Many of these works were collected and reprinted together around a hundred years ago in 'Lekoros HaGezeiros al Yisrael' (vol. 4). Additionally, there are several contemporary sefarim that give a summary of the tragedies of Gezeiras Ta'ach and the 20th of Sivan, including Sefer HaTodaah (vol. 2, Chodesh Sivan, Kaf B'Sivan, pg. 357-360), and Nitei Gavriel (on Hilchos Shavuos, Chelek HaBirurim 6, pg. 282-299). Especially of interest is Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff's recent article titled 'The Twentieth of Sivan'. [27] There are several theories raised to explain this. See Yad Shaul (Y'D 228, end 136), and the Maharshal's Daas Torah (O.C. 580, 4). One supposition is that the original decree from the Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos to fast on the 20th of Sivan was only for a hundred years. Another theory is that the decree was only for Jewry who lived in those lands. In fact, the lashon of the Magen Avraham (O.C. 580, end 9), as well as the Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16), bears this out, as they only mention the fast as a 'minhag Poland'. Moreover, the Tosafos Yom Tov himself, in his Hakdama to his Selichos L'Kaf Sivan, writes that the fast was encumbent upon all throughout the Arba Ha'Aratzos; implying that it was never accepted in other outlying lands. Nowadays, there are not many Jewish kehillos left in Poland or Ukraine to uphold this. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Y'D vol. 4, 57, 11 s.v. v'lo) and Rav Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog (Shu"t Heichal Yitzchak O.C. 61, 3) [and although disagreeing in psak about the main inyan in their respective responsa] both wrote that the takana to fast on the 20th of Sivan was only observed in those lands. [28] See Nitei Gavriel (ibid. pg. 297-299), citing the Pinkas Minhagim of Kehel Yereim of Budapest from 5706/1946 and the Mishnas Yaakov (O.C. 580). For example, the Belz minhag is to be very makpid with reciting the Selichos of the 20th of Sivan, including the later additions of special aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamim' recited on that day for the Harugei Kehillos T'ach [V'Ta"] (reprinted from an old manuscript that was printed in the Shach's lifetime) as well as a more recent, albeit unfortunately similar, aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamim' for the Kedoshim HaShoah (Ta'sh-Tash"). Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority. This article is dedicated L'Illi Nishmasam shel R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi and Naftali Frankel, Gilad Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach Hy'd. This article was written l'zechus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad! L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Baruch Yehuda For any questions, comments or for the full March Mekomos / sources, please email the author: [yspitz@ohr.edu](mailto:yspitz@ohr.edu). Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanet Halacha, serves as the Sh"el U'Meishiv and Rosh Chaburah of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.

## Parshas Chukat: Revisiting Mei Merivah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### I. The Text: Bamidbar 20:1-13

1 And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. 2 And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3 And the people strove with Moses, and spoke, saying: 'Would that we had perished when our brethren perished before Hashem! 4 And why have you brought the assembly of Hashem into this wilderness, to die there, we and our cattle? 5 And wherefore have you made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.' 6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tent of meeting, and fell upon their faces; and the glory of Hashem appeared unto them. 7 And Hashem spoke unto Moses, saying: 8 'Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock; so thou shalt give the congregation and their cattle drink.' 9 And Moses took the rod from before Hashem, as He commanded him. 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said unto them: 'Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?' 11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle. 12 And Hashem said unto Moses and Aaron: 'Because ye believed not in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.' 13 These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with Hashem, and He was sanctified in them.

### II. The Method

#### A: The panoramic view

Immediately when reading the text, besides the well-known question of the gravity of the punishment meted out to Moses and Aaron and identifying the particular sin of which they are held liable – we find another oddity. The mention of the death and burial of Miriam seems to have nothing to do with the rest of the story and doesn't seem to belong here. (The midrashic device of Miriam's well [Tosefta Sotah 11:1; Seder Olam Rabbah Ch. 10] seems to have been introduced to solve this problem. The gist of the Midrash is that perhaps her death occasioned an unexpected thirst that caused the crisis. A cursory look at the sources cited above will bear this out.)

Any student of Tanakh will have long realized that deaths and burials are never inherently significant (except, perhaps, in the royal chronicles of Melakhim as part of the royal-biography formula) – deaths and/or burials mentioned in the text are reported due to another consideration. Often as not, it is a demonstration of the fulfillment of a Divine promise (e.g. the funeral of Jacob was a direct fulfillment of God's last words to him in Gen. 46:4; the death of Sarah was occasion for Abraham to finally realize God's commitment of over 60 years that he will inherit the Land); as such, the mention of Miriam's death and burial seems to be unnecessary here.

Note that the complaint of the people isn't about thirst – they only mention "u-mayim ayin lish'tot" (there is no water to drink) as an apparent afterthought – strangely enough, their main complaint is about the desert not being a land for seed, figs, grapes and pomegranates, which rests upon an odd premise. Why would the Israelites think that this way-station on their way to the "good, wide land" should have any of those resources?

In numerous essays, I've underscored that a successful reader of Tanakh must become "part of the story" – we, the omniscient reader, know how everything is going to turn out; we know that Pharaoh will refuse, we know that Esau will discover Jacob's masquerade, we know that Rachel will die on the road – and we know that Moses will never enter the Land. We have to remember that none of the players know that until they do – either when it happens or when they are prophetically given that information.

The Israelites do not know where they are – just that they have been traveling for a long time with a beautiful land awaiting them at the end of that journey. They may have heard that the Land is "flowing with milk and honey," they may have even heard about the famed seven species (although only adumbrated in Deut. 8:8) – but all that they've seen is grapes, figs and pomegranates – which, surprisingly, lists exactly the same three types of fruit brought back by the scouts (above, 13:23), the absence of which they bemoaned here.

So...the Israelites must have thought they were in Israel – and that's why they are complaining about the lack of fig and pomegranate trees and grape vines. What might have given them the idea that they had already reached that Land?

The answer lies in again, using the frame of reference of the people themselves; in the middle of our camp, held in trust by the Levites, is a box containing Joseph's bones. Why didn't we bury our ancestor in Egypt? Evidently, we bury important people in the Land – Joseph has a special location (cf. Gen. 48:22), but no one is buried "out there" (except for the entire generation that passed away in the desert and whose death was a fulfillment of a Divine decree). So...if Miriam died and was buried "there" ("sham"), we must have arrived at the Land!

We can now understand the catalyst for the crisis – the people believe that they've arrived – but the "beautiful land, flowing with milk and honey, boasting fantastic fruit" is nowhere to be seen. "And what of the grapes, figs and pomegranates which we've seen with our own eyes (or our parents saw and related to us)?"

## B: Anticipatory reading

We would expect that Moses' response – or that directed by God that he take – would be to assure them that they are still on the road, not yet arrived and that, indeed, the Land to which they are coming is truly filled with luscious fruits and grains.

It takes a strong imagination to be able to see the text as it is not, to imagine what might have come next and then to "be surprised" at what actually ensues. This is nothing less than the traditional approach of Midrash (especially Midrash Halakhah) which is built on what should be written and then allowing what is written to teach additional lessons. We train ourselves to recognize a rhetorical pattern in Tanakh, whether it be nomenclature (see Rashi's comment at Gen. 1:1 noting that the "unexpected" use of Elokim followed, in ch. 2 [v. 4 ff.] by Hashem Elokim indicates a change in "Divine Policy" vis-à-vis creation), presentation of laws or any other genre of Biblical literature, we train ourselves to notice what is "off" about a particular passage and what that unusual twist may be signaling. This also makes reading the classical medieval commentators that much more empowering and impactful, as the students can already identify with "what's bothering Rashi/Ramban/ibn Ezra (etc.)?"

As such, we are surprised that God neither instructs Moses to march them into the Land or to inform them that they haven't yet arrived – which we can take in one of two ways. Either our hypothesis is wrong and the confrontation between Moses and the people isn't about the Land, but about thirst – or we may be right, but there may also be something bigger going on, beneath the superficial complaint, and that is what God is instructing Moses to address.

## C: Back to the panoramic view

If we take a look at the passage, we can see that the people's complaint doesn't jibe with what we know about the narrative. We know that God took the people out of Egypt, that God is leading them through the desert and directing their travels – but we are so accustomed to hearing the people's plaint to Moses (and Aaron): "Why have YOU brought the assembly of Hashem into this wilderness...And why have YOU made us to come up out of Egypt..." that we don't necessarily pick up on the incongruity of their complaint. Why aren't they angry at – or disappointed with – God, who has led them to this place?

There is a simple answer which, at once, illuminates and disappoints: The Israelites of this new generation believe, as did their parents, that it was Moses and Aaron who led them out of Egypt and who are leading them through the desert...in effect, nothing has changed since the complaints first registered just after we were miraculously brought through the Sea (Exodus chapters 15-17).

## D: The Crisis: A Summary

We can identify three different issues going on in our passage –

- 1) An elemental and existential need for water – as confirmed by v. 2
- 2) A disenchantment with the "Land" that they believe they have come to (v. 5)
- 3) A gross theological error about who (or Who) is leading them

Furthermore, we can then identify a causal chain of malaise: The lack of water opens up the wounds about the place, which in turns reveals a festering problem of belief.

## E: Testing the hypothesis

If we are right, then we should expect God's response to address the ultimate problem of belief; He does so (as we will discover forthwith) without sacrificing a solution to the most immediate problem of water. He directs Moses to act in such a way that belief in God's all-encompassing role in their deliverance, journeys and eventual destination would be confirmed.

The command to take the staff implies that Moses should use it to strike the rock (as ibn Ezra argues, and based on the parallel story in Exodus 17; see, however, R. Yoseph B'khor Shor's comments here); what are we to make of the directive "ve-dibbar tem el ha-sela". Here again, the students' familiarity with the rest of Tanakh, their learning to focus only on the text (and suspend interpretive memories) and to read with anticipation will help.

Here is where our trusty tool, the Concordance, comes in handy. To be fair, a concordance proper wouldn't help here; but familiarity with Tanakh ("bekiut") is the larger meaning and intent here. As there is no other occasion in all of Tanakh when anyone is commanded to speak to (and command) an inanimate object, perhaps we should challenge the usual translation of the prepositional *el* and to read, rather *al* (here we can use a "real" concordance; there are dozens of examples in the canon where the two are interchanged) and read, rather, "speak about the boulder" and understand that Moses and Aaron were directed to speak to the people, in front of the rock, about that selfsame boulder. But what were they to say?

Once we recall the underlying crisis of faith that lies at the heart of our textual onion, we may come to the conclusion that Moses and Aaron were to use the rock as a way of showing the people that it was God, not they, who were directing the people's lives, feeding them, leading them and protecting them through the desert.

Our hypothesis, that the real cause of the crisis was the people's misconception about Moses and Aaron's role in their destiny, can now be substantiated and, at the very least, we can continue to use it as a tentative approach as we come to the denouement of the passage.

#### **F: The "sin"**

What do we expect Moses to say at this point? (more "anticipatory reading") "I will bring water from the rock, something no human can accomplish – therefore, you all see that it is God Almighty who is protecting and leading us"....or something to that effect.

Instead, Moses used the device of a rhetorical question to make his point "ha-min ha-sela ha-zeh notzi lakhem mayim?" – but a rhetorical question will only work if the intended audience knows how to interpret it. When a teen's mother declares "Do you call this a clean room" – her son understands that she is calling it a mess – but if an immigrant has just moved in and she says the same thing – he may think that she is impressed with his work or even asking him what he thinks about the room.

Evidently, the new generation of Israelites didn't properly understand Moses' intent and his opportunity to inspire belief was lost – they could have been moved by his words to renew their belief in God, but instead (evidently) understood his words as anger, or defiance; either way, as confirmation of their belief in Moses as the "wizard" who was leading them.

A careful read of God's punishment is not that Moses and Aaron were punished with being condemned to die in the desert; but were stripped of their leadership. Read not "lo tavo'u" – you shall not come – rather "lo tavi'u" – you shall not lead; the inability to lead this new generation, evidenced by a communication gap between the old leader and the new community, necessitated a removal of Moses from the helm of leadership.

### **III. AFTERWORD**

In this brief essay, we've looked at the infamous "waters of strife", a scene that, in one sense or another, signals the end of Moses' leadership of the people. We've utilized various methodological tools to assay the narrative and to cut "between the lines" of the story to identify the underlying issues and how they interrelate. By using our familiarity with Tanakh in general, with the desert narratives in particular, we were able to identify several anomalies in the text and place them in (tentative) proper perspective. By utilizing the skill of "anticipatory reading", we allowed ourselves to be surprised by the text and to take a fresh look at this well-studied Parashah.

Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

## Parshat Chukat

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Parashat Hukkat is a potpourri of different events and literary modes: it begins with halakha (Para Aduma) and then moves to narrative, recounting a(nother) tale of rebellion (a two-fold tale of rebellion, as we shall see), moving on to several military battles (or near-battles) with other nations, and telling of the death of Aharon. Besides legal and narrative material, there is also a light sprinkling of poetry.

So much for the overview. We will focus on the episode of Mei Meriva, the place where Moshe and Aharon disobey Hashem's command:

1. What is Moshe's crime? Is the crime simply that he strikes instead of speaking to the rock, and that this is not precisely what Hashem had commanded? If there is deeper significance to the crime, what is it?
2. Perhaps another way to ask the question: what does Hashem want to accomplish in having the rock provide water when spoken to, and how does Moshe's action fail to accomplish this goal? If Hashem wants to impress the people with this miracle, what is the difference whether the rock provides water when spoken to or when struck? Isn't it a miracle either way? And what's the big deal anyway -- Hashem has split the sea for this nation, causes their daily bread to rain from the sky, caused the Earth to swallow some rebels in last week's parasha; are these people going to be impressed by water from a rock?
3. What is Aharon's crime, given that the Torah tells us that Moshe is the one who strikes the rock?
4. Why does Moshe hit the rock twice instead of just once? Or, to phrase it somewhat differently, why doesn't Hashem cause the water to come out after just one hit?
5. Why do Moshe and Aharon do it? Why, after all, do they disobey Hashem and hit the rock? We are not talking about the common folk, malingeringers, complainers, yesterday's slaves -- we are talking about Moshe and Aharon! Moshe, "My servant Moshe," "the most trusted in My entire house," the one God speaks to "like a man speaks to his friend." How is this very same Moshe capable of rebellion? Aharon, the chosen holiest -- joining the rebels against Hashem?
6. What exactly is their punishment for disobeying Hashem? Take a careful look at the text to see how the punishment is worded.
7. How is this punishment appropriate to the crime?
8. In the end of this short section, we hear that Hashem is "sanctified" ("va-yi-kkadesh"). But how is He sanctified?
9. There are several poems in the parasha. At least one of them may be very important for understanding our story. Which is it, and why is it important?
10. It is crucial also to look at other places in which the Torah refers to this story. See the following places: BeMidbar 20, BeMidbar 27, Devarim 1, Devarim 3, Devarim 32, Devarim 34.

### TO BEGIN:

One way in which to understand the episode facing us is to look through the Torah for whatever evidence seems relevant. So before commenting extensively on any one section, we will first survey the various places in the Torah where the episode is mentioned.

**BEMIDBAR 20:1-13** – Now they came, Bnei Yisrael, the entire community, to the wilderness of Tzin, in the first month. The people stayed in Kadesh. Miryam died there, and she was buried there.

Now there was no water for the community, so they assembled against Moshe and against Aharon; the people quarreled with Moshe, they said, saying: "Would that we had expired when our brothers expired before the presence of Hashem!"

Why did you bring the assembly of Hashem into this wilderness, to die there, us and our cattle? Why did you make us go up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place -- not a place of seeds and figs, vines and pomegranates! And water there is none to drink!"

Moshe and Aharon came away from the presence of the Assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Appointment, and flung themselves upon their faces. The glory of Hashem appeared to them, and Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: "Take the staff and assemble the community, you and Aharon your brother; you are to speak to the boulder before their eyes so that it gives forth its water; thus you are to bring out for them water from the boulder, that you may give drink to the assembly and to their cattle."

So Moshe took the staff from before the presence of Hashem, as He had commanded him. And Moshe and Aharon assembled the Assembly facing the boulder. He said to them: "Now hear, you rebels, from this boulder shall we bring you out water?" Moshe raised his hand and struck the boulder with his staff, twice, so that abundant water came out; and the community and their cattle drank. Now Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon: "Because you did not trust in Me, to sanctify me before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I give to them!" Those were the waters of Meriva/quarreling, where Bnei Yisrael quarreled with Hashem, and He was sanctified through them.

**BEMIDBAR 20:22-29** – They marched on from Kadesh, and they came, Bnei Yisrael, the entire community, to Hor ha-Har. Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon at Hor ha-Har, by the border of the land of Edom, saying: "Let Aharon be gathered to his people, for he is not to enter the Land that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael, since you rebelled against My orders at the waters of Meriva. Take Aharon and Elazar his son, and bring them up on Hor ha-Har; strip Aharon of his garments and clothe in them Elazar, his son. Aharon will be gathered up and will die there." So Moshe did as Hashem commanded him: they went up Hor ha-Har before the eyes of the entire community; Moshe stripped Aharon of his garments and clothed in them Elazar, his son. So Aharon died there on top of the hill. When Moshe and Elazar came down from the hill, the entire community saw that Aharon had expired, and they wept for Aharon thirty days, the whole House of Yisrael.

**BEMIDBAR 27:12-19** – Hashem said to Moshe: "Go up this mountain . . . and see the land that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael. When you have seen it, you will be gathered to your people, even you, as Aharon your brother was gathered; since you rebelled against My order in the wilderness of Tzin when the community quarreled, to sanctify Me through water before their eyes; they are the waters of quarreling at Kadesh, in the wilderness of Tzin."

Then Moshe spoke to Hashem, saying: "Let Hashem, the God of the spirits of all flesh, designate a man over the community who will go out before them, who will come back before them, who will lead them out, who will bring them back, so that the community of Hashem will not be like a flock that has no shepherd." Hashem said to Moshe: "Take yourself Yehoshua son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him. You are to stand him before Elazar the priest and before the entire community, and you are to commission him before their eyes."

**DEVARIM 1:37-38** – "Also at me was Hashem angry for your sake, saying: "You also will not enter there! Yehoshua son of Nun, who stands before you, he will enter there; him shall you strengthen, for he will give it as inheritance to Yisrael."

**DEVARIM 3:24-29** – "I pleaded with Hashem at that time, saying: 'My Lord Hashem, You have begun to let Your servant see Your greatness and Your strong hand; who is so powerful in heaven and on earth that he can do the like of Your deeds and Your power! Pray, let me cross over, that I may see the good land that is across the Jordan, this good hill country, and the Lebanon!' But Hashem was angry with me on your account, and He would not listen to me. Hashem said to me: 'Enough for you! Do not speak to Me any more again about this matter! Go up to the top of the range and lift up your eyes -- toward the sea, toward the north, toward the south, and toward sunrise; see it with your eyes, for you will not cross this Jordan! But command Yehoshua, make him strong, make him courageous, for he will cross over before this people, and he will cause them to inherit the land that you see.'"

**DEVARIM 32:48-52** – Hashem spoke to Moshe on that same day, saying: "Go up these heights . . . Mount Nevo, that is in the land of Mo'av, that faces Jericho, and see the land of Cana'an that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael for a holding. You are to

die on the mountain that you are going up, and are to be gathered to your people, as Aharon your brother died . . . and was gathered to his people, because you *\*MA'ALTEM\** Me in the midst of Bnei Yisrael at the waters of the quarrel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Tzin, because you did not sanctify Me among Bnei Yisrael. Indeed, at a distance you shall see the land, but there you shall not enter, the land that I am giving to Bnei Yisrael."

\*note: "ma'altem" comes from the root "ma'al," to take something which is dedicated to a holy purpose, i.e., property of Hashem, and use it for personal benefit.

**DEVARIM 34:1-6** – Moshe went up from the Plains of Mo'av to Mount Nevo, at the top of the range that faces Jericho, and Hashem let him see all the land: Gil'ad as far as Dan, and all Naftali, and the land of Efrayim and Menashe, and all the land of Yehuda, as far as the hindmost sea, and the Negev and the round-plain, the cleft of Jericho, the town of palms, as far as Tzo'ar. And Hashem said to him, "This is the land that I swore to Avraham, to Yitzhak, and to Ya'akov, saying, 'To your seed I give it! I have let you see it with your eyes, but there you shall not cross!' So there died Moshe, servant of Hashem . . . .

Two distinct patterns appear in almost all of these passages:

**1) There is a consistent pattern of "seeing":**

- a) Bem. 20: The original event at Kadesh takes places "in the EYES of the congregation": Hashem wants everyone to gather and witness the miracle.
- b) Bem. 20: Aharon ascends the mountain "in the EYES of the people." When Moshe returns, the entire nation "SEES" that Aharon has died.
- c) Bem. 27: Moshe is told -- twice -- that he will "SEE the land" but not enter it. Then Hashem repeats that the sin he committed was "in the EYES of Bnei Yisrael."
- d) Dev. 1: [no "seeing" pattern here].
- e) Dev. 3: Moshe begs to "SEE the land," by which he means to allow him to enter the land; Hashem refuses him, telling him he will only "SEE with his EYES," but not enter there.
- f) Dev. 32: Hashem repeats -- twice more -- that Moshe is to "SEE the land" but cannot enter it.
- g) Dev. 34: Hashem "SHOWS" Moshe the land, then tells him, "I have SHOWN you in your EYES, but you will not pass to there."

**2) There is also a consistent pattern of succession and successors connected explicitly with the punishment of Moshe and Aharon.** This confirms that the punishment is not merely a personal one -- that these two people will lose their privilege of entering Eretz Yisrael -- but that they are punished by losing the leadership of the people. They will not lead the people into the Land:

- a) Bem. 20: The original event: "You shall not bring the people . . . ."
- b) Bem. 20: Aharon dies in such a manner as to make the succession of Elazar an integral part of his death: the High Priestly clothing is removed from him and placed upon his son, and then he dies, as his son succeeds him.
- c) Bem. 27: when Hashem commands that he die, Moshe responds by worrying about the succession; Hashem commands him to appoint Yehoshua, and he does so.
- d) Dev. 1: "Encourage Yehoshua."
- e) Dev. 3: "Encourage Yehoshua."
- f) Dev. 32: "Encourage Yehoshua" (not in the text above, but just before the Song of Ha'azinu, 32:22-23).

g) Dev. 34: [not part of the succession pattern].

These two patterns are important because they hint at 1) what Moshe and Aharon's crime is, and 2) what the nature of their punishment is. **The crime is somehow tied to seeing, to the people's seeing something they should not have seen, and the punishment is played out in their losing their positions as leaders of the people. We will return to these issues in the course of our discussion.**

To move back to the account in BeMidbar 20 itself, what does the Torah tell us about the sin? Mefarshim (commentators) offer many possibilities:

1) Abravanel: this is the straw that broke the camel's back. In truth, Aharon loses the right to enter Eretz Yisrael because he built the Egel (Golden Calf) back in Sefer Shemot (Exodus); Moshe is punished for encouraging the meraglim (spies) in Parashat Shelah, which we read two weeks ago. Both of these episodes contributed to the people's loss of their privilege to enter the land; the crime at Kadesh was only the minor crime of hitting the rock as opposed to speaking to it, but it added just enough to tip the scales in favor of punishment for Moshe and Aharon.

Abravanel is motivated to suggest this interpretation because hitting the rock seems so minor a crime, and the punishment which ensues seems too harsh. His solution: the punishment addresses more serious wrongs. One weakness with this interpretation, however, is that, as the above citations from the Torah show, the Torah repeatedly focuses on this \*particular\* episode as the key to Moshe and Aharon's loss of their privilege to enter the Land. This focus is undue if the real focus is on the Egel and the spies.

2) **Hazal: the crime was that Moshe spoke roughly to the people as he provided them with water:** "Listen, you rebels!" Despite its didactic significance, this interpretation is difficult, as several mefarshim (commentators) point out: if Moshe's manner of addressing the people is such a great crime, Moshe seems not to have learned his lesson, as in Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy), he tells the people, "You have been rebels against Hashem from the day I knew you!"

3) Several mefarshim suggest that hitting is less impressive than speaking, so by hitting the rock, Moshe destroyed an opportunity for greater kiddush Hashem (sanctification of God's name). Ramban responds to this suggestion by pointing out that from the perspective of physics, hitting and speaking should be equally likely to cause water to come out of a rock, so both would be equally miraculous. Abravanel raises the additional problem that hitting as opposed to speaking seems too minor a crime to merit such a weighty punishment.

4) Rashi: speaking to the rock would have inspired people to draw a "kal va-homer" (a *fortiori* reasoning) to themselves: "If the rock is obedient when Hashem (or His servant) speaks to it, surely we should be at least as obedient as the rock!" As an inspiring midrashic perspective, this suggestion is beautiful and has much merit. But it is difficult to believe that the stiff-necked people we know so well from the rest of BeMidbar would be so easily and so subtly inspired. In addition, as Ramban points out, if this is indeed the crime, why does Hashem later describe it as "me'ilah," which implies that Moshe and Aharon usurped a prerogative of Hashem's?

5) **Rambam (Shemona Perakim): the crime was Moshe and Aharon's inappropriate anger with the people.** This suggestion is vehemently and powerfully rejected by the Ramban, who points out that this does not account for the phrases we find in the various descriptions of the sin: "You did not believe in Me," "You rebelled against My word," etc. [Rambam's suggestion does, of course, fit nicely with his view of anger: unlike other personal characteristics, with regard to which Rambam advocates moderation, when it comes to anger (and arrogance), Rambam insists that we must be radical, allowing no room at all for this emotion. It is understandable, in this light, how anger in Moshe and Aharon would be understood as a fundamental failing and a grave sin.]

6) Ibn Ezra: Moshe's sin was in his momentary distraction from his usually perfect spiritual concentration on Hashem. This, I believe, is difficult to refute, but even more difficult to support from the text or from logic.

7) Rabbeinu Hananel, R. Yosef Bekhor Shor, Ramban, Sefer Ha-Ikkarim (R. Yosef Albo): Moshe and Aharon did not make clear who had caused the water to come out; it sounded like Moshe and Aharon were ascribing to themselves (rather than to Hashem) the act of providing water. This is supported by the text, which has Moshe and Aharon saying, "Now hear, you rebels, from this boulder shall \*\*we\*\* bring water for you?"

This last possibility is the one to which we will now turn our attention, as it is a fascinating and usually neglected perspective.

**Read Bem. 20 again and think about the following: What is the people's complaint? Is it any different from any of the complaints we have seen before?**

The people blame Moshe and Aharon for their misery and for the entire process which has ripped them away from Egypt -- that great carefree vacation-land, that Eden of luxury and leisure -- and dropped them into the barren and waterless desert. There is nothing new about this sort of talk. But one element seems new: the people refer to themselves as "Hashem's people"! Instead of just saying "us," they refer to themselves as "Hashem's nation." In other words, it is not just "us," a group of innocent people whom you have harmed -- it is Hashem who has been stricken, in effect, by your leading His nation into this predicament! This is a new level of chutzpah: accusing Hashem's chief messenger of having led His people astray!

Moshe and Aharon have no response. This, too, is not new, as we noted in Parashat Shelah, where Moshe has no response to the evil report of the spies. Moshe and Aharon now turn to Hashem, who delivers a series of instructions to them. Hashem wants to provide water for the people in a public, miraculous way: "Speak to the rock and extract from it water for the people and their animals."

Moshe bitterly says to the people, "You rebels! Will we now take water from this rock for you?" Let us leave this enigmatic phrase for now; we will return to it soon.

Now look at the poem in 21:17-18:

"Then Israel sang this song:  
'Spring up, O well, sing in chorus to it;  
The well that was dug out by princes  
That was excavated by nobles of the people  
With scepter  
With their rods.'"

Now, to whom do the people give credit for the well in this joyous song? To Moshe and Aharon: they are the "princes" or "nobles" who dug out the well with their "scepter," their staff! The people give Moshe and Aharon credit for the great miracle of providing them with water; the credit was supposed to have gone to Hashem, but instead goes to Moshe and Aharon. Now look back at the story of the rock: where is the source for the people's giving credit for the miracle to Moshe and Aharon?

"Will \*\*we\*\* now take water for you from this rock?"

There are a number of ways to understand this enigmatic phrase:

1) "You ungrateful people! Don't you realize Hashem is among you, providing all your needs? Look here -- can Aharon and I get water from a rock? Certainly not! So if water does indeed come out of this rock, you will know that it is Hashem who has done it!"

2) "You ungrateful people! Don't you see what Aharon and I have done for you, providing for all your needs (by representing you before Hashem)? How can you accuse us of bringing 'Hashem's people' into the wilderness to die? You ungrateful rebels, we are about to facilitate another miracle for you, even as you rebel against us and reject us -- look here, is it possible for us to get water from this rock? Watch closely!"

Which of these interpretations is superior? Let us give some context to this story, and then we will decide. (Please note that all of what follows is brief summary of issues we have discussed in much greater detail in previous weeks, so if you haven't been with us for those weeks and think that the stuff below seems kind of skimpy and unsubstantiated, please visit <http://parsha-themes.homepage.com> for these parshiot.)

Sefer BeMidbar starts with the organization of the nation into an integrated religious and military organism. But these grand structures soon begin to crumble, as the people refuse to bend themselves into the shapes demanded by the new structure.

1) BeHa'alotekha: The people complain for water, then for meat. Moshe experiences a catastrophic sense of failure as a leader: he is unable to provide for his "baby," as he puts it. He cannot meet the people's needs, and he turns to Hashem in anger at the burden placed upon him. Hashem accedes to Moshe's request to share the burden of leadership with others -- the Zekenim (Elders). While this spreads the burden onto other shoulders, it does not mitigate Moshe's feeling of powerlessness and failure. He believes that he may have been right from the very beginning, when he said to Hashem in Sefer Shemot: "I am not a man of words"; "Send someone else -- anyone!"; "I am a man of uncircumcised lips." Send someone else, I am not capable of the job.

Hashem then turns to the problem at hand -- providing the people with meat -- and instructs Moshe to let the people know that meat will soon be arriving. Moshe refuses to believe it: there is not enough meat in the whole world for the people! Hashem scolds Moshe, but gently: "Is God's arm too short? Now you shall see if My words come to pass or not!" In Moshe's mind, the task of feeding the people had for a moment loomed impossibly enormous, so overwhelming that it surpassed even what Hashem could do. Moshe's feeling of failure and despair is so black that for a moment, it is not only "he" who cannot feed the people, but that the people simply cannot be fed. It is an impossible task.

This is the first sign that Moshe's faltering belief in himself has begun to affect his function as the conduit between Hashem and the people: he momentarily loses sight of Hashem's omnipotence.

The next crucial event is Miryam's harsh criticism of Moshe, which we discussed in detail last week. Miryam's words are so painful to Moshe not only because they are so patently false -- the humblest of all men did not marry a Cushite woman in order to take on airs -- but because it is his very sister who voices the words, and Moshe, the humblest of all men, is deeply affected by them. Moshe is shaken: perhaps she is right -- perhaps he has taken more honor and authority than his due. Moshe, so vulnerable, so humble, is so hurt by Miryam's words. Hashem responds ferociously, trying to prop Moshe up by purposely scolding Miryam in Moshe's presence. Hashem delivers a breathtaking account of Moshe's special place in Hashem's "house," attempting to undo the damage Miryam's words have done, but it is too late. Moshe has been seriously weakened.

2) Shelah: the debacle of the spies shows again how Moshe has been weakened. He sends the spies with the hope that they will return with beautiful fruits, with an impressive report of the Land and its riches. When they return with an evil report instead, Moshe is silenced: he makes no response, abandoning the stage to Yehoshua and Calev. Moshe manages to save the people's lives when Hashem threatens to kill them on the spot, but he can do more: he has lost faith in himself and in the people, and he cannot generate the will to beg Hashem to forgive the people (and allow them to enter the Land), as he did after the Egel. Hashem offers him opportunity after opportunity to jump in and demand that He forgive them, but Moshe remains eerily silent. He cannot take up the cause of the nation because he has lost faith in their ability to accomplish the mission, and because they have attempted to replace him as leader: "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt!"

3) Korah: as we discussed last week, Moshe first interprets Korah's attack as directed against Aharon, but eventually discovers, to his shock, anger and frustration, that the people are rejecting him as well. He becomes defensive and bitter, insisting on his innocence of any abuse of power. More importantly, when he at first sees the attack as directed against Aharon, he responds by telling the people that they are really attacking Hashem, not Aharon. But when he realizes that he is a target as well, he does not say the same thing: he turns to Hashem and defends himself instead of deflecting the attack and telling the people (and himself!) that the real target is Hashem, and that there is no cause for him to be defensive.

Moshe continues to defend himself as the parasha goes on -- another sign of trouble. He summons the Earth to swallow the rebels in order to prove his legitimacy as leader, not in order to defend Hashem per se. When the people then accuse Moshe and Aharon of having murdered the people who died, Hashem becomes angry with them: have they not learned by now that He is behind Moshe and Aharon? But there is an echo of truth in the people's accusation -- it is not clear how much of what has happened was for Hashem, and how much was necessary to prop up Moshe's and Aharon's

leadership.

4) Then comes Hukkat: Moshe is wounded, angry at the people for rejecting his selfless leadership and for accusing him of self-aggrandizement. But then the people complain once again, and this time it is too much. As usual, the people complain not against Hashem, but against Moshe and Aharon. In fact, they specifically acknowledge Hashem, referring to themselves as His people. So the villains are Moshe and Aharon, not Hashem. But this time it is too much. Moshe responds differently to this rebellion than he has in the past. Instead of trying to show the rebels that their real complaint is with Hashem and not with him, Moshe simply becomes angry at the people.

**Hashem instructs Moshe and Aharon to provide the people with water from a rock. This is just the latest chapter in the long process of the people's learning to trust Hashem. One more miracle. Not a great one, nothing like the splitting of a sea, but impressive nevertheless. And perhaps impressive also because of its mundanity: there is no dramatic backdrop here, no Egyptian cavalry giving murderous chase, there are only thirsty people and thirsty animals. And Hashem cares enough to perform a miracle to provide for them.**

**It is also an opportunity for Moshe to show that he is dedicated to the people's welfare, repudiating their claim that he has imposed his leadership on them for his own aggrandizement and that he has led them to die in the desert. But Moshe is already impatient with the people and angry at their accusations. For him, the personal issue has begun to overshadow all else. Extracting water from the rock is not just another effort to strengthen the people's faith in Hashem, it is a chance to bitterly blast the people for their attacks on him and to demonstrate his continued readiness to care for their needs despite their behavior. "Ungrateful rebels! I provide you with everything I can, even as you reject me again and again! And here I offer you water from this rock!"**

It is not that Moshe believes that he (and not Hashem) has made the water come out of the rock. It is that he feels vilified by the people, accused of having his own interests at heart instead of theirs, accused of having done them wrong. Moshe says bitterly, "I remain devoted to you even as you reject me!" Moshe means only to show the people that he now does and always did his best to help provide for the people's needs. Moshe does not mean for the people to understand that he and Aharon should get the credit for the miracle -- but that is exactly what happens. This is what the people sing as they celebrate the "digging" of this magical well. Moshe did not mean to give himself credit as opposed to Hashem, he meant only to defend himself, to show that he was devoted to the people even as they rebelled against him, but the result was that what should have been an opportunity to nurture the people's trust in Hashem became instead an opportunity for the people to acknowledge Moshe and Aharon as devoted to their care.

Moshe's function from the beginning has been to be the conduit between Hashem and the people. He hears the Torah from God and teaches it to the people; he leads the people out of Egypt as Hashem's messenger. He brings Hashem to the people. But once he is attacked and rejected by the people, he becomes defensive. He makes personal use of what should have been another opportunity to act as that identity-less conduit to Hashem. The people come away impressed with Moshe, not with Hashem.

For a religious leader, this misstep is fatal. A religious leader is so only insofar as he bridges the gap between Hashem and the people. The degree to which his personal issues cloud his actions is the degree to which he fails as a religious leader.

"Since you did not believe in Me" -- as Ramban interprets, "You did not cause the people to believe in Me" -- you caused them only to believe in you!

"To sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael" -- to make Me appear special in the eyes of the people; instead, you made yourself seem special.

"Therefore you shall not bring" -- therefore, you are removed as leaders. **The punishment is not formulated as a "personal" one, that Moshe the man and Aharon the man will never enter the Land, but that they will not bring the nation to the Land: they are no longer the leaders because instead of taking this opportunity to sanctify Hashem, they use it to sanctify themselves in the eyes of the people. This is why, every time this story is mentioned afterward in the Torah, it is always connected with Elazar and Yehoshua. Moshe and Aharon's punishment is not simply not entering the Land, but joining the failed generation of the desert as its failed leaders, never to enter**

**the Land as leaders of the successful new generation.**

"And He was sanctified in them" -- do not think that just because Moshe and Aharon failed to sanctify Hashem here with the water, that He is not sanctified through this event: He sanctifies Himself through Moshe and Aharon themselves! As punishment for not sanctifying Hashem through the rock, Moshe and Aharon themselves become objects through which Hashem is sanctified. **The entire people was supposed to have SEEN Hashem's great miracle, but they SAW "Moshe and Aharon's great miracle" instead;** in return, the entire nation SAW as Aharon ascended the mountain, and the entire nation SAW that he did not return: they SAW that Hashem had denied him the opportunity to lead into Eretz Yisrael, and had replaced him with his son. And the same with Moshe, who in addition is told time and again that he will "SEE" the land but never enter it. He sinned by distracting the SIGHT of the nation from Hashem, so his own VISION of the Land would be only from afar. By punishing Moshe and Aharon publicly for usurping the stage, Hashem demonstrates to the people His power.

"Ma'altem bi" -- appropriating something dedicated for a higher purpose, and using it for personal use: "You stole from Me an opportunity to show My caring for the people and My power, a chance to sanctify Myself, and used it to show the people that YOU cared for them."

"I have shown it to you with your eyes" -- I have shown it to you with your EYES, but you will not go there as leader, because of the PEOPLE'S eyes -- because you took advantage of the people's sight for your purposes. The moment your orientation became personal, you automatically ceased to be a religious leader, and therefore, "to there you shall not go."

Shabbat Shalom  
Emphasis added

\*\*\*\*\*  
**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER** [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org)  
*In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag*  
**Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**for PARSHAT CHUKAT [& DEVARIM]**

**BETWEEN KADESH & KADESH BARNEA**  
(or When did the Mei Meriva incident take place?)

How (and where) did Bnei Yisrael spend their 38 years in the desert? Most of us would answer: 'wandering somewhere in the desert'. Yet, in Parshat Devarim there appears to be a more precise answer; an answer that could radically change our understanding of certain events that take place in Sefer Bamidbar.

To explore this possibility, the following shiur will undertake a careful reading of several psukim in Parshat Devarim and compare them to their parallel sources in Sefer Bamidbar.

[To follow the shiur, you'll definitely need a Tanach in hand; in fact using two Tanachim (and a "mikraot gdolot") would come in very handy.]

**INTRODUCTION**

Just about everyone takes for granted that the Mei Meriva incident takes place in the 40th year. The reason why is quite simple - Mei Meriva takes place immediately after the death of Miriam (see Bamidbar 20:1), and Miriam died in the first month of the FORTIETH year - didn't she?

Let's double check this assumption by taking a closer look at that pasuk in Parshat Chukat:

"And Bnei Yisrael [the entire congregation] arrived at MIDBAR TZIN on the first month, and the people settled down in Kadesh, there Miriam died and was buried." (20:1)

Note, that we are only told that this took place on the first month, but there is no mention of the year at all! So why does everyone assume that it is year FORTY?

Most of the classical commentators deal with this question. Let's start with Rashbam's explanation (on 20:1):

"And Miriam died there: On the first month at the end of the FORTY years - for Aharon died on the fifth month of the fortieth year, as it states [explicitly] in Parshat Masei."

Rashbam's logic is quite straightforward. Since later in this same chapter we learn about Aharon's death (see 20:22-29), AND since Parshat Masei states explicitly that Aharon died on the fifth month of the FORTIETH year - therefore we assume that Miriam died (four months earlier) during that SAME year.

Note however that Rashbam's assumption is based on "parshanut" (exegesis) and not on a "masoret" (tradition).

[In other words, Rashbam doesn't say that we have a tradition that tells that Miriam died in the 40th year, rather, one can deduce this date from the psukim. Therefore, if by using the same tools of "parshanut" [i.e. by carefully studying all of the psukim involved] one arrives at a different conclusion, it is permitted to suggest (and discuss and debate) other possibilities as well - better known as "la'asok b'divrei Torah" / "v'akmal"]

IBN EZRA in his pirush (on 20:1) gets right to the point:

"In the first month: In the FORTIETH YEAR. And (thus) behold that there is neither a story nor a prophecy in the Torah other than in the FIRST year and in the FORTIETH year."

Ibn Ezra makes a very bold statement. He claims that from the moment that God decreed the punishment of forty years (after chet ha'meraglim) Chumash goes into a 'coma' for 38 years, no stories, no mitzvot - we learn about nothing until the fortieth year, and those events begin here in chapter 20!

[One could ask concerning the story of Korach which would seem to have take place in the interim, but recall that Ibn Ezra

himself claims that narrative to be 'out of order' and places it BEFORE Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai! See his pirush to Bamidbar 16:1 and Ramban's refutation as well.]

However, Ibn Ezra does not explain here how he arrives at that conclusion. [We'll return to a possible source later in the shiur, but most probably he would explain as Rashbam does.]

Also RAMBAN agrees that Bnei Yisrael first arrive at Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year. [Later we'll see how he and why he argues here with Ibn Ezra.] But most important is how he concludes his pirush to 20:

"But this KADESH is located in MIDBAR TZIN, and [Bnei Yisrael] arrived there in the FORTIETH year, and there Miriam died, and the psukim are EXPLICIT!"

[Note that the "girsas" in Torat Chaim's Ramban is "u'mikraot mfurashim HEYM" while Chavel's edition has: "u'mikraot mfurashim SHAM"]

Now Ramban tells us that the psukim are explicit, but he doesn't say which psukim he is referring to!

[Note again how neither Chavel's Ramban nor Torat Chaim's provide a footnote to explain what psukim Ramban is referring to (even though you would expect them to).]

Most likely, Ramban is referring to psukim in Moshe's first speech in Sefer Devarim. In fact, in CHIZKUNI's parallel explanation (on 20:1) he concurs that they arrive at Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year, he attempts to reconcile these psukim with parallel psukim both in Parshat Masei and in Sefer Devarim.

[I suggest that you see that Chizkuni inside, but AFTER you are familiar with those sources.]

To figure out what Ramban is referring to we must first take a step back and try to follow the flow of events, and then take inventory of all of the related sources in Chumash that describe this leg of Bnei Yisrael's journey.

**WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN TILL NOW?**

Where were Bnei Yisrael before they arrive at KADESH Midbar Tzin (in 20:1)? Let's work backwards to figure it out.

The previous story in Sefer Bamidbar was the incident with Korach. But no where in that narrative are we told WHERE that story took place. [That is what allows Ramban & Ibn Ezra to argue about it.] Therefore we must work our way backwards again to the story of the "meraglim" in Parshat Shlach which took place in KADESH BARNEA.

In other words, the last PLACE (in Chumash) before Miriam's death that Bnei Yisrael were 'spotted' was in KADESH BARNEA. But the Torah never tells us WHEN they left Kadesh Barnea, and what they did (and how longed they travelled) until they arrived at Midbar Tzin!

However, if we return to the story of the "meraglim", we can bring a very strong proof that they must have left Kadesh Barnea soon after. Recall that immediately after the chet ha'meraglim God commands them to leave Kadesh Barnea and head SOUTH:

"... the Amalekites and Canaanites are sitting in the valley, TOMORROW turn around and travel into the desert towards the Red Sea." (14:25)

Despite this warning the "ma'aplilim" decide to attack anyhow (and are defeated/ see 14:39-45), but that defeat would not be a reason for Bnei Yisrael to stay in Kadesh Barnea. That incident would only be an additional reason for them to travel into the desert - to the south- AWAY from Eretz Canaan. If they would stay near Kadesh Barnea, there would be fear of an attack by Canaanites who most likely are already on guard because of the 'rumors' about Bnei Yisrael's plan to conquer 'their' land.

Now Parshat Shlach stops right here without telling us if, when, or how they actually left Kadesh Barnea; but according to "pshat", based on 14:25 (quoted above), it would be safe to assume that they left immediately, just as God commanded them to!

As Sefer Bamidbar continues, the next time an encampment is recorded is in Parshat Chukat, as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Kadesh Midbar Tzin (see 20:1). What happened in the meantime. How many years elapsed? Did they travel to (or toward) the Red Sea as God commanded them?

At least partial answers to these questions are found in Parshat Masei and in Sefer Devarim.

## THE 18 STOP JOURNEY IN PARSHAT MASEI

Parshat Masei provides with a detailed list of Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert (see 33:1-49). Even though that account mentions many locations that are not mentioned elsewhere in Chumash (and skips many locations that are mentioned - such as Kadesh Barnea itself!) - it will still be helpful for our discussion.

Let's pick up Parshat Masei as it records Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai (see 33:16). From Sinai they travel to Kivrot ha'taava, and then to Chatzerot, and then to Ritma. Now Kivrot ha'taava and Chatzerot have already been mentioned in Parshat Bha'alotcha (see 11:34-35), but Ritma is not. However, Parshat Bha'alotcha tells us that they camped next in Midbar Paraan (see 12:16), and from there Moshe sent the meraglim (see 13:3) from an area known as KADESH BARNEA in Midbar Paraan.

[Parshat Shlach never mentions Kadesh Barnea itself, but everywhere else in Chumash when chet ha'meraglim is mentioned, it states explicitly KADESH BARNEA - see Bamidbar 32:8 and Devarim 1:3,19; 2:14; and 9:23! Most likely "Kadesha" mentioned in 13:26 refers to (and is a short form of) Kadesh Barnea.]

Therefore, Chazal identify Ritma with Kadesh Barnea, and its 'new name' reflects the events which took place there (see Rashi 33:18). Then Parshat Masei mentions an additional 18 stops from Ritma until Bnei Yisrael arrive in Midbar Tzin (see 33:18-36), which were not mentioned anywhere else earlier in Sefer Bamidbar.

[Now you can read the first part of the Chizkuni on 20:1 and better understand what he's talking about.]

Now among the 18 locations we find Yotvata and Etzion Gaver, sites which almost for sure are somewhere in the SOUTHERN Negev, not far from the Red Sea (i.e. near Eilat). Most likely, this journey SOUTHWARD was a fulfillment of God's command to leave Kadesh Barnea towards the Red Sea (see again 14:25).

Then, Parshat Masei tells us that Bnei Yisrael travel from Etzion Gaver and arrive at Kadesh Midbar Tzin (see 33:36-38/ compare with 20:1), but does not tell us on what year they arrived.

[However, it is quite clear that they LEAVE Kadesh Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year, for from Kadesh they travel to Hor Ha'Har to bury Aharon - and that event for sure took place in year 40 as the pasuk itself testifies (33:38).]

So was Kadesh Midbar Tzin the LAST stop after a long 38 year journey wandering through the desert, OR was Kadesh Midbar Tzin the LONG stopover where Bnei Yisrael may have spent MOST of the years while waiting for the first generation to die?

Enter Parshat Devarim!

Recall that in Moshe Rabeinu's first speech in Sefer Devarim (chapters 1-4), he explains why forty years had elapsed since Bnei Yisrael SHOULD have entered. Therefore, the first part of that speech includes the story of chet ha'meraglim, for that was the primary reason for the forty year delay.

## WILL THE REAL 'KADESH' PLEASE STAND UP

That story states specifically that the meraglim were sent from KADESH BARNEA (see 1:19), and also includes God's

commandment that Bnei Yisrael must immediately leave and travel back into the desert toward the Red Sea (see 1:40). But after the story of the "ma'apilim" (see 1:41-45) there is one small, but very important pasuk:

"va'teshvu ba'KADESH yamim rabim, kayamim asher ya'shavtem."

[And you settled (or sat) in KADESH many days - as the days that you settled (or sat) there." (1:46)

[Note the difficulty in translating this pasuk! See for example JPS and its footnote.]

So what KADESH is this pasuk referring to? There are two 'candidates':

- 1) KADESH BARNEA - where the meraglim were sent from
- 2) KADESH MIDBAR TZIN - where the Mei Meriva story took place

But based on our analysis above, it CANNOT be Kadesh Barnea! After all, God commanded them to LEAVE Kadesh Barnea - "machar" - the NEXT DAY. Why then would they stay there for a long time?

[It cannot be because the ma'apilim lost their battle, since that defeat is only more reason to retreat to a safer location farther away. Most likely the Canaanites have heard rumors of Bnei Yisrael's impending attack and now that they are camped so close [Kadesh Barnea borders on eretz canaan (see Bamidbar 34:4)] - God commands that they move to the south for their own safety. Otherwise they will be attacked and God is no longer 'with them' to protect them in battle.]

So why do almost all of the commentators explain that KADESH here means KADESH BARNEA? [see Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni]

After all, in this very same chapter Kadesh Barnea has already been mentioned twice (see 1:3 & 1:19 and 2:14) and each by its full name KADESH BARNEA! Why then would Moshe refer to it now simply as KADESH - especially when there is another location called KADESH (i.e. Kadesh Midbar Tzin) which is always referred to simply as KADESH?!

## THE EVENTS FROM MERAGLIM TO ARVOT MOAV

Most probably, the reason why everyone explains KADESH here as KADESH BARNEA is because of the immediate context of this pasuk.

[Before continuing, you must review 1:40->2:14 on your own, and attempt to follow the flow. Compare them with the parallel account in Bamidbar 20:14->21:4, and especially 20:16 & 21:4! Pay careful attention to Dvarim 2:14 as well.]

Let's follow the flow:

- \* the story of chet ha'meraglim (1:19-40)
- \* God's command to LEAVE Kadesh Barnea -> Yam Suf (1:40)
- \* The "ma'apilim" are defeated, Bnei Yisrael cry (1:41-45)
- \*\* -- AND YOU SETTLED IN KADESH FOR MANY DAYS (1:46)
- \* "Then we turned and travelled into the DESERT towards YAM SUF, as GOD HAD COMMANDED US, and we circled Har Seir for many days". (22:1 / this pasuk is KEY)

The last pasuk which we quoted is the KEY to understanding what happened, [and its most likely what Ramban was referring to when he said "ha'mikraot m'furashim"].

As Chizkuni (on 2:1) explains - the travel described in this pasuk is precisely the same 18 stops described in Parshat Masei from Ritma to Kadesh Midbar Tzin. Most likely, he reaches this conclusion for the following reason:

Since God commanded Bnei Yisrael to travel towards Yam Suf in 1:40, it only makes sense that this pasuk describes HOW Bnei Yisrael fulfilled this command. In fact the pasuk states explicitly "as God had commanded us" (2:1) - i.e. his command in 1:40. Furthermore, that journey took "many days" - therefore it coincides perfectly with the 18 stop journey from Ritma to Kadesh

as described in Parshat Masei. If so, then KADEXH which is mentioned in the previous pasuk (1:46) CANNOT be Kadesh Midbar Tzin, since Bnei Yisrael had not arrived there yet, since they only arrive there after the journey described in 2:1. Therefore, KADEXH in 1:46 must be KADEXH BARNEA, and it would seem that Bnei Yisrael remained for a long time in Kadesh Barnea, most probably feeling quite devastated by the events of the meraglim and ma'apilim.

But what about God's command of "machar, pnu u'su lachem" (1:40)? Should they not have left right away?

On the other hand, 2:1 must be talking about the 18 stop journey, for that is the only journey when Bnei Yisrael travel for 'many days' in the direction of Yam Suf. [Isn't it?]

Therefore all of the commentators prefer this explanation of 2:1, and prefer to overlook the problem with "machar" (in 1:40) - and hence KADEXH in 1:46 must be KADEXH BARNEA and therefore, they only arrive in Kadesh Midbar Tzin in the fortieth year.

[I'm almost sure that this is how all of the rishonim understood these psukim, if anyone has heard a different explanation - please write me.]

#### NOT SO FAST!

However, there is one small 'hole' in this interpretation. The assumption that 2:1 refers to the 18 stop journey was based on two very strong points:

- 1) they travelled south to Yam Suf/ at that was only once.
- 2) just as God had commanded / in 1:40

But one can argue with both of these points. [It's a bit complicated, so follow carefully with your Tanach in hand.]

Note how the next set of psukim in Sefer Devarim (see 2:2-8) relate BACK to the journey described in 2:1. Let's explain how:

"Then God said to me saying: You have been circling this mountain for too long - turn to the NORTH. And command the people saying: You are passing now along the border of your brother Esav... then we passed thru the land of 'bnei Esav' along the way of the ARAVA from Eilot & Etzion Gaver and then we passed Moav... until we reached Nachal Zared."

(see 2:2-14)

Now this journey CANNOT be the 18 stop journey from Ritma to Kadesh, since this journey ends in Transjordan, in the land of Moav. In fact, this is the final journey of the end of the fortieth year when Bnei Yisrael pass thru Seir, Moav, and Amon and fight with Sichon & Og and camp in Arvot Moav. In other words, this is no the journey of 33:16-36 in Parshat Masei, rather it is the last leg of the journey described in Parshat Masei, i.e. 33:40-49, AFTER they leave Kadesh Midbar Tzin.

And if the journey described in 2:2-13 is from Kadesh Midbar Tzin to Arvot Moav, then (based in its context) so must be the journey described in 2:1!

And if 2:1 describes this last leg of the journey, the KADEXH mentioned in 1:46 must be Kadesh Midbar Tzin - just as its name implies!

But how about our two anchors? How can this last leg of the journey be considered a travel TOWARDS YAM SUF, and how could it be referred to "as God had commanded us" (see 2:1)?

The answer is simple. Go back to Parshat Chukat and the parallel account of Bnei Yisrael's departure from KADEXH Midbar Tzin:

"And Moshe sent messengers from KADEXH to the King of Edom saying:... we are now in Kadesh - a city on your border - let us pass thru your land..." (see Bamidbar 20:14-21)

But Edom [=bnei Esav] did not allow Bnei Yisrael to pass. But God COMMANDED them not to attack Edom, but instead to CIRCLE the land Edom by travelling south TOWARDS YAM SUF, and then crossing the ARAVA towards the east, and then turning north towards Moav!

And this is exactly what Parshat Chukat tells us in the next chapter:

"And we left Hor ha'Har (next to Kadesh), and travelled

TOWARDS YAM SUF, to CIRCLE the land of EDOM..." (21:4)

[From there they travelled north (see 21:10-20) thru Moav etc. ending up in Arvot Moav. Compare this journey with the second leg in Parshat Masei (33:38-48/ you'll see that its the same journey!]

So lo and behold we find a SECOND journey, commanded by God, where Bnei Yisrael travel TOWARDS YAM SUF and CIRCLE HAR SEIR. It is this journey, described in Parshat Chukat and detailed in Parshat Masei (33:38-48) that Devarim 2:1 could very easily be referring to! And hence, this SECOND journey as well fulfills both criterions mentioned above ("derek Yam Suf" and "as God commanded")- and KADEXH in 1:46 can still be KADEXH Midbar Tzin -and all of the psukim work out perfectly!

The final proof that Bnei Yisrael must have left Kadesh Barnea immediately and not waited there for too long is from Devarim 2:14:

"And the days that we travelled from KADEXH BARNEA until we reached NACHAL ZARED (border with Moav) were 38 YEARS..."

This pasuk states explicitly that Bnei Yisrael LEFT Kadesh Barnea in YEAR 2, and therefore, they could not have stayed there for "yamim rabim" [which implies many years / see Breishit 24:55].

#### IN CONCLUSION / & SOME REMARKS

So "l'mai nafka minah" - what difference does it make when Bnei Yisrael first arrived in KADEXH.

If we understand that they arrive in Kadesh Midbar Tzin only in year 40, the Mei Meriva takes place in year 40 and begins the events of that final year, and Miriam dies at an age well over 130!

If we understand that they possibly could have arrived in Kadesh Midbar Tzin only several years after chet ha'meraglim, i.e. after the 18 stop journey towards Yam Suf back, then back north to Kadesh (which could have taken several years and served as a precaution against any further Canaanite attacks); then Moshe's sin at Mei Meriva could have taken place only a short time after chet ha'meraglim and the story of Korach. If so, this would fit in thematically very nicely with our shiurim on Bhaalotcha, Shlach, and Korach, which all indicate a slow but definite gap between Moshe and people and hence the collapse of his leadership. [It would also have Miriam's death at an age under 120.]

There are several other implications, but the main purpose of the shiur is simply to study Chumash, trying to figure out all of the possibilities. Once again, it could be I missed something, since I'd expect to find the possibility in one of the commentaries. [I haven't looked that much yet, so if anyone finds something, please write. Also if anyone finds a mistake in the shiur or another source that I overlooked, please write.]

In the meantime, it's a two hours before sunset in Israel and want to send it out before shabbat (at least for those of you in the western hemisphere). As you must have noticed, the shiur is a very rough draft, hopefully, after hearing your comments, by next year we'll have an edited and updated version. Till then,

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

#### =====

#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note also from Bamidbar 34:4 that Kadesh Barnea is located on the SOUTHERN border of Eretz Canaan, and that's exactly why the meraglim are sent from there. (Today, this area is identified just over the Egyptian border with Israel in the Negev, about 20 kilometers east of Sdeh Boker and south of Nitzana.)

## **PARSHAT CHUKAT - Mei Meriva**

Ask most anyone:

- \* What was Moshe Rabeinu's 'sin' at Mei Meriva?  
They will answer: He hit the rock instead of talking to it.
- \* What was his punishment?  
They will answer: He was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael.
- \* Does this punishment seem fair?  
They'll say: No, but God must be extra strict with tzadikim.

Even though there is nothing 'wrong' about any of the above answers, they certainly 'oversimplify' a very complex topic.

In this week's shiur, as we carefully analyze the story of Mei Meriva, we will see how and why there are many other ways to understand both Moshe's 'sin' and his 'punishment'. In Part One, we undertake a careful textual analysis to explain why there are so many different opinions. In Part Two, we re-examine this entire topic from a 'wider angle' to show how Moshe may not have sinned after all.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Rashi's explanation - that Moshe is punished for hitting the rock instead of talking to it - is definitely the most popular explanation of Moshe's sin. However, just about every other commentator disagrees and offers a different reason instead. For example:

- \* IBN EZRA -  
claims that he hit the rock TWICE, instead of once;
- \* RAMBAM -  
argues that Moshe 'lost his temper' and spoke harshly;
- \* RAMBAN -  
(quoting Rabeinu Chananel) explains that Moshe was not careful in his speech, for he said: "can WE get water from this rock?" instead of saying: "can GOD get water from this rock?".

In fact, Abrabanel (commenting on Devarim 1:37) summarizes some TEN different opinions; and proves why each one is incorrect.

There is a very simple reason why we find such a variety of opinion. Even though the Torah tells us WHY Moshe and Aharon were punished, we are never told WHAT they did wrong. To appreciate this distinction, let's carefully note how the Torah informs us of their punishment:

"...because you did not 'believe' in Me ["lo he'emanem bi"] to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not lead Bnei Yisrael into the land...." (see 20:12)

[Note that this is a very difficult pasuk to translate. (Note as well that just about every English translation translates this pasuk in a different manner.)

Clearly, this pasuk implies that Moshe & Aharon did something wrong, but it doesn't tell us precisely WHAT that was. Nevertheless, because this pasuk forms the conclusion of the Mei Meriva story, we can safely assume that somewhere within that incident there must be a flaw in their behavior. Therefore, all the commentators scrutinize the psukim that describe that event, in search for some action that would warrant this punishment.

To appreciate their various conclusions, let's begin by doing exactly what they did, i.e. let's carefully study those psukim that immediately precede the punishment - Bamidbar 20:7-11.

[This is very important methodological point. Our assumption is that the variety of conclusions stems from the analysis of these psukim by each commentator [= "parshanut"], and not from a variance in passed down traditions [= "mesora"] from generation to generation since the time of Chumash. This assumption not only explains why there are so many different opinions, it also explains why each new generation continues to study Chumash in search of additional possible explanations.]

### **THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS!**

As you review 20:7-11, note how 20:7-8 describes God's command to Moshe and Aharon; while 20:9-11 describes its fulfillment.

Therefore, it should be quite simple to figure out what they did wrong. We simply need to compare what God had commanded - to what Moshe actually did! Let's begin with God's instructions to Moshe, noting how they contain several explicit commands:

"And God spoke to Moshe saying: TAKE the staff, and GATHER the congregation together, you and Aharon your brother, and SPEAK to the rock before their eyes that it should give water, and TAKE OUT for them water from the rock, and GIVE DRINK to the people and their animals." (20:7-8)

Review these psukim one more time, paying attention to the FIVE commands that Moshe (and Aharon) must execute:

- (1) TAKE the staff;
- (2) GATHER the congregation;
- (3) SPEAK to the rock... and it will give water;
- (4) TAKE OUT for them water from the rock;
- (5) GIVE DRINK to the people.

Note how each of these five commands contains an active verb, and hence requires that Moshe take a specific action. [In other words, Moshe must (1) TAKE the staff, (2) GATHER the people, and (3) SPEAK to the rock, etc.]

However, there appears to be a contradiction between the third and the fourth command (concerning how the water would be taken out of the rock).

According to command #3, Moshe should speak to the rock, whereupon it should immediately start giving its water. But the next command (#4) is for Moshe to 'take water out of the rock' (without explaining HOW he should do it). But if by SPEAKING to the rock (3) the rock will already be giving its water, how can Moshe fulfill command (4) to TAKE OUT water from the rock? The rock is already giving its water - so what would command (4) entail?

As we continue our analysis, keep this question in mind.

### **FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS**

The next step of our analysis will help us understand the underlying reason for the various opinions. We begin our analysis (of 20:9-11) to see how Moshe fulfilled (or didn't fulfill) each of these five commands.

We will compare each command to its execution in search of any slight variance that could be considered a lack of "emunah" that would warrant such a severe punishment (as described in 20:12).

### **COMMAND #1 - "TAKE the staff"; (20:8)**

#### MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

"And Moshe TOOK the staff from before the Lord, as God had commanded him..." (20:9)

Nothing seems to be wrong here, after all the pasuk itself testifies: "as God commanded him". Certainly, this could not be a sin.

[Later in the shiur we will return to this pasuk.]

#### COMMAND #2 - GATHER the "eydah" (congregation)... (20:8)

##### MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

"And Moshe and Aharon GATHERED the "kahal" (congregation) people together in front of the rock..." (20:10)

Here again, nothing appears to have been done wrong. [There is slight discrepancy between "kehal" and "eydah", but these two words in Chumash are usually synonymous. [It should be noted that Malbim disagrees.]

#### COMMAND #3 - SPEAK to the rock that it should give water...

##### MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

"...And he [Moshe] said to THEM (i.e. to the people): Listen here you rebellious people, is it possible that WE can take water from this rock?" (20:10)

Here we finally find our first major problem. Even though God had instructed Moshe to speak TO the rock- so that it would give water; instead Moshe speaks to the PEOPLE - ABOUT the rock (that it would give water)! Therefore, most of the commentators [Rashi, Rambam, Ramban, Rashbam] will find fault with some aspect of Moshe's behavior in this pasuk (which will be discussed below).

#### COMMAND #4 - TAKE OUT for them water from the rock...

(20:8)

##### MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

"... and Moshe lifted his hand and HIT the rock with his staff TWO times, then much water came out..." (20:11)

Even though RASHI claims that this is Moshe's primary transgression [for he hit the rock INSTEAD of 'talking' to it], based on this careful comparison it becomes clear why other commentators disagree. After all, God commanded him to 'take out water', but didn't tell him HOW to accomplish this. It seems as though Moshe understood that he was supposed to use his staff to do so (as he had done forty years earlier). Furthermore, God had commanded him to 'take his staff' (i.e. command #1) -if he wasn't supposed to hit the rock, why was he commanded to take his staff? Ibn Ezra advances this argument, and concludes instead that Moshe erred by hitting the rock TWICE instead of once.

"...and the people and their animals drank. (20:11)

Clearly, Moshe does nothing wrong in this final stage. After all, we surely don't expect Moshe to 'pour drinks' for everyone; rather he fulfills this command by allowing the people to gather the water for their needs.

=====

This analysis shows that the primary problem in Moshe's behavior lies somewhere between his execution of commands 3 & 4. Let's return to our discussion of command #3. Recall how God had instructed Moshe:

**"SPEAK to the rock and [or that] it should [or will] give water..."**

[Note the two possible translations.]

Considering that we never find that Moshe actually talked to the rock (and based on the above parallel comparison), we must conclude that the following phrase is Moshe's execution of this command:

"...And he [Moshe] said to THEM (i.e. to the people): Listen here you rebellious people, is it possible that we can take water from this rock?" (20:10)

At first glance, it even appears as though there may have been a small 'misunderstanding'. As we explained above, even though God had instructed Moshe to speak TO the rock, instead Moshe speaks to the people ABOUT the rock. At this point, there are three different approaches that one can follow:

a) Moshe indeed misunderstood what God wanted.

Hence his transgression would fall under the category of "shogeg" - an unintentional sin / see Rashbam.

b) Moshe understood God's command; but acted differently. In other words, he acted defiantly [= "mayzid" - an intentional transgression]. This leads Rashi to his conclusion that Moshe hit the rock instead of speaking to it.

c) Moshe acted properly (in this regard), and understood God's command.

In other words, speaking to the people about the rock was precisely what God commanded. As Ramban explains, in the phrase "v'dbar tem EL ha'sela" - the word "el" should be understood as "odot" (about). God commands Moshe to speak to the people ABOUT the rock THAT it should give water; and that is exactly what Moshe does!

Even though this third possibility (that this was indeed God's intention) may seem a bit 'stretched', it definitely can be supported from the next commandment: "And you shall TAKE OUT water for them from the rock" (see 20:8). As we pointed out earlier, this fourth command implies that Moshe must now do something to 'take out' water from the rock.

Therefore, it is possible that hitting the rock was exactly what God expected Moshe to do. After all, this is exactly how God had instructed him to take water from the 'rock at Chorev' many years earlier (see Shmot 17:6). Furthermore, once Moshe understands that 'speak TO the rock' means 'speak ABOUT the rock' then obviously "take out water" must imply to take a certain action to

#### COMMAND #5 - Give drink to the people and their animals.

(20:8)

##### MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

extract the water - i.e. to hit the rock! Certainly, it would be no less of a miracle now than it was forty years earlier!

Because of these considerations, all of the commentators (except Rashi) must search elsewhere for a flaw in Moshe's behavior. For example, Rambam and Ramban take issue with how Moshe's words his rebuke:

"...And he [Moshe] said to them: Listen here you rebellious people, is it possible that WE can take water from this rock?" (20:10)

Rambam takes issue with the TONE of this rebuke, while Ramban takes issue with its CONTENT.

RAMBAM claims that the tone of Moshe's statement - "listen you rebels..." - reflects an unnecessary anger which caused a "chillul Hashem" (a desecration of God's Name). [See Rambam in "shmoneh perakim", or simply see its quote by Ramban in his pirush to 20:7.]

RAMBAN claims that Moshe caused a "chillul Hashem" by saying 'we' in their rhetorical question - "is it possible that WE can take out water from this rock". This 'careless' statement may have caused the people to conclude that it was Moshe and Aharon (and not God) who cause the water to come out from the rock.

[See Ramban 20:7 in name of Rabeinu Chananel.]

Nonetheless, it remains possible to understand that Moshe's rebuke in this pausk was entirely in order. This leads Ibn Ezra to find fault in the next stage:

"... and Moshe lifted his hand and HIT the rock with his staff TWO times, then much water came out..." (20:11)

After refuting all of the other opinions, Ibn Ezra finds Moshe's flaw in the fact that he hit the rock TWICE instead of only once. [It seems that according to Ibn Ezra, this reason 'wins by default'. Note that Ramban (towards the end of his commentary) also supports this opinion - to a certain extent.]

Thus, by careful comparing Moshe's execution of each of God's commands, we are able to find the underlying reason for the opinions of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rambam, Rashbam, Ramban, etc.

Nonetheless, no matter how we explain WHAT Moshe's sin was, a more fundamental question remains - i.e. WHY was his punishment so severe?

## PART II

### DID MOSHE DO ANYTHING 'WRONG' ?

From the above analysis, a very interesting possibility arises. If we combine all of the reasons advanced by each commentator to reject the other interpretations - we could conclude that Moshe did nothing wrong at all!

[See the commentaries of Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Abrabanel on this sugya. Each of them present very convincing arguments why all of the other opinions are wrong.]

In fact, Abrabanel himself raises this possibility, then he advances his own opinion (based on Devarim 1:37) that Moshe & Aharon are really being punished for earlier sins - Moshe for "chet ha'mergalim" and Aharon for "chet ha'egel". Mei Meriva, he explains, serves as a kind of 'cover-up' to differentiate between Moshe &

Aharon's punishment, and the punishment of the nation.

Nonetheless, his interpretation remains difficult because the text states explicitly that Moshe is punished because of the events that took place at MEI MERIVA! [See not only here in 20:12-13, but also in 20:24, 27:14 and Devarim 32:51.] Therefore, we should be quite reluctant to look for the PRIMARY reason elsewhere.

But, where else can we look to find Moshe's sin? On the one hand, it must be related to the events of Mei Meriva, but when we examined those psukim, it was very hard to pinpoint a 'sin'; and certainly not a sin severe enough to deserve such a harsh punishment.

To answer this question, we must first take a closer look at precisely WHAT their punishment was.

### CRIME & PUNISHMENT

It is commonly understood that Moshe and Aharon's punishment is that they are forbidden from ENTERING the land of Israel. However, this popular assumption is not precise. Let's take a look once again how the Chumash explains their punishment:

"And God told Moshe... because you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me... therefore you shall NOT LEAD THIS NATION into the LAND which I promised them..." (20:12)

Note, that God doesn't say that they cannot enter the Land; rather they cannot LEAD the people into the Land. In other words, Moshe and Aharon are not being punished as INDIVIDUALS, rather as NATIONAL LEADERS. As such, their 'sin' must relate in some manner to a flaw in their leadership traits.

In fact, the very pasuk that explains their punishment already hints to a flaw in leadership:

"...BECAUSE you did not trust Me enough TO SANCTIFY ME in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael..." (20:12)

God's statement implies that He had expected Moshe and Aharon to take the rebellion at Mei Meriva and somehow create from it a "kiddush Hashem" - a sanctification of God's Name. Therefore, to find that 'sin', we must examine the Mei Meriva once again, in search of leadership crisis. But this time, we must begin by studying those events from their onset.

### LET'S START FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

Recall that the Mei Meriva incident began when Bnei Yisrael encountered a terrible water shortage immediately upon their arrival at Midbar Tzin. Let's begin our study by taking a closer look at how the Torah described that crisis:

"And Bnei Yisrael arrived at Midbar Tzin... but there was not enough water for the people, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon. They argued with Moshe saying: It would have been better had we died with our brethren "lifnei Hashem" [before God]... So - why did you bring us to this desert to die?...and why did you take us out of Egypt to bring us to this terrible place... - there are no fruits here and there is no water to drink." (see 20:1-5)

Not only did Bnei Yisrael ask for water, they expressed their total disgust with the entire process of Yetziat Mitzraim. Even though they direct these harsh complaints to Moshe and Aharon, they can be understood no less as a complaint against God; questioning not only His ability to save them, but also the very

purpose of their special relationship.

How should Moshe and Aharon respond to these blasphemous complaints? Should they not argue by defending God? Should they not encourage the people to remain faithful?

Instead, Chumash describes what appears to be a rather 'pathetic' reaction:

"And Moshe and Aharon came to the Ohel Moed [in fear] from the congregation, and they fell on their faces..." (20:6)

One could suggest that already at this stage a leadership crisis has unfolded. To clarify this point, let's compare this event to the parallel incident that took place when Bnei Yisrael complained for water at Refidim many years earlier (see Shmot 17:1-7). Note Moshe's immediate response to an almost identical complaint:

"mah trivun iy'madi, mah t'nasun et Hashem" -Why are you arguing with me, why are you TESTING God? (see 17:2)

At Refidim, Moshe immediately challenged the people - reprimanding them how their complaint reflected a lack of faith in God. Afterward, when the people continued to complain, Moshe cries out to God, begging for a solution (see 17:4).

In contrast, at "Mei Meriva" Moshe's reaction is quite different. Instead of confronting these almost identical complaints, Moshe & Aharon immediately 'run away' to the Ohel Moed and 'fall on their faces' (20:6). [Even if this means that they prayed - is this a time for prayer? Compare with Shmot 14:15 and its context!]

Was 'running away' the proper reaction? Should they not have assured the people that God will indeed take care of their needs. Should they not have challenged the people's irreverent statement that "it would have been better had they remained in Egypt"?

One could suggest that already at this early stage in the narrative - Moshe & Aharon have already 'failed' as national leaders, for they do not SANCTIFY God's name when the opportunity arose. In fact, this may be precisely what God is referring to when He states: "because you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael..." (20:12).

Even though God immediately gives Moshe & Aharon specific instructions on how to deal with the situation, it is already too late. As soon as the incident is over, even though Moshe & Aharon may have properly fulfilled all of God's instructions when hitting the rock, God informs them that their days as the nation's leaders are numbered. Before Bnei Yisrael will begin their conquest of Eretz Canaan, it will be necessary to appoint new leadership.

[Note that later in Sefer Devarim when Moshe begs that he be allowed see the land (3:23-26), he does not ask to LEAD, only to ENTER and see for himself.]

However, if this interpretation is correct, why do we need the story of 'hitting the rock' (20:7-11) in between? Let the Torah first inform us of Moshe's punishment, and then let God provide water for the people.

To answer this question, and to understand this entire incident in its wider perspective, we must turn back a few pages to a related event in Parshat Korach.

### WHOSE STAFF IS IT?

To our surprise, the key to understanding this complicated sugya lies in its connection to Parshat Korach! To appreciate that connection, let's pay careful attention to how the narrative continues (after Moshe & Aharon run away to the Ohel Moed):

"And God spoke to Moshe saying: "kach et ha'mateh" - take THE STAFF and gather the people..." (see 20:8)

It is commonly assumed that Moshe is instructed to takes his own staff, i.e. the very same staff with which he brought the plagues; split the sea; and brought forth water from the rock at Chovav; etc.

However, it cannot be Moshe's own staff, for the pasuk states explicitly:

"And Moshe took the staff - M'LIFNEI HASHEM - from before God, as God had commanded him..." (20:9)

In Chumash, "lifnei Hashem" usually refers to in front of the ARON, i.e. the ark of the covenant located in the holiest domain of the Mishkan (see Shmot 29:11,42;30:8; etc.). Surely, Moshe would not keep his staff "lifnei Hashem"! [The "kodesh kedoshim" is not his personal closet!]

[Note that God commands Moshe -"kach et HA'mateh" - THE staff, not -"matecha" - YOUR staff. Compare with Shmot 14:16, 17:5.]

If it is not his own staff that Moshe must take, then what staff is it? Is there someone else who keeps his staff in the "kodesh ha'kedoshim"?

The answer, as Rashbam and Chizkuni so beautifully explain (see their commentaries to 20:8), is quite simple - it is AHARON's special staff!

Recall from Parshat Korach that God had commanded Moshe to conduct a test between the staffs of each of the tribal leaders (see 17:16-24) to establish that the tribe of Levi is indeed chosen. Carefully note God's command to Moshe after Aharon's staff wins that test:

"... return the STAFF OF AHARON - "lifnei ha'leydut" - [in front of the 'tablets of testimony', i.e. the ARON ] for safe keeping, in order that it be a SIGN FOR ANY REBELLIOUS GROUP ["ot l'bnei meri"]- so that they will stop complaining and not die..." (17:25-26)

In other words, God tells Moshe - NEXT TIME that Bnei Yisrael complain or rebel, take out Aharon's staff from the Ohel Moed and REMIND them of what happened to Korach's rebellion.

And sure enough - the next complaint in Chumash is the incident at Mei Meriva!

This not only explains Rashbam's pirush, but it also neatly explains why the Torah (in 20:9) must inform us that Moshe takes specifically the staff "m'lifnei Hashem" - from before God. Moshe doesn't take his own staff - he takes the staff of AHARON that was kept "lifnei Hashem" - for it was set aside for specifically for this purpose.

In other words, in 20:8 God instructs Moshe to do exactly what Moshe should have done on his own!

This also beautifully explains why Moshe prefaces his rebuke with: "shimu na ha'MORIM" [listen o' you rebellious ones /see 20:10]. Considering that God had instructed Moshe to take the "mateh Aharon" which was set aside for an "ot l'bnei MERI", it is only appropriate that he would rebuke the people by saying: "shimu na ha'MORIM"! [See Chizkuni on 20:10, note also that "meri" & "morim" are derived from the same shoresh.]

In a similar manner, the Torah's use of the word GAVANU in both these parshiot provides additional (textual) support for this interpretation. Recall how the complaints at Mei Meriva first began:

"And the people quarrelled with Moshe saying: 'loo GAVANU B'GVA acheinu...' - if only we had perished with our brothers" (20:3)

This complaint echoes the cry of Bnei Yisrael in the aftermath of Korach's rebellion (immediately after Aharon's staff is set aside/ see 17:25-27):

"And Bnei Yisrael said to Moshe: 'heyn GAVANU avadnu' - lo, we perish, we are lost... anyone who comes close to the Mishkan will die, alas we are doomed to perish..." (17:27-28) [Compare also 20:4-5 with 16:13-14.]

## MAKING NO MISTAKES

Once we explain that Moshe was commanded to take MATEH AHARON - almost every following action that he takes makes perfect sense. Let's explain why:

As we explained earlier, because MATEH AHARON is an "ot l'bnei meri", it is only logical that Moshe understands "speak to the rock" as "speak ABOUT the rock" and therefore begins his rebuke with "SHIMU NA HA'MORIM".

Then, Moshe's next statement: "Can we take water from this rock?" can be explained as precisely what God commanded him to do: i.e. to speak about (or at) the rock - "v'natan meimav" - THAT IT SHOULD give water. In other words, God instructs Moshe is to challenge the people's belief, to ask them - is it possible for a rock to give water? - And that's exactly what he does!

This also explains why Moshe hit the rock. Once he understands that "speak TO the rock" means "speak ABOUT the rock", then God's next instruction: "v'hotzeita" [you shall TAKE OUT water] must imply that Moshe himself must cause the water to come out. How? Exactly as he did forty years earlier by the rock in Chorev, using his OWN mateh (not Aharon's / read 20:11 carefully - "matelyhu").

[This implies that there were actually TWO staffs at Mei Meriva:

(1) The staff of Aharon - was taken by Moshe and most probably given to Aharon to hold up in front of the people during this entire event. And (2)- the staff of Moshe - which he himself used to hit the rock to bring forth water.]

The only detail that remains to be explained is why Moshe hit the rock twice (see Ibn Ezra'). However, as Ramban asks, could it be that hitting the rock twice instead of once makes the miracle any less impressive? Furthermore, God did not tell Moshe to hit the rock ONCE or TWICE! He just commanded him to 'take out water'. Certainly, Moshe should have the leeway to hit the rock as many times as he feels necessary. [Even at Chorev, it never mentions how many times Moshe hit the rock. And even if this action was incorrect, could this slight 'transgression' warrant such a severe punishment?]

This explanation of "mateh AHARON" only strengthens our claim that Moshe indeed followed God's instructions properly - but he and Aharon are punished for not sanctifying God's Name earlier - when Bnei Yisrael FIRST complained at Mei Meriva.

With this background, it becomes easier to understand why their punishment relates to this leadership crisis. Failure in

leadership is not necessarily because the leader does something 'wrong', nor is it a sin. Leadership, as its name implies, must LEAD the people - i.e. it must do something right, it must take an initiative.

As individuals, Moshe & Aharon never 'sinned' at Mei Meriva, but as leaders they failed. Therefore, God reaches the conclusion that they will not be able to succeed should they be the leaders who will take Bnei Yisrael into the Promised Land.

## BELIEVING or SUPPORTING

Based on this interpretation, we can suggest an alternate understanding of the word "EMUNAH" (used in the pasuk which explains the reason for their punishment):

"ya'an lo he'EMANTEM BI" - because you did not have FAITH IN ME in the EYES of Bnei Yisrael" (see 20:12).

The word "emunah" in this pasuk may not refer to belief in God in the theological sense. Surely, Moshe and Aharon 'believe' in God. However, they were not 'supportive' enough of God in the eyes of the people. The Hebrew word "emunah" stems from the shoresh aleph.mem.nun which means to support or sustain.

[For example, in Shmot 17:12 - "v'haya yadav emunah..." in the war against Amalek, when Aharon & Chur support Moshe's arm, or in Megilat Esther (2:7) -"va'yehi OMEYN et Hadassah..." - i.e. Mordechai supported (or adopted) Esther, or "omnot ha'bayit" the pillars supporting the Beit Ha'Mikdash (Il Melachim 18:16), or the word "amen", which confirms or supports a bracha or statement made by others, etc.] .

In hindsight, the reason for Moshe's 'punishment' may even be quite logical. Considering the many difficulties that will face Bnei Yisrael once they begin conquest of the Land, it is only inevitable that many more rebellious situations such as these will arise. Leadership, which can deal with such complaints, is essential.

## THE FINAL STRAW

Had this been the only incident where Moshe & Aharon's leadership faltered, their punishment may not have been so harsh. However, this problem of leadership had already surfaced numerous times in Sefer Bamidbar. In fact it could almost be considered its secondary theme. Recall, that from the time Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai, almost every event which Chumash records reflects this pattern of faltering leadership:

- \* At "kvivot ha'taaveh" Moshe himself claims that he can longer lead the people (11:11-15).
- \* Later, even Miriam, Moshe's own sister, complains about his leadership (12:1-3).
- \* When the "meraglim" return, Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces (14:5); Kalev and Yehoshua take leadership positions.
- \* In the rebellion of Korach (chapter 16), again Moshe and Aharon's leadership is challenged, again they fall on their faces (16:4,22).

[This approach also explains why later in Sefer Devarim, Moshe claims that it was because of "chet ha'meraglim" that he could not enter the land (see Devarim 1:37).]

As we have explained, surely as individuals, Moshe and Aharon are "tzadikim"; they do nothing 'wrong'. However, as happens over and over again in Sefer Bamidbar, their leadership fails. At Mei Meriva, possibly a personal example of patience, stamina, confidence, and calm rebuke may have able to create the necessary

"kiddush Hashem"; but this did not happen.

Can we be critical of Moshe and Aharon for their behavior? Should we consider their actions as sinful? Not necessarily! This leadership crisis does not have to be considered a question of 'good or bad' behavior. Rather, it could be considered a tragedy - a problem of compatibility.

As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Shlach, already when Bnei Yisrael first left Har Sinai, there were signs of a lack of compatibility between Moshe Rabeinu and Bnei Yisrael. After all, Moshe had spent months on Har Sinai with the SHCHINA, and was no longer capable of dealing with complaints concerning mundane manners. [Note also Shmot 34:35. See also commentary of the Sfat Emet on the Mei Meriva incident.]

To meet the challenges of taking Am Yisrael into the Promised Land, new leadership was essential. Not necessarily because Moshe and Aharon did anything 'wrong', rather because Am Yisrael were not worthy of their leadership.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

---

#### FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. One could even go one step further and suggest that Moshe, even before God's command, should have taken MATEH AHARON and shown it to the people and rebuked them. If so, then God's first command to Moshe - "kach et ha'mateh" may simply be a reminder to Moshe of what he SHOULD HAVE DONE on his own (as he was instructed in Parshat Korach)! This could explain "ka'asher tzivahu" in 20:9. It may imply: as God commanded him - not just now, but earlier - in PARSHAT KORACH!]

B. Later in the Parsha, a similar situation where the people need water, arises at "B'ey'rah" (21:16-18). There Moshe gathers the people together, God provides water, and the people respond with a song of praise! This shows that given the proper circumstances, such a situation can result in a "kiddush Hashem". Moshe may have learned his lesson, however, by then it is already too late for God to change His decision.]

#### C. REASONS OR INDICATORS

Our interpretation in the shiur (part two) does not necessarily have to conflict with the various opinions raised by the "rishonim" which we discussed in Part One. One could suggest that each of those reasons can be understood as INDICATORS of this faltering leadership, not just REASONS for Moshe's punishment. For example, Moshe and Aharon's use of a harsh tone; their quick anger; their lack of patience hitting the rock twice instead of once; their running away to the Ohel Moed, etc. All of these opinions point to the same general problem of leadership.

D. According to our explanation above, the most difficult pasuk to explain is 20:24, in relation to Aharon's death at Hor haHar:

"... al asher m'ritem et pi, Imei m'riva"  
"meri" implies more than not doing something right, it seems as though something of a rebellious nature was done.

1. Explain why this pasuk led many commentators to explain the sin as hitting the rock instead of speaking to it.
2. How else can one explain this pasuk?

3. Explain the "lamed" in "Imei m'riva".

4. Read Devarim 32:51. What does "m'altem" mean?

( What is "me'ilah", in general)?

Relate this pasuk to Bamidbar 20:24 and 20:12-13, and use it to explain your answer to 1 & 2 above.

E. See the Netziv's pirush in Emek Davar to Bamidbar 20:8-11.

Note how he insists that the mateh is Moshe's mateh, and hence he must explain that "ka'asher tzivayhu" - is that God had sometime earlier commanded Moshe to take his "mateh" and put it next to the Aron. He also solves the problem of the contradiction between command 3 and 4 by explaining that God gave Moshe TWO options for bringing water: 1) speak to the people that they should pray for water, and if that didn't work, as a back up - he could alternately hit the rock, and that would also bring forth water. Even though our shiur has followed a very different approach, it is interesting to note the originality of the Netziv's approach, and how he deals with many of the questions that we raised in the above shiur.

# OH RNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHUKAT • 9 TAMMUZ 5781 JUNE 19, 2021 • VOL 28 NO. 28

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Show Me the Waze To Go Home

***“Come to Cheshbon” (21:27)***

I well remember, before setting off on a trip, pulling out my somewhat dog-eared maps and carefully planning my route. I carefully considered the prevailing traffic at my estimated times along journey, and committed to memory the route, jotting down the names or numbers of the highways that I would need to take.

Who'd a-thought that that just a few short years later, my maps would be gathering mold at the bottom the trunk of my car, and a satellite miles above me in the sky would be guiding me to my destination on a screen in my car? And not only that, but if the traffic situation changed, it would reroute me as I was driving!

Waze sure is a wonderful invention. Only problem is if the satellite doesn't work, or your phone can't pick up the signal.

A few years ago, one of my sons was attending a Yeshiva in the south of Israel, and my wife and I made several trips to visit him. I jumped in the car, fired up Waze, and off we went. We must have made the journey at least five or six times, when one day I realized that Waze had gone “on the blink.” I suddenly started to pay attention to the road signs and cast my eyes to the left and the right, trying to recognize the scenery.

I had absolutely no idea where I was.

Or how to get to where I wanted to get.

Our lives are full of labor-saving devices that can make our lives full of labor.

When the personal computer first came out, I suggested that every computer that left the factory should have a little sticker on it saying, “You can waste your life saving time.”

One of the most dangerous things in life is to travel through it on “auto-pilot.” Although we may have traveled through similar situations in the past, life choices require constant reevaluation. The “Negative Drive” is a master of misrouting. And what may have been a necessary strategy in the past — or even a mitzvah — now, on this particular journey, the road that we are on may take us far from our goal.

***“Come to Cheshbon.”***

The Talmud (Bava Batra 78b) expounds this verse in this manner: “Therefore, the allegorists say, ‘Come to Cheshbon.’ ... Those who rule over their negative drive say, ‘Come and evaluate the *cheshbon* (“balance sheet of the world”) — the loss of a mitzvah versus its gain — and the gain of a transgression versus its loss...’”

When we fail to do life's essential map work, we may find ourselves far “awaze” from where we want to be.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**T**he laws of the *Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death.

After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land.

The Jewish People resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon, the Amorite, attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

**subscribe @ [ohr.edu](http://ohr.edu)**

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week

# Q & A

## Questions – Chukat

1. "Take a perfect *Para Aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" *temima* mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *Para Aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *Para Aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Para Aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *Para Aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, which was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, to which everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Biblical Refuseniks

**W**hen the Jews appealed to the Edomites for permission to travel through their territory *en route* the Holy Land, the Edomites flatly refused and even threatened military action. The word used in the Bible to denote the Edomites' "refusal" is *vayima'en* (Num. 20:21). That same word is used when Jacob "refuses" to be consoled over Joseph's apparent death (Gen. 37:35), when Joseph "refused" to philander with Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:8), when Jacob "refused" to place his right hand on Joseph's firstborn (Gen. 48:19), when Amon deviously feigned sickness by "refusing" to eat (II Shmuel 13:9), and in several other places in the Bible. Nonetheless, the more familiar Hebrew term for "refusal" is not *mi'un* — a cognate of *vayima'en* — but rather *siruv*. In this essay we will discuss these two synonyms and attempt to find the differences between them.

While cognates of the Hebrew word *mi'un* appear forty-six times throughout the Bible, its seemingly synonymous counterpart *siruv* only occurs once in the entire Bible, making it a *hapax legomenon* — and even that example is not universally agreed upon. When G-d tells the Prophet Yechezkel not to fear any repercussions from the Jewish People as the result of his prophecies, He refers to the nation as *saravim* and *salonim* (Yechezkel 2:6). The commentators agree that *salonim* are a type of "thorns," but when it comes to the word *saravim*, there are two different approaches.

Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), Rashi (1040-1105), Radak (1160-1234), and others explain that *saravim* means that the Jews were "rebels" and "refusers." Menachem even defines *meridah* ("rebellion") as *sarvanut*, just like he defines *saravanim* as *mardut* ("rebellion"). According to them, this is the only instance of the root SAMECH-REISH-BET in the Bible in the sense of "refusing." Nonetheless, Menachem's famous interlocutor Donash Ibn Labrat

(920-990) disagrees with this assessment, instead proffering that when Yechezkel calls the Jews *saravim*, this term refers to a type of "thorn," just like *salonim* does.

Interestingly, in that chapter of the Book of Yechezkel, G-d uses cognates of *meri/meridah* ("rebellion") when discussing the Jewish People six times, and in each of those times the Targum renders the word in Aramaic with a cognate of *siruv*. What's even more interesting is that when Yechezkel uses a cognate of *pesha* to mean "rebellion" in that chapter (Yechezkel 2:3), Targum renders that term in Aramaic with an Aramaicized cognate of the Hebrew *meridah*.

That said, all commentators agree that *sarvan* in later Rabbinic Hebrew refers to a "refusenik." For example, the Mishna (*Brachot* 5:3) rules that if the *chazan* made a mistake during the prayers, then he should immediately be replaced with another *chazan*, warning that the second *chazan* should not be a *sarvan* under such circumstances. Maimonides and Bartenura explain that under normal circumstances a person asked to function as the *chazzan* should show some humility, and initially "refuse" the honor (*sarvan*), but in this case, where the second *chazan* is appointed to replace the first *chazan*, it is inappropriate for him to "refuse" (*sarvan*) the honor.

Similarly, a person who pesters another and unrelentingly tries to convince him of something is called *misarev* (*Nedarim* 8:7), because he "refuses" to give up on changing the other person's mind (see *Tosafot Yom Tov*). Sometimes, an extra HEY is added before the final letter of this word to yield *mis'harev* for "pestering" (see Rashi to *Bava Kama* 28a, 32b, *Chullin* 94a).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenehim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that the word *mi'un* is related to the word

*ein/ayin* (“no,” “is not,” “has not”), because a person who “refuses” does *not* engage with that which he has rejected, but instead stubbornly tries to ignore it.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) points out in his works *Sefer HaTishbi* and *Meturgaman* that most instances of the Hebrew words *meridah* (“rebellion”), *meri* (“rebellion”), and *mi'un* (“refusal”) in the Torah are rendered by the Targumim as *siruv*. In light of this, it seems that the two Hebrew words for “refusal” – *mi'un* and *siruv* – are indeed synonyms, but that they are sourced in different languages. *Mi'un* and its cognates that appear multiple times in the Bible seem to be genuine Hebrew, while *siruv*, which at most only appears once in the Bible, seems to be a borrowed Aramaic loanword, and thus became more popular in post-Biblical Hebrew when Aramaic had a stronger influence on the language.

However, there is another approach to this question.

An early commentary to Targum Onkelos ascribed to Rabbi Yaakov Dienna (published under the various names *Patshegen*, *Tzintzenet HaMann*, and *Sefer HaYair*) asks the following question: Given that Targum Onkelos typically renders *mi'un* as *siruv*, then why in Exodus 22:16 does he not do so? That verse states that if the father of a girl who was seduced “refuses” to give his daughter to the seducer for marriage, then the seducer must pay a penalty. The Hebrew text there reads *im ma'en yima'en* (“and if the father *refuses*”) – yet Onkelos translates the verse into Aramaic as though it says, “and if the father does not wish...” The meaning does not necessarily change, but the wording is unexpected.

Rabbi Dienna resolves this question by positing that *mi'un* and *siruv* are not perfect synonyms, and that their meanings do not always line up. He explains that *mi'un* refers specifically to a case wherein somebody was asked to do something (perhaps a favor) and “refused” to comply. On the other hand, the term *siruv* implies a stronger refusal than simple non-compliance. *Siruv* implies the utter rejection of a certain proposition. In the case of the seducee’s father, because he publicly declares in front of the court and in front of his daughter that he does not want her to marry the seducer, he can be expected to use a more toned-down verbiage. Because of this,

Onkelos did not want to translate the Bible’s *mi'un* as *siruv*, which would imply a more intense language than the father would likely use in public discourse.

Similarly, when Balaam reported that he cannot accompany Balak’s men, he says: “G-d has refused (*me'en*) to allow me to go with you” (Num. 22:13). Targum (there) again refuses to translate *mi'un* as *siruv*, instead rendering the clause “there is no will before G-d to allow...” Rabbi Dienna accounts for this unexpected phraseology by explaining that Onkelos felt that using the more vulgar term *siruv* regarding G-d’s refusal is considered somewhat disrespectful towards Him. Therefore, Onkelos creatively rendered the passage a bit differently. According to this approach, the difference between *mi'un* and *siruv* lies not just in their etymological roots, but also in their meanings, as *siruv* somehow implies a more intense form of “refusing” than *mi'un* does. (On the difference between *ma'en* and *me'en*, see *Midrash Sechel Tov* to Exodus 7:27.)

Another fascinating point related to this discussion is that colloquially the terms *mi'un* and *siruv* refer to two totally different legal procedures. The term *mi'un* appears numerous times in the Mishna (for example: *Moed Katan* 3:3, *Yevamot* 13:1-6, *Bava Metzia* 1:8, *Sanhedrin* 1:3, *Chullin* 1:7) in reference to the legal procedure by which a girl who was wed in a marriage not recognized by the Bible, but recognized by the Rabbis (e.g., if she was orphaned from her father, and her mother or brothers married her off), can “refuse” her husband and be allowed to marry someone else. In contrast, the term *siruv* refers to a person who “refuses” to heed a summons when called to appear before Jewish Court or “refuses” to listen to the court’s ruling. Such a person, who is held in contempt of the court, may be subject to sanctions that resemble excommunication and/or may allow the *dayanim* to give permission to the opposing litigant to petition a non-Jewish court.

(By the way, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *-nik* suffix in English is borrowed from Yiddish and Russian, and is said to have especially come in vogue after the Russians successfully launched the *Sputnik* satellite. Hence, the English terms *beatnik*, *no-goodnik*, *peacenik*, and *kibbutznik*.)

# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 10)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

*"These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one's parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all." (Tractate Shabbat 127a)*

**M**itzvah number nine is making peace between two people who have fallen out with each other. So great is the mitzvah that the Talmud teaches us in Tractate Yevamot (65b) that there are even occasions where it might be permissible to say something that is not [entirely] true in order to further the cause of goodwill between two quarrelling parties. Furthermore, in Tractate Ketubot (17b) there is a fascinating dispute between the School of Shamai and the School of Hillel as to how one should praise a bride. The School of Shamai is of the opinion that it is forbidden to say anything that is not true. In the words of the School of Shamai one must praise a bride "how she is" - i.e. not to say anything that is not true, and not even to embellish the truth in any way. According to the School of Shamai the pursuit of truth is so intrinsic to our identity as believing Jews that it is forbidden to say anything that is untrue. The School of Hillel, on the other hand, disagrees. According to the School of Hillel maintaining *shalom* - peace - is of paramount importance and it is permissible for a person to say that the bride is "beautiful and pious" even if it seems that she might not be.

The definitive ruling as found in the Code of Jewish Law, Even HaEzer 65:1, follows the opinion of the School of Hillel. We are allowed to say something that is not necessarily the truth in order to preserve the peace, or to enhance the feelings of goodwill between two people.

Rabbi Yom ben Avraham Asevilli, 1260-1320, known by his acronym, Ritva, the universally revered head of the famed Yeshiva in Seville and the author of one of the classic commentaries on the Talmud, writes that even though there is a very clear admonishment in the Torah that it is forbidden to lie, nevertheless, it is permitted to do so when for the sake of *shalom*. Many of the authorities of Jewish Law clarify this position and rule that it is only permissible when what is being said does not deviate explicitly from the truth. Therefore, to say something ambiguous would be permissible but to say something that is unquestionably not true is forbidden. If so, how is it possible to balance the prevailing view of the authorities with the opinion of the School of Hillel?

Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, known as the Maharal of Prague, one of the most brilliant scholars in the sixteenth century, whose commentary on the Torah and his many philosophical works are considered to be classic masterpieces, and whose influence is still keenly felt today, explains, *Netiv HaEmet*, that whilst it is true that it may not be possible to praise a bride for her physical beauty, nevertheless, there are a plethora of other praiseworthy qualities that she has. It is those traits that are being praised because, in the eyes of her husband, they make her truly beautiful.

It is reminiscent of the witness in court who, when instructed to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” asked the judge which one was wanted. The truth. The whole truth. Or nothing but the truth!

Unfortunately, if a person does not understand clearly what the Rabbis are teaching they may come to the erroneous conclusion that not being truthful is acceptable. That is absolutely not true (pun intended...). According to all authorities it is completely forbidden to say things that are distortions of the truth on a regular basis. And, as the Maharal points out, even in those specific scenarios when Jewish Law might permit a person to say something that does not *seem* to be completely truthful, it is always forbidden to say something if it is *obviously* not true.

The Maharal, *Tiferet Yisrael* 7, in defining *shalom*, writes that when each person stays within his own boundaries *shalom* can exist between people. It is when a person begins to encroach on the personal space of another that *shalom* begins to unravel. Aharon, the brother of Moshe Rabbeinu, was the paragon of making peace between people. Our Sages describe the almost limitless extent that he was prepared to go to in order to ensure that there were no disagreements and arguments between people – especially between husbands and wives. In fact, so great was his ability to inspire couples to live in harmony, that the Midrash relates (*Avot d’Rabbi Natan* 12) that thousands of children born in the desert were named after him. If not for his efforts to make peace between their parents, those children would never have been born. Even the

knowledge that, very often, trying to make peace between two opposing factions causes the peacemaker to become sullied in the process could not stop Aharon from pressing ahead in his holy efforts to foster love and benevolence among the Jewish Nation.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky (1886-1976) was one of the foremost leaders of Lithuanian Jewry. After escaping communist Russia, he headed the rabbinical courts in London for seventeen years before moving to Israel. Rabbi Abramsky used to ask rhetorically why a pot is black. And then he would answer: “Because the pot makes ‘peace’ between the fire and the water. And whoever is involved in making peace always ends up getting dirty!”

In conclusion, the Maharal further goes on to explain, *ibid.* 62, that the Torah is comprised of three fundamental tenets: *mishpat* – judgment, *chessed* – kindness, and *shalom* – peace. Eight out of ten of the mitzvahs that are mentioned in our list contain one of these tenets. Making peace between people, however, is comprised of two – judgment and kindness. Learning Torah is all-encompassing as it includes all three tenets. That is why, writes the Maharal, making peace is followed by learning Torah.

*To be continued...*

---

# TALMUD TIPS

---

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Chukat: Yoma 58-64

### The Right of the Way

*Rami bar Yechezkel said, “All turns that you make must be towards the right.”*

**T**his statement of the direction for turning is found a number of times in *Masechet Yoma*, as well in other places in *Shas*. However, in the context of the *mishna* and the *gemara*, this “turning teaching” refers to the correct direction for a *kohen* to turn when on the Altar while maneuvering about in his service of Hashem in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

If we might consider this Torah Sage’s words to be literally “speaking for themselves,” we might ask if this teaching – “all turnings that you do are only to the right” – applies to aspects of life outside of the *Beit Hamikdash* as well. In particular, does this teaching have halachic implications nowadays, when there is no *Beit Hamikdash*? In our present mitzvah observance, does the distinction between “right” and “left” play a halachic role?

But, before any further words, a strong disclaimer must be made. The words “left” and “right” in this article are absolutely in no way related to any political terminology or significance. One who even begins to imagine any such link is purely mistaken – and, dare I add, a fool.

Another disclaimer: Although we have previously written a general disclaimer regarding the correct method of any practice addressed in this series, it must be repeatedly emphasized that in any matter of practical halacha one should not rely on what is written here, but should rather ask a competent halachic authority for a ruling. It is not uncommon to find a dispute among the great halachic authorities regarding the halachic conclusion to be drawn from the *Shas* and the writings of the *Rishonim*.

It is important to note that the significance of “right and left” and “right vs. left” should be viewed as two separate concepts, although there may be a correlation at some level of understanding. One idea, the more basic idea, is that we find in nature that the right is stronger. For example, for the majority of people, the right hand is naturally strong and with greater coordination. For this reason, when fulfilling a mitzvah, one should do it with one’s right hand in order to show one’s love for Hashem and the dearness one has for His mitzvahs. A few examples: taking the *lulav* with one’s right hand, holding the Kiddush cup in one’s right hand and giving *tzedaka* with one’s right hand.

On a “deeper” level, right and left represent what we have been taught to perceive as the traits that Hashem reveals when interacting with the Creation – in particular, with people. A correct, Torah understanding of these concepts can help us better understand the hows and whys and *kavanas* (intents) for everyday life, helping us follow the way of Hashem. In a superficial manner, “right” often represents the Divine trait of strict justice. “Left” represents Hashem’s merciful nature. One of many examples of this is the halacha found in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* (95:3): to stand in prayer with one’s right hand over one’s left hand, over one’s heart. Why the right over the left? Prayer in this manner indicates a plea from one’s heart to Hashem,

that His Divine attribute of mercy “conquer” strict judgment, so to speak. In this manner we pray that Hashem will *mercifully* grant our requests – even if our merits are lacking. We seek His mercy to receive His countless gifts, such as sustenance, good health and wisdom, and that He guide and help us to repent and grow closer to Him. This explanation of standing with the right hand over the left hand in prayer is taught in the writings of the *Arizal*. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (91:6), however, notes: “Each person is different and for some it is difficult to pray like this (with the hands over the heart, as written in the *Shulchan Aruch*). Instead, these people place their hands on a *shtender* (for stability). Each person should do whatever is best for him in order to pray with focus and concentration, standing in awe before the King of kings and turning to Him in prayer for all his needs.”

• *Yoma 58b*

---

## @ OHR

---

### The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

**Dovid Uhlmann (31)**

**Chicago, Illinois**

**Governor State University, University Park, IL - BA Criminal Justice 2017**

**Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya- MA in Government, with specialties in Counterterrorism, Homeland Security and Counter Cyberterrorism; and a Cluster Certificate in Cyber Security**

**Ohr Somayach Center Program 2017-2019**

**Works in Security and Family Business**

Dovid grew up in a leafy suburb south of Chicago, the second of three sons, in a Jewish but non-observant family. His parents are both Chicago natives. Ever since he was a young boy he had dreamed of becoming a police officer. After high school he earned an Associate's degree in Criminal Justice, and began applying to police departments and security companies in the Chicago area. Dovid had not yet thought deeply about any religion, but when a Moslem co-worker began questioning him about Judaism, Dovid was ashamed to admit that he knew almost nothing. A curious young man, he started researching religions on the Internet and decided

that being Jewish was something to be proud of. He immediately put on a *kippa* and wore it to school and work as a symbol of his pride. Now, however, since

he was openly identifying as a Jew, he realized that he needed to know more than he did.



In researching a question from his co-worker, he stumbled across a verse: “*M'dvar sheker tirchak*” – “Keep far away from a lie,” and as a corollary to that, “Don’t falsely portray yourself.” If he was going to wear a *kippa*, that meant he was identifying as a Jew who keeps mitzvahs. Dovid thought to himself, “I either have to keep mitzvahs, or take off the *kippa*.” He started

reading an English translation of the *Chumash* and doing those things that he understood were incumbent upon Jews, such as avoiding shellfish and wearing a *kippa* and *tzitzis*. Because he was not yet in touch with a Rabbi or any religious Jews, he did not know what he did not know. His observance was admirable, but not yet halachic.

After reading about attacks on Jews in the Ukraine in 2014, he decided to make *aliyah* and join the Israeli army, the IDF. He also resolved to begin keeping Shabbos when he arrived in Israel. He came in 2015 and went directly to *ulpan* for almost a year. After attaining proficiency in Hebrew, Dovid joined *Plugat Tomer*, a *charedi* unit in the elite combat Givati Brigade. He served for approximately two years. Those years strengthened his observance and taught him how to live as a Jew.

Upon discharge, he returned to Chicago to finish his BA degree in Criminal Justice. He completed the degree in 2017 and then turned down offers to join various police departments because he wanted to learn in yeshiva in order to build a foundation for his future life. Dovid came to Ohr Somayach's Center Program that year.

During his second year at the Center, he simultaneously earned his Masters Degree in Government at IDC in Herzliya, with specialties in

Counterterrorism, Homeland Security; Counter Cyberterrorism – and a Cluster Certificate in Cyber Security.

He returned home at the end of 2019 and started working a security job at a top-secret data center in the Chicago area. He later joined his father in the family's Home Improvement business.

Dovid returned to Israel for a visit the week before Shavuos in 5781 (2021). It was probably the most momentous week in Dovid Uhlmann's life. He was nearly murdered by a bloodthirsty mob of Arabs shortly after Hamas began its missile attacks from the Gaza Strip on May 10th. For more on this gripping story, please read the article on our website at: <https://ohr.edu/articles/Trapped.html>.

At a *siyum* on *Makkos*, which he made at the Yeshiva on Thursday night after his miraculous escape, he ended his speech with the following words:

"It doesn't matter where you are in the world. You can be in Jerusalem, South Africa, South America or the USA. Bad things can happen anywhere. You can even be in the middle of an angry and dangerous anti-Semitic mob. If Hashem does not give permission for something to happen, nobody can touch you."

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

©1992-2021 Ohr Somayach Institutions – All rights reserved – This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer – Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for ruling.

# LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

## Three Benefactors

In one chapter, we learn of the death of Miriam and Aharon. This chapter is preceded by the great *Parah Adumah* chapter (Red Heifer), which teaches the Jewish concepts of immortality and of moral freedom which transcend the physical forces of our nature. The section of *parah adumah* is an important introduction to these deaths, for it declares that what made Miriam into Miriam and what made Aharon into Aharon did not die when Miriam and Aharon died. Just as their work and legacy live on forever in the Jewish People, their true essence is eternal, and their souls will return to G-d.

Our Sages teach that the juxtaposition of these two chapters teach that the just as the sin-offering character of the *parah adumah* effects atonement, so too does the death of the righteous. Perhaps this means that the truth of immortality and moral freedom – the teachings expressed in the *parah adumah* – are also taught by the death of the righteous. The death of the righteous offers convincing proof of immortality. Only one who is spiritually blind would identify the *tzaddik* with his inert corpse. When a corpse only a short time before had employed thought and will with spiritual strength and moral power, it is all too clear that the corpse is merely the garment of a soul who departed.

When the three great leaders of that generation, Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe, die, their loss was manifest in external phenomena. Immediately after the death of Miriam, the text records that there was no water. From this, our Sages learn that the well of water that accompanied the people in the desert dried up when Miriam passed away. The text records that the people “saw” that Aharon had perished – which leads the Sages to conclude that the loss was “visible” because the cloud, that until then had protected and guided them in the wilderness, departed. The resultant state of defenselessness left the people vulnerable to the subsequent attack by the Canaanite king, Arad. When Moshe departed, the Heavenly manna food stopped falling. Thus, the

three leaders were responsible for three critical benefits that sustained and protected the people during the years in the desert: the well, the cloud, and the manna.

The prophet Michah refers to these three great leaders in his exhortation that moral strength alone, and no other act or circumstance, is the condition for national existence. (Michah 6:4) Their personalities attested to the task whose accomplishment was crucial to the future of the nation. Michah then describes the three-part task of the Jew: *What does the L-rd demand of you? But to do justice, to love loving-kindness, and to walk modestly with your G-d.*

Rav Hirsch suggests that these three elements of our moral mission characterize the work of the three great leaders.

*Mishpat*, the norm of justice, shapes one’s whole life in accordance with G-d’s will. This was primarily the mission of Moshe, and is represented in the *manna*, the bread of existence

*Ahavat Chesed*, the love of loving-kindness – the heart’s inclination to joyfully relinquish what one is rightfully entitled to, the attribute of compassion – are the traits of Aharon, which spread a cloud of protection from the clear penetrative rays of justice.

*Hatzenea Lechet*, walking unpretentiously and modestly with G-d, is the fundamental character of Jewish womanhood, and was fostered under Miriam’s influence – the quiet, hidden “spring” from whose depths all holiness flows. Thus, the physical gifts that these benefactors provided the people with, in turn, represent the more enduring gifts that would provide for the nation’s spiritual well-being long after their departure.

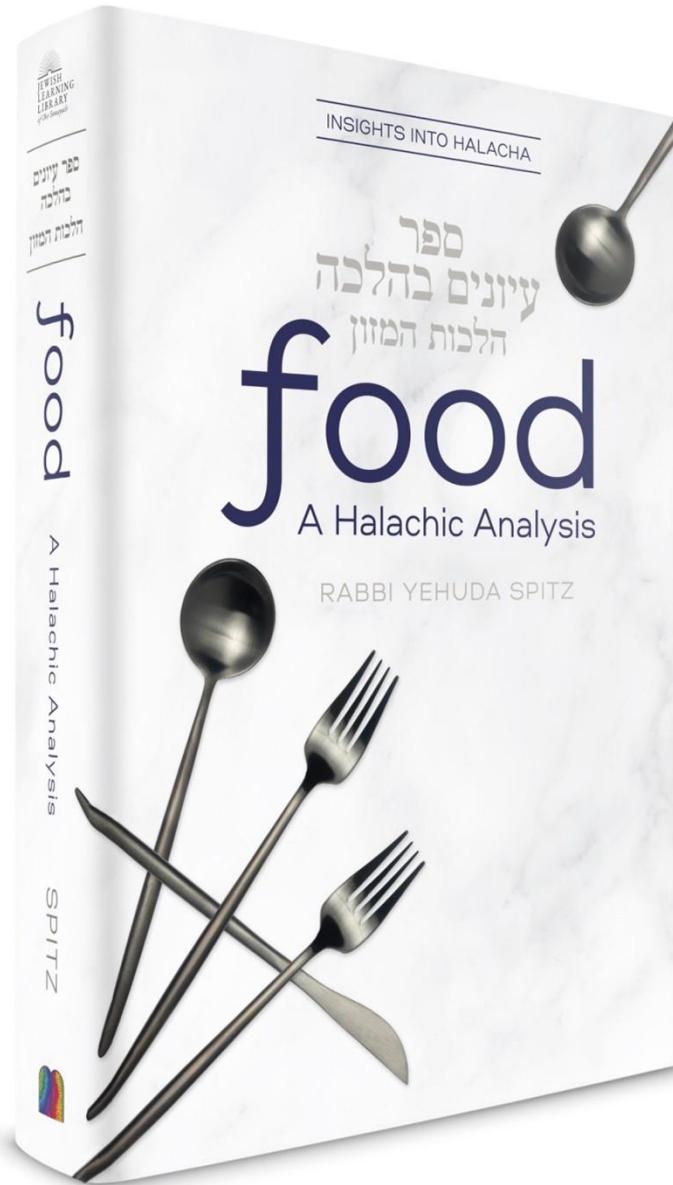
- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 20:29

# Just Published!

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz's new sefer -  
Insights Into Halacha:

*Sefer Iyunim B'Halacha - Hilchos Hamazon*

## Food: A Halachic Analysis



Now in Book Stores

Also Available From the Author:  
Rabbi Spitz - [yspitz@ohr.edu](mailto:yspitz@ohr.edu)