

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
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**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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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**Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.**

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Between chapters 18 and 20 of Bemidbar, we have a gap of 38 years, during which all the remaining adults who were age 20 or older at the time of the Exodus have passed away, except Caleb, Yehoshua, Aharon, Miriam, and Moshe. Chapter 19 is the Chukat (decree) or procedure of how a person who has had contact with a dead body becomes ritually pure again. The process requires killing a red heifer (female cow who has not yet given birth) and mixing the ashes with a red thread, cedar wood, hyssop, and pure running water. The resulting water, saved and stored, is used for a kohen to sprinkle on a person who has contacted a dead body, twice, before the person becomes tahor (ritually pure) again. Everyone involved in preparing the sprinkling solution and performing the ritual becomes tamai (ritually impure) for a day. As Rabbi David Fohrman explains, the procedure has many links back to the first death in the Torah, Kayin's killing of his brother Hevel. While Torah scholars have puzzled over the meaning of the ritual for thousands of years, Rabbi Fohrman and his fellow scholars at alephbeta.org present the interpretation that I find most convincing – that the procedure is to remind us that any contact with death (even an indirect contact) should be horrifying and remind us that life is fragile.

When the Torah resumes the story of our ancestors in chapter 20, it opens with the death of Miriam, the story of Moshe and Aharon not precisely following God's instructions for obtaining water from a rock, and God's decree that Moshe and Aharon therefore will not live to lead B'Nai Yisrael into the land. Edom refuses to permit our ancestors to pass through their land to go directly to Canaan, so they turn around, go south back into the Midbar, and travel around Edom. God tells Moshe to take Aharon and Eleizer up Mount Hor, remove Aharon's Kohen Gadol garments from Aharon, and put them on Eleizer. Aharon dies, and the people mourn him for thirty days.

Torah scholars for countless generations have puzzled over God's punishment of Moshe and Aharon for obtaining water from the rock. God instructed Moshe forty years earlier that hitting a designated rock was the procedure for making it release water, and He directed Moshe to take his staff with him again at Mei Meriva. Was their sin great enough to ban them from leading the people into the promised land? Rabbi Fohrman again has a convincing explanation. Chapter 20 has the first stories of the generation that is about to enter the land. The lesson they must learn is that they must look to God to provide for all their needs, even when they enter the land and obvious miracles will end. God asks Moshe and Aharon to provide a Kiddush Hashem – to show the people that even a rock obeys God's request to provide water when Hashem asks it to do so. If a rock willingly obeys God's request, how much more should people do so and obey His

mitzvot. By hitting the rock instead of making a simple request, Moshe and Aharon fail to teach this important lesson, which the new generation needs to understand. This presentation of the story demonstrates why hitting the rock is a significant sin. It also demonstrates that Moshe and Aharon fail an important test of the leadership that the new generation needs to be successful entering and conquering the land. Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon, z"l, in his life lessons from the parsha (below), beautifully elaborates on this interpretation, especially in his discussion of what the parsha teaches us about raising our children properly.

We no longer use the ritual of the red heifer in the absence of the Beit HaMikdash. Chukat, however, has important lessons for us in our times. Rabbi Yehoshua Singer focuses on lessons from Mei Meriva. The Taz observes that Hashem gives us guidance, and it is our task to analyze situations and figure out what Hashem wants us to do. The Gra observes that a "gut feeling" is God's way to guide us now; the gut feeling is equivalent to prophecy, and we must find lessons from the Torah and Talmud to enable us to understand these lessons.

Rabbi Moshe Hauer, Executive Vice President of the Orthodox Union, sent an email reminding us that many Jews have a custom of fasting on Erev Shabbat of Chukat. We face dangerous times, with continuing deaths as the IDF tries to free our hostages from Hamas. We face threats from Hezbollah and Iran, Arabs across the Green Line, and countless anti-Semites all over the world. Meanwhile, we have renewed political strife in Israel over politics and ways for the country to include the Haredi in Israel among those contributing to defense of the country. Rabbi Hauer reminds us that sinat chinam (groundless hatred) is a poison, and we must avoid senseless hatred especially as we approach the Three Weeks.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander's *Devar Torah* (below) extends Rabbi Hauer's message. Since I do not live in Israel, I refuse to take a position on Israel's internal policies. Rabbi Brander, an Israeli citizen as well as President of an extremely large and highly respected Orthodox yeshiva, has devoted his *Devar Torah* this week to discussing the halachic issues involved with including the Haredi in defense of Israel. I feel that I cannot summarize Dr. Brander's arguments well enough to do more than to recommend that everyone read his piece. The argument for excluding yeshiva students in the military is based on the importance of these young men learning so they can contribute to Israelis raising the level of mitzvot of our people. Rabbi Brander discusses several important halachic principles involved in balancing the contributions of yeshiva students to religious study versus their obligations to help immediate needs of Israelis in defense.

This Sunday evening is the yahrzeit of my beloved grandfather, David Fisher, after whom my wife and I named our first child. His yahrzeit always comes nine days before the beginning of the Three Weeks, the most difficult period of the year for many of us. Chukat reminds us that life is fragile and that we must unify our people as we face many dangers throughout the world. None of us want a return of the horrifying death and destruction surrounding the destruction of the Temples and other disasters that have haunted our people throughout history. When Jews unite, we can be strong. May we work together and meet the many challenges surrounding us.

During difficult times, I especially miss my beloved mentor, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, who guided me for nearly fifty years as Rebbe, mentor, and close friend. Rabbi Cahan reinforced an important lesson from Rashi, that a man's Rebbe is like his father. He certainly filled that role for me.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.**

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

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### **Parshat Chukat: The Time Has Come to Leave the Tent**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* © 5784 (2024)  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

For thousands of years in the Diaspora, without the Beit Hamikdash or a country of our own, the Jewish people were in survival mode. Many laws discussed in the Torah, including those in this week's parsha, Chukat, lost their practical applicability. Yet our Sages, understanding that the Torah never loses its relevance, sought deeper meanings in these laws and verses.

Reish Lakish's explanation in the Gemara (Brachot 63b) illustrates this very approach in his reinterpretation of the verse, *"This is the Torah, a person who dies in a tent"* (Bamidbar 19:14), which refers to ritual impurity caused by a dead body. Recognizing its lack of relevance for non-Kohanim in his time, Reish Lakish suggested an alternate meaning: only one who 'dies in the tent' – who toils in Torah study – can become a true Torah scholar.

This interpretation, born of Diaspora necessity, encouraged sacrifice of comfort and ease of life for the sake of Torah study. However, in our contemporary reality as a sovereign nation in Israel, this explanation is no longer pertinent and continues to be misapplied by some voices of fellow observant Jews who abuse this teaching to justify refusing IDF enlistment – even during a milchemet mitzva (obligatory war) like the one we face today.

This misinterpretation contradicts the Rambam's clear ruling based on the Mishnah in Sotah: *"In a milchemet mitzva, the entire nation must go out to war, even a groom from his chamber, and a bride from her pavilion"* (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Malachim u'Milchamot* 7:4). Furthermore, it ignores the mitzvah of not standing idly by while your friend's blood is being spilled (Vayikra 19:16).

We would never authorize violating Shabbat, consuming non-kosher food, stealing, or forgoing mitzvot between Jews for the sake of studying Torah. How, then, has it become acceptable that Torah study trumps the law of pikuach nefesh – saving a life – and of milchemet mitzva, defending our sovereign nation under attack? (It should also be pointed out that the current system doesn't actually ensure that those exempt from army service on grounds of learning Torah are even really learning Torah. There is evidence that many obtain exemptions under false pretenses, and are not actually learning in the Beit Midrash either, so they are simply avoiding their national duty, contributing neither to Torah scholarship nor to the country's defense.)

In our times, the true fulfillment of *"dying in the tent"* is not reflected by pursuing or advocating a life secluding ourselves in the Beit Midrash. Rather, it refers to the righteous men and women who, out of dedication to Torah and religious

observance, temporarily leave the study hall to defend the Jewish people on the frontlines. At the same time, many go to great lengths to continue learning Torah even on the battlefield, embodying the sanctity of Torah in the darkest moments.

With countless soldiers and civilians having lost their lives, it's time to set aside outdated Diaspora patterns of thought and action. We must unite, as the Torah mandates, to ensure the wellbeing and flourishing of the entire Jewish people. It's time to "leave the tent"; not God forbid to abandon Torah, but to fulfill its true intent in our generation.

\* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsny.org) or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

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## Chukas: "Chok" is the Real Thing

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5765 (2005)

*HASHEM spoke to Moshe and to Aaron saying, "This is the decree (chukos) of the Torah, which HASHEM has commanded, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to you a completely red cow -- which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come. )Bamidbar 19:1-2(*

*HASHEM spoke to Moshe and to Aaron, saying, "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them." )Bamidbar 20:12(*

*The verse reveals that if they had not done this sin they would have entered the land. )Why?( In order that they should not say about them, "Because of the sin of the rest of the "generation of the desert" that was decreed upon them, they did not enter." )Rashi(*

Ask the man in the street, "Why were Moshe and Aaron not allowed to enter the Land of Israel?" The answer you're likely to get, "Cause he hit the rock!" Rashi more than implies that this is not the real reason. The verse only reveals this incident so that we dare not conclude that some less acceptable reason was the cause of them not entering. What is the real reason Moshe and Aaron did not enter the Land of Israel? Why is this entire episode included with "Chukas," having to do with the classically incomprehensible "Red Cow"?

What is a "Chok"? A Chok is a law that, by definition, cannot be understood by the human mind. We may be tempted to reject it altogether if not for the credibility of the promulgator of that law. Even if it is not comprehensible to us, ultimately we defer to the expertise of a mind that supercedes our own. As Maimonides writes in Moreh Nevuchim, "Truth does not become more true by virtue that the whole world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it!" Galileo concurs, "In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual."

The surprising fact is that, "These are the "chukos" of the Torah" – The whole of Torah is a "chok"! What we experience as a reason (in Hebrew Ta'am) is merely a taste. We have a flavor or a sense of some local benefit from a Mitzvos, but the bottom line of it all is that they are beyond human ken.

In reality HASHEM plays a subtle trick on all of us. It is the same trick we play on our children. When they are in need of some medicine the pharmacist laces it with candy flavor so the child will desire to take it. The parent has one motive – to get the spoon into the kid's mouth. The kid has an entirely different agenda – to enjoy a sweet taste.

So it goes with apples and marriage and children and work. We are often there for one selfish reason but deep down buried beneath the surface of these experiences are vitamins packed with multiple life lessons we could not and would not have gotten otherwise. And so it is with Moshe and Aaron. We are shown a somewhat reasonable explanation as to he

why they were denied entry to the land of their and our desire. The real bottom line, though, is that it is a “Chok.” It relates to HASHEM’s infinite mind, and as we all now know -- “chok” is the real thing.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5765-chukas/>

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## **Chukat – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Reinterring a Corpse Buried in an Otherwise Reserved Plot**

Rabbi Dov Linzer \*

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevi Torah

“and Miriam died there, and was buried there” (Bamidbar 20:1).

### **QUESTION – Minneapolis, MI \*\***

A man was mistakenly buried in a plot reserved for a distant relative (his second wife’s cousin). The plot owner is adamant that the deceased be moved and will sue the cemetery if the deceased is not relocated.

Can we move him (the deceased) to his rightful plot, which is eight spots away? This would place him adjacent (above, not next to) his in-laws, as well as freeing the plot reserved for his surviving wife. Shulkhan Arukh YD 363:1 indicates that it may be permissible to reinter for the sake of being close to immediate family, but I want to ensure that this situation meets that criterion.

### **ANSWER**

Yes, you should move the deceased, otherwise, it would be gezel (theft). (See SA YD 364:2, Rashi to Sanhedrin 47b, Kol Mevasser 1:1)

\* Yeshivat Chovevi Torah, Bronx, NY.

\*\* This question is taken from a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/07/ryrchukat/>

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## **Spare the Rod By Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff \***

Why are Moshe and Aharon barred from entering the Land of Israel? What was so wrong about hitting the rock?

After all, God explicitly tells Moshe to take his staff with him when going to speak to the rock (Bamidbar 20:8). In the entire Torah, there are only three other places where God instructs Moshe to take up his staff: at the burning bush (Shemot 4:17), before turning the Nile to blood (Shemot 7:15), and before hitting the first rock (the *tsur*, as opposed to the *ye’o* here) to extract water from it (Shemot 17:5). In all three cases, the staff is used to initiate the miracle that follows. As God says at the burning bush: “*Take this staff in your hands to do the signs with it.*”

Furthermore, hitting is undoubtedly one of the common uses of the staff to perform miracles.

Both in the case of the Nile and the first rock, the staff initiates the miracle by hitting something. This is also true of the plague of lice (Shemot 8:13).

God’s language, when he informs Moshe and Aharon of their punishment, also doesn’t indicate that God is perturbed by the hitting. God says (Bamidbar 20:12):

*“Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them”*

In other words, God was upset that Moshe and Aharon did not sanctify God's name when they brought forth the water. The word “האמנתם” translated above as “trust” can also mean “to be true or loyal to,” as can be seen in the Targumim (early Aramaic biblical translations).<sup>1</sup> Thus the problem is not that Moshe and Aharon somehow disobeyed God, but rather that they failed to sanctify God at the critical moment.

This interpretation jives nicely with the assertion of Rabbeinu Chananel (11th c., N. Africa) as cited by the Ramban (13th c., Spain–Bamidbar 20:8, s.v. *משה ואנו*):

*“The sin consisted of their saying, we shall bring you forth water out of this rock. They should have said God shall bring you forth water.”*

The problem, according to this, was not what they did, but what they said. When Moshe and Aharon gather the people at the rock, they say, “Listen, you rebels, we shall get water for you out of this rock!”<sup>2</sup> What they should have said is, “God will get water for you out of this rock!” Their placement of themselves at the center of the miracle, even unintentionally, even once, is enough to start a cult around their charismatic personalities. For anyone short of Moshe and Aharon, we might even call this borderline predatory behavior. A situation arises in which God is no longer the religious center, but rather, the religious leaders. Besides the theological fallacy, this raises opportunities for all kinds of abuse.

For this reason, God forbids even Moshe and Aharon, the two most humble, and least predatory of Jewish leaders, to enter the Land, where the permanent religion of the Jews will be centered. Moshe, at least, is permitted to continue to lead in the desert, although he performs no more miracles.

It is a truism that the Torah never presents characters that are without faults. We typically understand this as empowering. It teaches us that despite our faults, we all have the potential for greatness. In addition, it urges us towards forgiveness. Even the greatest among us, Moshe and Aharon, themselves, were subject to faults, how much more so we, ordinary folk?

Parashat Chukat reminds us that there are some behaviors that cannot be tolerated in our leaders. Even accidental behaviors! Even if they happen only once. Predatory behavior and attempts to establish cults of personality cannot be countenanced. Leaders who behave this way, must be removed from their positions as Moshe and Aharon were. Leadership of the Jewish people, then and now, belongs only to God. Trying to center that leadership around human personalities is a fallacy so great that it warrants deposing leaders who behave in this way.

[1] The Targumim actually seem to support the claim that the punishment was for hitting the rock, contra to my argument here. I bring them only to note their use of the word *דַּבָּרָךְ* which they give as “*Because you were not true/loyal to my word...*”

[2] The interrogative *ן* at the beginning of the sentence is mysterious. I read it as an intensifier, but I acknowledge that I am unaware of an unambiguous example of this usage anywhere else in Tanach.

\* Dean and Rebbe, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/07/chukat5784/>

## The Hatred Syndrome: Thoughts for Parashat Hukkat

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

This week's Parasha deals with death, rebellion and war. It points to the perennial dissensions that plague humanity, including our situation today.

All of us are concerned with the hatred, strife and violence that are infecting our societies. We worry about Israel, the Jewish world, and all good people everywhere. For this week's Angel for Shabbat, I'm reprinting an op ed piece I wrote that appeared in the *Jewish Link*, April 11, 2024.

It is a strange feeling to be hated by people who don't know you and don't want to know you. It is perplexing to hear people calling for your death and the death of all your people without ever considering your humanity, your goodness, your contributions to society.

Haters don't see their victims as fellow human beings. They create and foster ugly stereotypes. They promote outrageous conspiracy theories that dehumanize their targets.

Hatred is an ugly thing. It not only promotes hatred of the perceived enemy, but it distorts the lives of the haters themselves. Energy and resources that could be utilized to build compassionate societies are instead diverted to hatred, weaponry, death and destruction.

We have always been aware of an under-current of antisemitic and anti-Israel attitudes, but things today seem qualitatively and quantitatively different. We witness throngs of people throughout the United States and throughout the world who brazenly and unabashedly call for the annihilation of Israel and the murder of Jews. The public display of raw hatred is alarming.

I suspect that almost all of those spewing hatred of Israel and Jews don't even know Israelis or Jews in person. They don't hate actual Jews: they hate stereotypes of Jews. They are indoctrinated with propaganda and are fed a stream of lies about Israel and about Jews. The haters are steeped in their hateful ideology and are not interested in civil dialogue and relationship with actual Jews and Israelis. They know little or nothing about the connection of Jews to the land of Israel going back thousands of years, from Biblical times to the present.

So why do so many haters take aim at Jews and Israel? Some of this hatred stems from anti-Jewish religious teachings. Some of it stems from jealousy at the phenomenal success of such a tiny group. Some people spew hatred as a way of making themselves seem important, as though picking on Jews somehow makes them appear stronger and braver.

Erich Fromm has written of the syndrome of decay that "*prompts men to destroy for the sake of destruction and to hate for the sake of hate.*" Many people poison their own lives with hatred and only feel truly alive and validated when they express hatred of others.

When societies allow hatred to flourish, they are sowing the seeds of their own destruction. When universities, media and political forums condone blatantly anti-Jewish intimidation and violence, the infection spreads well beyond Jews. Civil discourse is threatened. Respectful dialogue is quashed.

All who stand for a civil society must not be intimidated by the haters, bullies and supporters of terrorism. The syndrome of hate eats away at the foundations of society. It must not be allowed to prevail.

Rav Nahman of Bratslav taught: "*The whole world is a narrow bridge (precarious), but the essential thing is not to be afraid, not to be afraid at all.*"

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3253>

## Talking to a Rock: Thoughts for Parashat Hukkat, June 27, 2015

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

This week's Parasha includes one of the most perplexing episodes in the Torah. The Israelites complain bitterly that they have no water to drink, that they will die of thirst, that they should have remained in Egypt rather than suffer such a terrible fate. God tells Moses and Aaron to gather the people, to speak to a rock, and that water would come forth from the rock to quench the people's thirst.

Moses calls the people "rebels," smites the rock twice, and water emerges in abundance. God then informs Moses and Aaron that their lack of faith led to their not sanctifying God's name in the presence of the Israelites. *"Therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."* Moses and Aaron are condemned to die in the wilderness, but neither utters a word of protest or apology to God. Our commentators try to explain why Moses and Aaron received such a heavy punishment.

What was their sin? Some suggest that the sin consisted in Moses' losing his temper and calling the people rebels. Some suggest that the sin was that Moses smote the rock rather than speaking to it as God had commanded. Some suggest that Moses and Aaron gave themselves credit for bringing forth the water, rather than attributing the miracle to God. Perhaps there is another way of understanding this episode. We need to study this story in light of the verses that come immediately before:

*"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. And there was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron"* (Bemidbar 20:1-2).

The Midrash connects the death of Miriam with the lack of water. As long as she was alive, her merit was so great that a well miraculously accompanied the people. Once she died, that well ceased to give water and the people therefore became thirsty. The Midrash is highlighting the significance of Miriam. She was a key leader of Israel and was gifted with prophecy.

Yet, when she died, the Torah tersely reports that she was buried. There is no mention of the Israelites mourning her death. (By contrast, at the deaths of Aaron and Moses, the Torah indicates a national thirty day mourning period.) Not only did the people not seem to appreciate the lifelong service of Miriam, they are not reported as having offered any words of consolation to her brothers, Moses and Aaron. The people didn't seem to care much about Miriam's passing, and did not seem to associate her virtue with the existence of the water well that had accompanied them in the wilderness. The people were thirsty; they were not concerned about the death of Miriam or the grief of Moses and Aaron.

When the Israelites complained, then, Moses and Aaron were deeply disappointed and pained. Not only should the people have had more faith in God, Who had been providing for them throughout their years in the wilderness; the people should have shown appreciation to Miriam! How could they be so callous? How could they ignore all that she had done for them? How could they lack the elementary decency to mourn her passing and to express condolences to her brothers? So Moses and Aaron were personally hurt and angered. The people had not only betrayed God, but had betrayed Moses and Aaron.

When Moses and Aaron assembled the people to bring forth water from the rock, they were not in a calm state of mind. They were bitter, disappointed and angry. God told Moses to speak to the rock, as though to say: *"Moses, I know you are frustrated and angry, but don't let your personal feelings get in the way of your service to the people. Speak to them. Explain your concerns. Teach them to respect Miriam's memory."* But Moses was too distraught to heed this divine guidance. He lashed out at the people, calling them rebels. He smote the rock rather than speaking to it. Moses let his anger get the best of him.

Aaron, as Moses' accomplice in this episode, apparently shared Moses' feelings and concurred with his words and actions. So this was the great "sin" of Moses and Aaron: letting their personal grief and frustration overtake their reason and sense of responsibility to the people. They could have sanctified God's name by speaking with the people, by

reminding them of God's miraculous provision of water through the merit of Miriam. Instead, their anger dominated them, and they lost the opportunity to teach an important lesson to the Israelites. God never promised Moses and Aaron that they would lead the people into the Promised Land. Their deaths in the wilderness, like Miriam's, need not be interpreted as a punishment for a particular sin. Indeed, the Pirkei Avot (5:8) lists Moses' burial site as among ten things that God had created on the eve of the first Sabbath.

This indicates that the Almighty had known and planned well in advance that Moses would die in the wilderness, before entering the Promised Land. This had nothing to do with sin and punishment. However, this episode demonstrates that their terms of leadership had come to an end. Once they allowed their personal feelings to take control, it was time to pass leadership to others who could remain more dispassionate and above the fray.

Moses and Aaron were simply too disappointed with the people to continue as effective leaders and teachers. When God informed Moses and Aaron that they would not lead the people into the Promised Land, neither raised a word of protest or apology. They fully understood that their terms of office were drawing to a close, and they were ready to pass on the mantle of leadership to others. At that moment, they may well have felt a sense of relief and gratitude.

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Note: I am reprinting this column by Rabbi Angel from 2015 in memory of his sister, Bernice Angel Schotten, who passed away slightly more than a month ago.

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during and since 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](http://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 during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3248>

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### Parshas Chukas – Do you see what I see?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2014

The Torah describes an incident in which dangerous snakes attacked the Jews while they were in the desert. The people cried out for help and Moshe erected a pole with the image of a snake at its top. The Torah relates, *“It was, that whoever was bitten by the snakes, they would look to the image that Moshe erected, and they would be healed.”*

The Talmud asks, *“Could it be that the image of a snake caused people to be healed?”* The Talmud explains that when people looked up at the image of the snake that Moshe created, they were reminded to look even higher. They saw the image as a catalyst for heartfelt prayer. They realized that the snakes came from G-d, and only He could save them.

It is fascinating that years later people looked at the image which Moshe built, and did not see deeper than its surface. Jewish Scripture records that in the time of King Chizkiya there were people who worshiped the image as an idol, instead of being reminded through it to focus exclusively on G-d. Chizkiya took the bold step of destroying the image that was made by Moshe, because he saw that people were not seeing its deeper message.

Much of life is to be able to see beyond the surface. When we talk to people we not only hear what they say, but we also listen to their body language, and take in a variety of “context” clues. One who does not see beyond the surface sees the “image” but doesn’t appreciate its message.

Jewish tradition compares life to the “garden maze” in which one walks between the bushes trying to get from start to finish. One who is in the maze has trouble interpreting the signs which he encounters. *“Is this turn an opportunity, or*

*merely a dead end.*" Only one who has risen above the challenges can turn around and advise people as to which turn to take. Everyone sees the same "image" but only one with the gift of vision can appreciate its deeper ramifications.

Recently I had a conversation with a young man who was embarking on a three year program for a prestigious sounding degree. I asked him in all innocence what he would be able to do with the degree once he obtained it. Did his chosen field have significant job opportunities? He told me he wasn't sure. I recommended that he speak to a guidance counselor before the semester began.

He phoned me two days later to tell me that he met with the guidance counselor. It was now clear to him that there were few job opportunities in the field. "Actually," the guidance counselor told him, "*Those who excel in this field, end up going on to teach others.*"

He posed the question to me. "*What do you think I should do?*"

I said, "*You should thank G-d for helping you realize the deeper significance of your field choice before you spend three prime years of your life on it, and then regret it.*"

Our sages felt very strongly about the importance of having a mentor in our lives. Parents, guidance counselors, Rabbis, and people with life experience whom we can respect play an important role in the decision making process. If a trusted mentor tells you something, listen well. Sometimes such people can see things that we simply cannot see.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are [www.care-mediation.com](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives: <https://www.teach613.org/parshas-chukas-do-you-see-what-i-see/>

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## Chukas -- Divine Direction

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 5782

In our parsha, we learn of the incident known as "Mei Merivah" – "Waters of Strife." The rock which had miraculously provided water for the nation during their travels through the desert was called the Well of Miriam, and it was understood that this miracle occurred in Miriam's merit. When Miriam passed away, the rock left the camp and the nation found itself without a water source. They came to Moshe in turmoil and challenged him to provide water, asking what value there was in having left Egypt forty years ago just to die of thirst in the desert.

Despite Moshe's great humility and patience, he was in some small way angered by their rebellious outburst. Our rabbis teach us that anger can even cause the wisest and greatest of people to make mistakes, and they tell us that Moshe was no exception. G-d told Moshe where to find the rock, and that it would continue to provide water. However, G-d gave Moshe different instructions for how to get water from the rock than He had given him forty years earlier. The first time, G-d had told Moshe to hit the rock. This time G-d instructed Moshe to speak to the rock. Due to his anger and the pressure put on him by the nation, Moshe erred and hit the rock. For this error, Moshe was punished that he would not be able to enter the Land of Israel.

Rash"i discusses this incident in two places and appears to give two different explanations for what Moshe's error was. In our parsha, Rash"i explains that Moshe accidentally spoke to the wrong rock. When the rock he was speaking to did not provide water, he thought that perhaps after he spoke to the rock, he also needed to hit the rock as he had done originally. When he went to hit the rock, the rocks shifted and he struck the correct rock. )Bamidbar 20:11( In Parshas Matos, Rash"i discusses this incident again but does not mention that there were two rocks. Instead he says that Moshe's mistake was that he chose to hit the rock.

The Ta"z, in his commentary *Divrei Dovid*, learns that these mistakes were in fact both true. Moshe initially erred by choosing the wrong rock, and this is why speaking to the rock didn't work. He then made a second error in choosing to hit the rock as he had done forty years ago. He goes on to explain that this second error was the greater of the two and the main reason why Moshe was punished. Moshe had such a high level of faith and trust in G-d that he should have realized that G-d would provide all necessary guidance. When speaking to the rock didn't work, he should have realized that he must not have followed G-d's guidance properly. After all, if he had followed G-d's guidance properly, the rock should have given water. Moshe would have then realized on his own that he must have chosen the wrong rock. At the very least, he concludes, Moshe should have waited for G-d to give him further instructions.

The Ta"z implies that G-d provides guidance, one way or another, whenever we need it. Moshe should have felt so secure in this fact that he should have simply stopped and waited for a prophecy from G-d, when the water didn't come forth. This begs the question, though: how does G-d provide us with the guidance we need today? We are not privy to direct prophecy, and so often feel lost when facing difficult decisions.

When we analyze the Ta"z carefully, I think we find the answer to this question. Waiting for prophecy was the secondary option. He first says that really Moshe should have figured out that he had chosen the wrong rock. Moshe was responsible to analyze the situation and to figure out for himself what Hashem wanted him to do differently. G-d provides us with the wisdom and tools to find the answer, but it is our job to understand how it applies. We must analyze what we do know and determine how to apply it to the choices in front of us.

The Gr"a In Mishlei )16:4( goes even further and notes that we even have the equivalence of prophecy today. He says that a gut feeling is a form of prophecy. When we have done all we can to determine what we need to do in life, if we still don't know, G-d will enable our own soul to direct us. We are truly never alone.

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\* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

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## Chukat

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter \*

]Rabbi Hefter did not send in a Dvar Torah for Chukat. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah[

\* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see [www.har-el.org](http://www.har-el.org). To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

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## Hukkat -- Torah: Does it Make Sense?

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

Do you have to understand the laws of the Torah to be able to observe them? This is not a new question. It was probably born at the same moment the laws of the Torah were introduced to the Israelites for the first time. It gained prominence in Talmudic times as scholars were crafting a Jewish theology to serve the needs of a population stricken by exiles, economic strife, and religious persecutions. The rabbis felt the urgency of discussing issues such as reward and punishment, the purpose in life, and of course, the meaning and purpose of the Torah's commandments. That last theme raised concerns among some rabbis that once the purpose of the Mitzvah will be determined, people will argue that they can achieve the goal by other means. In later generations, a synthetic approach emerged, which claimed that one must seek an understanding of the purpose of the Mitzvot, but even when this is achieved, the compliance must stem not from logical conviction but from total obedience to the Divine word.

All approaches agree that there is a reason for each Mitzvah, but they disagree as to what is the reason. According to some, the benefit of obeying a commandment or avoiding transgression is intrinsic and unique to each concept, while others believe that many laws are arbitrary, and that they benefit us by teaching us to be obedient and so be closer to God.

One of the Mitzvot which exemplifies the concept of blind obedience is the ritual of the red heifer. It is highlighted in several Midrashic sources as a Mitzvah which makes no sense. Particularly perplexing in this ritual is the fact that while the potion of the red heifer changes the status of the impure to pure, it does the opposite for all those who handle the potion. Four people, the one who slaughters the heifer, the one who burns it, the one who collect the ashes, and the one who sprinkles the potion on the impure person, all turn from pure to impure and need to undergo a process of purification.

In his commentary on the Torah (Num. 19:2), Rashi writes:

*The devil and the nations tease Israel, saying, what is this Mitzvah and what is the logic behind it? The Torah therefore said: This is the law! Meaning that God has made a law and a decree, and we have no right to second-guess Him.*

Based on this commentary and on several Midrashic sources, most people believe that the word Hukka – הַקָּה means an arbitrary law. Others believe that it denotes a Mitzva which has a mystical reason, which we are not capable of grasping. There are several problems with this approach, and particularly in the way it is applied to the ritual of the red heifer:

1. As parents, educators, commanders, and executives know very well, there are much better chances of cooperation and compliance when the reason for the orders, commandments, and the need for acquiring knowledge is well explained.
2. Rashi's answer to the teasing by the devil and the nations does not address their mockery, but rather emboldens the Jews in their determination to keep the law even though they do not understand it.
3. The word Hukka appears in two other places in the Torah as an introduction for mitzvot which make perfect sense, such as the Pesah sacrifice (Ex. 12:43), and the cleansing of vessels (Num. 31:21).
4. Most importantly, there is an explanation for the red heifer ritual. R. Yosef Ber Soloveitchik points out in his Beth HaLevi commentary (Ex. 31) that the Midrash provides a detailed analogy of the red heifer and the golden calf, and I have presented here a theory that the ritual was a therapy to help the mourner deal with grief.

The answer to all these questions is that we are dealing with a Midrash which was taken out of context and drafted to the war against rationalism. The original Midrash referred to a different verse in the same parasha (Num. 19:14): when a person dies in a tent. The argument of the Midrash, later applied by Rashi to the ritual itself, was originally directed at the

concept of death. Humans challenged God with the question: “*why have you created death, or a world where death is a possibility?*” and God answered: “*this is my decree, do not second guess me!*”

The Midrash was preserved in one source )Yalkut Shimoni on Deut. 32:49( as God’s response to Moshe when he argues that he should merit a longer life, or not die at all:

*God told him: Moshe! It is my decree for all humans! It is written: when a man dies in a tent!*

Conclusion: the ritual of the red heifer is frequently used to fend off the demand for a better understanding of the logic and meaning behind each commandment and concept of Jewish law. However, as we have seen here, there is little basis for it in the Torah, and the Midrashic literature was based on a misunderstood source. It is imperative that we strive to understand and internalize the intrinsic value and benefit of the rich trove of Jewish law and lore, or we run the risk of either becoming observant robots, or slowly losing our connection to Judaism and its spirituality.

Shabbat Shalom

\* Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia’s Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.**

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## **Chukat: We All Learn from Our Mistakes**

By Rabbi Moshe Rube \*

I’m not sure why we have such a fear of making a mistake.

There’s not a pianist in the world who hasn’t started his career by playing the wrong notes for “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” There’s not a businessman alive who hasn’t done a deal that cost him more money than it should have. What bar mitzvah boy has actually done his haftarah perfectly the first time he tried it?

You live and learn. And there’s no way you learn without not doing it perfectly at first. Otherwise, there would be no learning, and living wouldn’t be much fun either

Even Moses made a mistake. Our fearless leader, who stuck by Israel through thick and thin. The man who always kept calm during times of national discord and disaster finally snapped. Moses yelled at B’Nai Israel when they complained that the well Miriam’s well dried up. He hit the rock instead of speaking to it, as God told him to do. Forty years of complaints and wandering will grate on anyone’s nerves.

No man is immune to making an error. No matter if you’re 20 or 120, a happy shulgoer, seasoned Rabbi, or timeless Jewish leader.

I’m sure a cognitive behavioural scientist will be able to explain why we need learning situations when we make mistakes. That fear is a part of being human. But another part of being human is learning -- to be able to adapt and learn about new environments and new skills by making the necessary errors.

Perhaps a better thing to fear would be the fear of making an error rather than the error itself.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(.

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## **Rav Kook Torah** **Chukat: Religious Rage**

Moses made a terrible mistake. Near the end of their forty-year journey in the desert, the Israelites had arrived at Kadesh. There was no water to drink, and the people complained bitterly. God commanded Moses to take his staff before the entire people and speak to the cliff-rock, to provide water for the nation. Moses took the staff and assembled the people.

But he shouted,

*“Listen now, you rebels! Shall we produce water for you from this cliff?”* )Num. 20:10(

Moses then struck the cliff twice with the staff, and a huge flow of water gushed out.

The commentators scratched their heads trying to understand what exactly was Moses' mistake — an error so serious that God did not allow him to enter into the Land of Israel. Was it a case of uncontrolled anger, as Maimonides explained? Was he punished for disobeying God by hitting the rock )Rashi(? Was it because he initially fled from the people )Ibn Ezra(? Or was it for saying *“Shall we produce,”* instead of *“Shall God produce”*)Rabbeinu Chananel(?

Let us consider Maimonides' explanation. Clearly, Moses was judged strictly, according to his lofty spiritual state. But was this fit of anger truly so terrible that it constituted a chilul Hashem, a public desecration of God's Name?

Did Moses deserve to die outside of the Land of Israel merely for losing his temper?

### **Religious Rage**

According to Rav Kook, all religious rage, all intolerance for moral failings, is rooted in this display of anger. Instead of words of reconciliation, Moses shouted, *“Listen now, you rebels.”* Instead of speaking to the heart, he hit the rock. While righteous indignation stems from sincere and pure intentions, the highest goals of holiness will only be achieved through calm spirits and mutual respect.

In our generation, the instruction of Torah and its details involves a pedantic form of debate. Father and son, teacher and student, battle over Torah study. In the end, their mutual respect returns; but the residual feelings of enmity are never completely erased.

The restoration of darkei noam, the peaceful ways of Torah, will come through the prophet Elijah, who will reconcile the different paths of the generations, *“turning the hearts of fathers back to the children, and the hearts of the children back to their fathers”* )Malachi 3:24(.

This will be accomplished through the revelation of the esoteric side of Torah, a wonderful Torah of kindness. The same profundity and dedication which in the past was acquired through the intellectual zeal of ritcha d'oraita will be attained in the future through the spiritual fortitude of gentleness and equanimity. Then the light of the *“sukkah of peace”* will envelop the Jewish people, as well as the nations of the world who gather from afar to the holy city of Jerusalem, the city of peace.

### **A Letter of Loving Rebuke**

As chief rabbi of Jaffa, Rav Kook was responsible for religious affairs in the surrounding communities. It is instructive to see how he took to task individuals and groups for infractions of Jewish law. The quote below, from a letter written in 1912, illustrates his method of respectful and loving reproach. The letter was written in response to public Sabbath desecration in the community of Ness Ziona.

*"My dear brothers,*

*I find in the depths of my heart a powerful, sacred duty to call out to you with affection, from my sincere love for you as pioneers in the rebirth of our nation in the land of our yearnings. I am confident in your integrity and your trust in me -- which I have witnessed from when I first began serving you in a rabbinical capacity — that my words, the words of a faithful and respectful friend, will be well-received.*

*For some time I have heard that the level of sanctity of the Sabbath has greatly deteriorated in your beloved community. This decline, according to the rumors, is troubling and alarming to all who live Jewish life in the depths of their soul, to all who feel and recognize what the Sabbath means to us, to all who are aware of its holiness in our religious tradition, as well as its national, historical value.*

*My dear brothers! I am unable to express in writing even a small measure of my soul's anguish whenever such reports reach my ears. Especially as it concerns your precious and holy settlement and its pioneers, who bring redemption to the Jewish people. May my words find favor in your eyes, so that you will search and discover a way to remove this terrible embarrassment from your beloved community, this profound shame for the entire Jewish people, who proudly look upon our new settlement as a resting place for their very essence, for all that we have held sacred and revered throughout the generations." )Igrot HaRe'iyah, vol. II, 88(*

)Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. IV, p. 500.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/CHUKAT58.htm>

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### **Chukat: Kohelet, Tolstoy, and the Red Heifer (5780)**

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

The command of the parah adumah, the Red Heifer, with which our parsha begins, is known as the hardest of the mitzvot to understand. The opening words, zot chukat ha-Torah, are taken to mean, this is the supreme example of a chok in the Torah, that is, a law whose logic is obscure, perhaps unfathomable.

It was a ritual for the purification of those who had been in contact with, or in, certain forms of proximity to a dead body. A dead body is the primary source of impurity, and the defilement it caused to the living meant that the person so affected could not enter the precincts of the Tabernacle or Temple until cleansed, in a process that lasted seven days.

A key element of the purification process involved a Priest sprinkling the person so affected, on the third and seventh day, with a specially prepared liquid known as "the water of cleansing." First a Red Heifer had to be found, without a blemish, and which had never been used to perform work: a yoke had never been placed on it. This was ritually killed and burned outside the camp. Cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool were added to the fire, and the ashes placed in a vessel containing "living" i.e. fresh water. It was this that was sprinkled on those who had become impure by contact with death. One of the more paradoxical features of the rite is that though it cleansed the impure, it rendered impure those who were involved with the preparation of the water of cleansing.

Though the ritual has not been practised since the days of the Temple, it nonetheless remains significant, in itself and for an understanding of what a chok, usually translated as “statute,” actually is. Other instances include the prohibition against eating meat and milk together, wearing clothes of mixed wool and linen )shatnez( and sowing a field with two kinds of grain )kilayim(. There have been several very different explanations of chukim.

The most famous is that a chok is a law whose logic we cannot understand. It makes sense to God, but it makes no sense to us. We cannot aspire to the kind of cosmic wisdom that would allow us to see its point and purpose. Or perhaps, as Rav Saadia Gaon put it, it is a command issued for no other reason than to reward us for obeying it.]1[

The Sages recognised that whereas Gentiles might understand Jewish laws based on social justice )mishpatim( or historical memory )edot(, commands such as the prohibition of eating meat and milk together seemed irrational and superstitious. The chukim were laws of which “*Satan and the nations of the world made fun.*”]2[

Maimonides had a quite different view. He believed that no Divine command was irrational. To suppose otherwise was to think God inferior to human beings. The chukim only appear to be inexplicable because we have forgotten the original context in which they were ordained. Each of them was a rejection of, and education against, some idolatrous practice. For the most part, however, such practises have died out, which is why we now find the commands hard to understand.]3[

A third view, adopted by Nahmanides in the thirteenth century]4[ and further articulated by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in the nineteenth, is that the chukim were laws designed to teach the integrity of nature. Nature has its own laws, domains and boundaries, to cross which is to dishonour the divinely created order, and to threaten nature itself. So we do not combine animal )wool( and vegetable )linen( textiles, or mix animal life )milk( and animal death )meat(. As for the Red Heifer, Rabbi Hirsch says that the ritual is to cleanse humans from depression brought about by reminders of human mortality.

My own view is that chukim are commands deliberately intended to bypass the rational brain, the pre-frontal cortex. The root from which the word chok comes is h-k-k, meaning, “*to engrave.*” Writing is on the surface; engraving cuts much deeper than the surface. Rituals go deep below the surface of the mind, and for an important reason. We are not fully rational animals, and we can make momentous mistakes if we think we are. We have a limbic system, an emotional brain. We also have an extremely powerful set of reactions to potential danger, located in the amygdala, that lead us to flee, freeze or fight. A moral system, to be adequate to the human condition, must recognise the nature of the human condition. It must speak to our fears.

The most profound fear most of us have is of death. As La Rochefoucauld said, “*Neither the sun nor death can be looked on with a steady eye.*” Few have explored death and the tragic shadow it casts over life more profoundly than the author of Kohelet )Ecclesiastes(:

*“The fate of man is the fate of cattle; the same fate awaits them both, the death of one is like the death of the other, their spirits are the same, and the pre-eminence of man over beast is nothing, for it is all shallow breath. All end in the same place; all emerge from dust and all go back to dust”*  
)Eccl. 3:19-20.

The knowledge that he will die robs Kohelet of any sense of the meaningfulness of life. We have no idea what will happen, after our death, to what we have achieved in life. Death makes mockery of virtue: the hero may die young while the coward lives to old age. And bereavement is tragic in a different way. To lose those we love is to have the fabric of our life torn, perhaps irreparably. Death defiles in the simplest, starker sense: mortality opens an abyss between us and God’s eternity.

It is this fear, existential and elemental, to which the rite of the Heifer is addressed. The animal itself is the starker symbol of pure, animal life, untamed, undomesticated. The red, like the scarlet of the wool, is the colour of blood, the essence of life. The cedar, tallest of trees, represents vegetative life. The hyssop symbolises purity. All these were reduced to ash in

the fire, a powerful drama of mortality. The ash itself was then dissolved in water, symbolising continuity, the flow of life, and the potential of rebirth. The body dies but the spirit flows on. A generation dies but another is born. Lives may end but life does not. Those who live after us continue what we began, and we live on in them. Life is a never-ending stream, and a trace of us is carried onward to the future.

The person in modern times who most deeply experienced and expressed what Kohelet felt was Tolstoy, who told the story in his essay, "A Confession."<sup>5</sup> By the time he wrote it, in his early fifties, he had already published two of the greatest novels ever written, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. His literary legacy was secure. His greatness was universally recognised. He was married, with children. He had a large estate. His health was good. Yet he was overcome with a sense of the meaninglessness of life in the face of the knowledge that we will all die. He quoted Kohelet at length. He contemplated suicide. The question that haunted him was: "*Is there any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me?*"<sup>6</sup>

He searched for an answer in science, but all it told him was that "*in the infinity of space and the infinity of time infinitely small particles mutate with infinite complexity.*" Science deals in causes and effects, not purpose and meaning. In the end, he concluded that only religious faith rescues life from meaninglessness. "*Rational knowledge, as presented by the learned and wise, negates the meaning of life.*"<sup>7</sup> What is needed is something other than rational knowledge. "*Faith is the force of life. If a man lives, then he must believe in something ... If he does understand the illusion of the finite, he is bound to believe in the infinite. Without faith it is impossible to live.*"<sup>8</sup>

That is why, to defeat the defilement of contact with death, there must be a ritual that bypasses rational knowledge. Hence the rite of the Red Heifer, in which death is dissolved in the waters of life, and those on whom it is sprinkled are made pure again so that they can enter the precincts of the Shechinah and re-establish contact with eternity.

We no longer have the Red Heifer and its seven-day purification ritual, but we do have the shiva, the seven days of mourning during which we are comforted by others and thus reconnected with life. Our grief is gradually dissolved by the contact with friends and family, as the ashes of the Heifer were dissolved in the "*living water.*" We emerge, still bereaved, but in some measure cleansed, purified, able again to face life.

**I believe that we can emerge from the shadow of death if we allow ourselves to be healed by the God of life. To do so, though, we need the help of others.** "*A prisoner cannot release himself from prison,*"<sup>9</sup> says the Talmud. It took a Kohen to sprinkle the waters of cleansing. It takes comforters to lift our grief. **But faith – faith from the world of chok, deeper than the rational mind – can help cure our deepest fears.**

#### FOOTNOTES:

]1[ Saadia Gaon, *Beliefs and Opinions*, Book III.

]2[ Yoma 67b.

]3[ *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:31.

]4[ Commentary to Leviticus 19:19.

]5[ Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and Other Religious Writings*, Penguin Classics, 1987.

]6[ Ibid., 35.

]7[ Ibid., 50.

]8[ Ibid., 54.

]9[ *Brachot 5b*

#### **Around the Shabbat Table:**

]1[ Why do you think proximity to death causes impurity?

]2[ What is the benefit of having a mitzvah designed to “bypass the rational brain”?

]3[ How is the purpose of shiva similar to the idea of the Red Heifer?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/chukat/kohelet-tolstoy-and-the-red-heifer/> Because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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### **Chukat: Leadership and Legacy -- Life Lessons From the Parshah**

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l \* © Chabad 2024

#### **A Sudden Leap in Time**

One of the most phenomenal transitions in the Torah occurs in Parshat Chukat. The events of the previous portions — including the debacle of the Spies and Korach’s rebellion — all took place during the first two years of the nation’s desert sojourn. In Chukat, we read of the passing of Moses’ sister Miriam — a sudden transition from the second year in the desert to the 40th!

The parshah begins with chapter 19, detailing the laws of the Red Heifer, laws that the Jewish people received in their second year in the desert. Then, the opening verse of chapter 20 states, *“The entire congregation of the Children of Israel arrived at the desert of Zin in the first month, and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there.”*<sup>1</sup> A full 38 years elapse between chapters 19 and 20.

Rashi points out that the word “*entire*” seems superfluous. The verse could have simply stated that the congregation arrived at the desert of Zin. Why the extra word? Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains that this alludes to the fact that the congregation was now complete and perfected; at this point, anyone who needed to perish in the desert had already died. All that was left was for the leaders of the generation to pass, and for the people, under new leadership, to cross the Jordan River and take possession of the Land.

#### **Moses’ Misstep**

The laws of nature dictate that it is impossible for a large group of people to survive for 40 years in a desert, which is why many secular historians question the biblical narrative. Indeed, the Jewish People’s survival in the desert was sustained largely by three prominent miracles: the Manna, the Clouds of Glory, and the Well, which they received in the merit of the three great leaders of that generation — Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.<sup>2</sup>

The Manna — the bread that came down from Heaven each day — was in the merit of Moses.

The Clouds of Glory — which provided a protective shield against their enemies and a pleasant environment that was cool during the day and both warm and illuminated at night — were in the merit of Aaron the High Priest.

The Well — which provided the people with water for all their needs — was in the merit of Miriam the Prophetess.

When Miriam died, the well disappeared. Now stranded in the middle of the desert without water, the people began to

panic.

G d instructed Moses to gather the people and, “*... speak to the rock in their presence, so that it will give forth its water. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give the congregation and their livestock to drink.*”<sup>3</sup>

Moses indeed brings forth water from the rock; however, instead of speaking to the rock, he strikes it with his staff, and for the grave misstep of not following G d’s instructions precisely, he is told that he will not merit to enter the Land of Israel. Rather, he will die in the desert.

It is true that some 39 years earlier, the first time the Jewish people needed water, G d had indeed instructed Moses to strike a rock. But the instructions were different this time, and Moses failed to comply.

### **True Leadership**

Why, in fact, did Moses hit the rock instead of speaking to it?

After Moses struck the rock, G d told him that had he spoken to it instead, it would have greatly sanctified His name. Rashi elaborates,

*“For had you spoken to the rock and it had given forth water, I would have been sanctified in the eyes of the congregation. They would have said, ‘If this rock, which neither speaks nor hears and does not require sustenance, fulfills the word of the Omnipresent, how much more should we!’”*

The Rebbe explains that Moses, the quintessential leader, put the people first, and turned this idea around: “*If I speak to the rock and it obeys,*” reasoned Moses, “*the people, who are not the best listeners, will look bad. I would rather be punished than be the reason my people are shamed. Let me rather demonstrate that the rock did not listen!*” This exemplifies Moses’ self-sacrifice for the people, where his own suffering mattered little if it minimized theirs.

Furthermore, according to the teachings of Kabbalah, it was Joshua’s destiny to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land. Each generation has its leader, its shepherd. Had the Jewish people not sinned, Moses’ generation could have entered the Land with him. However, because of the sin of the Spies, Moses’ generation did not merit to enter the Land. Consequently, the Jewish People’s settling of the Land did not have the permanence that it could have had.

And we see that the settling of the Land and the Holy Temples that were built, did not, in fact, have a sense of permanence. Eventually, there was destruction and exile. Had Moses been the one to conquer and settle the Land, it would have been permanent. No destruction or exile would have followed. However, they didn’t merit this permanence because of their sin, so Moses had to remain in the desert with them. This was his generation. Joshua had to take over.

G d, however, had to connect it to something Moses did, so he “*used*” this seemingly trivial transgression. Additionally, Moses’ severe punishment could also serve to inspire the people to be vigilant in following Divine instructions.

### **Evolving Discipline**

The episode with Moses striking the rock offers a profound and fundamental lesson in parenting.

At the beginning of the 40 years, Moses was commanded to hit the rock to bring forth water; at the end of the 40 years, his instructions were to speak to it.

When our children are young, we should discipline them. As King Solomon said, “*He who holds back his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him early.*”<sup>4</sup> Spare the rod, spoil the child. This doesn’t necessarily mean physical punishment, but it certainly involves discipline — by today’s standards, it might mean that we take away their iPads, laptops, and other electronic devices for a couple of hours, or perhaps put them in “*timeout*.” Whatever method we

choose, when children are young, we must discipline them.

But with older children, that style of discipline is no longer an option. You have to speak to them. Those who treat grown children the same way they treated them when they were young, risk alienating them, or worse.

### **You Didn't Have to Listen**

At the same time, we should not always give in to our children's wishes, even when they are older and think they know best.

Shortly before the passing of my father and lifelong teacher, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, I had the privilege of receiving my final lesson in parenting from him, which is very much in line with the lesson from our parshah.

Some background: After leaving his father's house, Jacob journeyed to Charan where he married his cousins, Leah and Rachel. After Leah bore him four sons, Rachel suggested that Jacob marry her handmaid, Bilhah, so that Rachel could have children through her. Upon seeing this, Leah then suggested that Jacob also marry her handmaid, Zilpah. Thus, Zilpah bore him a son. Leah said, *"ba gad – good fortune has come! Mazal has come!"* and she therefore named him Gad.<sup>5</sup>

Rashi explains<sup>6</sup> that the name Gad also stems from the Hebrew word for betrayal – bagad. *"You betrayed me,"* said Leah, *"when you agreed to marry my handmaid, for since I had already borne you children, you did not have to agree to my offer."* Although Leah herself had given her handmaid to Jacob, she felt that he should have refused.

Sitting with my father, he shared something crucial with me: Rashi teaches that bagad implies deception or betrayal, for Leah felt that Jacob had betrayed her by fathering a child with Zilpah. When a surprised Jacob told Leah, *"What do you want from me? It was your idea!"* Leah countered, *"That's true, but you didn't have to listen to me!"*

*"You must remember this as you raise your children,"* continued my father, imparting a valuable tool for healthy parenting. There will be times when you may feel like being lenient with your children, granting them what they desire even if it contradicts what you know is best for them. *"I should accept my child's wishes,"* you might think. *"I don't want to push them too hard; they made it clear this is what they want to do. I want to be supportive."*

In such situations, before allowing your child to make a decision that could harm their spiritual well-being, find a way to inspire them to do the right thing. Why not simply *"be a good parent"* and let your children decide for themselves? Because when they grow older, they may ask, *"Why did you allow me to go in this direction? Why didn't you steer me right?"* And your defense, *"You told me that's what you wanted; you asked me not to interfere!"* might not suffice, as the child will rightfully argue, *"You didn't have to listen."*

Ultimately, our children need our guidance, our direction, our encouragement to do what is beneficial for them. Allowing them to make poor choices in the name of parental love might feel good in the moment, but they will call us out on it later with, *"You didn't have to listen."*

### **Mourned by All**

The time had come, God informed Moses and Aaron: *"Aaron shall be gathered to his people."*<sup>7</sup> Moses was instructed to take his dear brother to the top of Mount Hor, where Aaron would pass away and be buried. Although it must have been difficult for Moses to accompany his brother up the mountain for his final journey, he did so without hesitation.

Upon Aaron's passing, the *"entire house of Israel"* mourned for him. For 30 days — the shloshim period — the entire nation, both men and women, mourned Aaron. This was unlike Moses' passing when only the men mourned. Why? Because of Aaron's role as a peacemaker. Aaron's passion was bringing peace between people, particularly between husband and wife. Aaron loved people and would do whatever it took to keep the peace.<sup>8</sup>

The Mishnah in *Ethics of the Fathers* teaches, “Be of the disciples of Aaron: a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah.”<sup>9</sup> The Rebbe often underscored the words “one who loves the creatures,” explaining that Aaron loved all people, even those whose only redeeming quality, the only good thing you could say about them, is that they are a “creature,” i.e., that they were created by G d. And that’s a lesson for all of us — be a disciple of Aaron and focus on the good characteristics in others!<sup>10</sup>

### **Red Heifer Juxtaposition**

We find that the narrative of the death of Miriam is juxtaposed with the laws of the Red Heifer. Rashi, quoting the Talmud<sup>11</sup>, explains that this conveys an important lesson: just as sacrifices bring atonement — and the waters of the Red Heifer serve as a form of sacrifice — so does the death of a tzaddik (righteous person) bring tremendous atonement to the world.

In the teachings of Chassidism, we find that one of the reasons for this is because all the good deeds performed by the tzaddik during their lifetime ascend on high, and a powerful stream of blessings descends back down to us, especially showering with blessing those who are keeping the tzaddik alive by following in their ways and continuing their legacy.

This parshah is often read in close proximity to the 3rd of Tammuz, the yahrtzeit of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory, which certainly brings tremendous atonement and blessings to our world. May the Rebbe’s greatest vision be fulfilled — may we merit the coming of our righteous Moshiach, and the permanent settling of the Promised Land — may it be speedily in our days. Amen.

### **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Numbers 20:1.
2. Talmud, *Taanit* 9:1.
3. Numbers 20:8.
4. Proverbs 13:24.
5. Genesis 30:11.
6. Rashi to Genesis 30:11.
7. Numbers 20:24.
8. *Avot D’Rabbi Natan* 12.
9. *Avot* 1:12.
10. *Biurim Lpirkei Avot* 1:12.
11. *Moed Katan* 28a.

\* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. “Life Lessons from the Parshah” is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

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## **Korach: A Dash of Salt**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

### **A Dash of Salt**

After Korach's rebellion was crushed, the people finally accepted the Divinely ordained distinction between the tribe of Levi and the lay people. G-d confirmed this distinction by listing the entitlements that the people were to give the priests and Levites.

*I have given all the separated portions of the sanctified animals that the Israelites set aside for G-d to you [Aaron] and your sons and daughters with you, as an eternal portion. It is an eternal covenant of salt before G-d for you and your descendants with you. )Num. 18:19(*

The Torah's outer dimension is the knowledge of how G-d wants us to live our lives in the context of our physical world. This knowledge is contained in the Talmud and its associated legal texts.

The Torah's inner dimension is the knowledge of the inner life of the soul and its spiritual relationship to G-d; this knowledge is contained in the texts of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) and in the vast corpus of Chasidic teachings.

Allegorically, the Torah's outer dimension is compared to bread and meat, the staples of a healthy diet, since we must study this dimension of the Torah in order to lead a healthy spiritual life.

In contrast, the inner dimension of the Torah is compared to salt, which enhances the taste of the food it touches. Including the study of the inner dimension of the Torah in our spiritual "diet" reveals the intrinsic sweetness of the Torah's outer dimension.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

**May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.**

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Volume 30, Issue 39

Shabbat Parashat Chukat

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## Covenant and Conversation Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

### Healing the Trauma of Loss

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.<sup>[1]</sup> 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, halachah 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 Shechinah 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 Hashanah 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.

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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 Tanach 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,<sup>[6]</sup> and the good we do never dies.<sup>[7]</sup>

[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.

### Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

#### Why was Moshe punished and not allowed to enter the Land?

**Bat Chen Bar-Geva** (and Rabbi Eliyahu)

After spending a few Shabbatot in the synagogue with the lovely members of our new community, we noticed an elderly man whom nobody knew quietly walk in. He put on a kippah and went to sit alone in one of the corners of the women’s gallery. It was clear to us that he knew quite well where the men’s section was and was expecting an angry or negative reaction on our part at his choice. However, my husband, the rabbi of the congregation, approached him, shook his hand, asked him about himself and didn’t mention his choice of seating at all.

Ever since that Shabbat, this Jew has been coming to the Shabbat service. He goes up to the women’s gallery where he sits, listens to the service and joins in the prayer. Sometimes he even asks to make kiddush for everyone and shares some of his worldviews and perspectives.

Then, eight months after making his first appearance, he entered the women’s gallery as he did every Shabbat, said to himself, “I don’t hear so well up here”, and made his way down to the men’s section. My husband, Rabbi Eliyahu, and I were dumbfounded. Something in this stubborn and righteous Jew had given way. A layer had been peeled away. We knew for certain that had we commented on his sitting in the women’s gallery the first time we saw him, he would never have showed his face in the synagogue again.

Much has been written about Mei Meriva – the Waters of Strife – and the reason for Moshe’s receiving such a severe punishment on account of hitting the rock instead of talking to it. Was it really such a grave crime?

I have found a great variety of commentaries attempting to explain this, although the truth of the matter is that we simply cannot understand God’s ways and His reasoning.

I find it difficult to write words of criticism about Moshe, who supposedly committed a negative action. Who are we to judge him?

And yet I would like to share a commentary that really touched me: Moshe leads the Israelites through the desert for many a decade. Through the scorching days and freezing nights, he listens to their every complaint. They are witness to both revealed and concealed miracles until they finally reach the edge of the great wilderness of Zin, where

### Likutei Divrei Torah

Miriam, Moshe’s sister, dies and there is no water for the People to drink.

The People start complaining: “Soon we shall all die of thirst! There is no water! What a shame we came here in the first place! Maybe we should have stayed in Egypt and died there? Why did you bring us into the wilderness? Just so we could die? So much for your promises of figs and grapes and pomegranates... But water?! Surely, we cannot exist without water!”

Frustrated, Moshe listens. He must have thought, “We have been walking this desert for so many years, and you have seen some incredible miracles – so how about a little faith on your part?” Still in mourning for his sister, Moshe has to contend with endless complaints by the People. They have made him so tired.

And he blurts out: “Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?”

“And Moshe lifted up his hand, and smote the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.” (Bamidbar 20, 10-11)

Put in more contemporary language, “Listen up you obstinate, spoiled people! Nothing is good enough for you! You are satisfied with nothing! God said the rock will bring forth water and so it will!”

And then on the spur of the moment, he hits the rock instead of talking to it.

And God says to Moshe that in wake of his action he will not be allowed to enter the Holy Land but would die in the desert.

The Psikta deRav Kahana on the words “Hear now, ye rebels” says as follows: “It is written ‘And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aharon, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel’ (Shemot 6:13). With what did he charge them? He told them do not call my sons rebels! And since they complained in the Waters of Meriva, Moshe responded with ‘Hear now, ye rebels’, to which God responded – I have warned you against calling my sons rebels, but since you have called my sons rebels – you shall not enter [the Land].”

The Ibn Ezra on Bamidbar 20:8 writes: “[He was punished] for the reason that he said to the Israelites ‘Hear now, ye rebels’, to them who are the sons of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov.”

This notion is also expressed by the Yalkut Shimoni: “At Mt Sinai the Children of Israel proclaimed ‘We shall do and we shall listen’. Much like a young child who goes to the synagogue, fulfills the mitzvot, gets dressed, brushes his teeth, showers etc. and complies with the will of his parents who have taught him his habits. All this is the “We shall do” part [of the Torah]. However, as the child gets older, it no longer suffices to focus on the “doing” part only, and one has to start

“listening” as well. In other words, we are now required to explain to the child how meaningful and sweet the mitzvot are. More importantly, one must believe in the child even more than he believes in himself. One must keep telling him that he is capable, and that we have full confidence in his abilities.

Our mentor in the Straus-Amiel institute, Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum, put it as follows: “That which was suitable for the generation of the Exodus, was no longer suitable for those entering the Land. In Egypt it was appropriate to “hit the rock”; however, once in Israel, it was wiser to adopt a “talking-to-the-rock” approach.”

The rock can serve as a parable for all of us. Ostensibly, after dozens of years of leadership, the great leader Moshe reaches a breaking point and finds himself disconnected from the People. Hence, God reacts and says: “Don’t give up on any Jew no matter what! Always see the good in each person! Even when one of them complains, he is still my son, for he is the son of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov! Therefore, nobody has the right to call any of them rebels or dissidents.”

We have only just set out on our journey, and the Jewish People can definitely be a stiff-necked People. I wish all of us – shlichim, parents, teachers and all those engaged in educating the next generation – to have faith in our children, in our students and in every Jew, and to find the good in each and every individual. In other words, let us give them all our vote of confidence. Don’t give up on any Jew!

#### Aish.Com by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

##### Actions and Intent

Bamidbar, 21:33-34: “They turned and ascended by way of Bashan: Og, King of Bashan, went out against them, he and his entire people, to do battle at Edrei. Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Do not fear him, for into your hand have I given him, his entire people, and his land...’

Rashi, 21:34, Dh: Al tirah oso: “Moshe was afraid that perhaps the merit of Avraham would stand for him, as it says, ‘and the fugitive came’ – this refers to Og who escaped among the Refaim whom Cardelomer struck...”

When the Jewish people approached the nation of Bashan, their mighty King, Og, met them in battle. God told Moshe not to be afraid, and that they would defeat Og. The fact that God told Moshe not to be afraid implies that he was scared approaching this battle, something we do not see in the lead up to other battles. Rashi, citing the Midrash Tanchuma, claims that Moshe was afraid that Og had a long-standing spiritual merit. Hundreds of years earlier, Og told Avraham that Lot had been kidnapped, which resulted in the rescue of Lot.

However, the Midrash elaborates that Og’s motivation in telling Avraham was not pure.

He knew that Avraham would try to rescue Lot, and he hoped that Avraham would get killed in the process, enabling Og to marry Avraham’s wife, Sarah. The Kli Yakar<sup>1</sup> understands that Moshe did not know Og’s true motives and so was afraid that his merit would protect him in the battle with the Jewish people. Yet, in truth, since his motives were nefarious, he would not be protected. However, it is important to note, that the Midrash Tanchuma does say that, despite his ulterior motives, Og was rewarded with a very long life – he was over 500 years old at the time of this battle.

Rabbi Aron Yehuda Leib Shteinman notes that we learn from here that any action that had positive consequences is rewarded even if the underlying motives were impure, and even nefarious.<sup>2</sup> Another, highly significant lesson can be derived from the implication that had Og had pure motives in saving Lot, then it is conceivable that the merit from his distant act of kindness may have even helped him in the battle with the Jewish nation. This teaches that the motivations behind good deeds are of seminal significance in determining the level of merit a person accrues for his good deed.

The question arises, when a person does a good deed without the proper intention, is it considered as if he actually did a Mitzva or is it viewed in a similar way to the action of Og that he accrues a merit but it does not have the spiritual power of a mitzvah? The authorities debate this question, based on their interpretation of a number of cases in Chazal.<sup>3</sup> The Sifra states that if a person drops money and a poor person finds it and uses it to support himself, God gives the person a blessing. Some authorities learn from here that even if a person does not have intent to give charity, but someone benefits from it, then it is considered as if he did a mitzvah. Based on this idea, they propose a novel idea.

Jewish law states that ‘mitzvot tzrichot kavannah’ – in order to fulfil a mitzvah, a person must have intent to do the commandment and without such intent, he does not fulfil it. However, based on the above cited Rabbinic source, among other sources, they argue that this does not apply to commandments in the realm of inter-personal relationships.

They explain that there are two types of mitzvot: There are some where the whole purpose of the mitzvah is to do a certain action but there is no tangible result to that action, such as shaking a lulav. In such mitzvot, if the person has no intention, then the action is meaningless as it does not achieve anything.

On the other hand, there are other mitzvot, particularly pertaining to inter-personal relationships, where the purpose is to achieve a certain result, such as giving charity to a poor person. With regard to such mitzvot, even if one did not have intent to do a mitzvah, he nevertheless achieved the ostensible purpose

#### Likutei Divrei Torah

of the commandment, which is to give a poor person money. Thus, they explain that even when a person dropped money and a poor person benefitted from it, they have still fulfilled the mitzvah of giving charity.

However, others argue and hold that doing any Mitzva without intent is not considered to be fulfilling a mitzvah to the fullest. They hold that Mitzvot of inter-personal relationships are no different from other Mitzvot. They explain the Sifra to mean that the person has a merit in the form of a blessing for the fact that someone found his money, but he did not fulfil a Mitzva.<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky answered a question in this vein that when a person does a Mitzva in the inter-personal realm without intent, he did not fulfil a Mitzva, but he has a merit.<sup>5</sup>

This brings us back to the discussion with regard to Og. He did a good deed when he told Avraham about Lot and he was rewarded with the merit of living a very long life. However, the fact that he did not have good intentions in his action meant that his merit was limited. So too, when a person does an action that benefits someone, the intention that he has, will play a huge role in determining the level of reward that he receives.

The practical lesson that emerges from these ideas is the importance of having intent when doing good deeds. This includes seemingly mundane actions such as feeding children and seeing to their needs. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe pointed out how many Mitzvot a person can fulfil through simply having intent through multiple acts of kindness that he does in the home. The same applies to numerous interactions such as paying a taxi driver<sup>6</sup>, or telling someone the time.

May we all merit to combine good actions with good intent.

1. Kli Yakar, Bamidbar, 12:34.

2. Ayelet HaShachar, Bamidbar, 12:34.

3. We will discuss one case above – see Lereyecha Kemocha, Volume 2, Simun 9 for more cases and the various opinions among the Authorities.

4. Ibid.

5. Ka’ashe Tzivah HaShem, p.48, Os 21.

6. Whereby one fulfils the Mitzva of paying a worker on time.

#### Torah.Org Dvar Torah

##### by Rabbi Label Lam

##### Educated Taste Buds

HASHEM spoke to Moshe and to Aaron saying, “This is the statute (Chukos) of the Torah, which HASHEM has commanded, saying: “Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to you a completely red cow which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come. (Bamidbar 19:1-2)

This is the statute of the Torah: Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, “What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?” Therefore, the Torah

uses the term "statute." I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it. — Rashi

There we have it. A Chok is by definition a law cannot be explained. It transcends human reason. It is futile to search for a reason. By declaring it so we are quieting the oppositional voices in advance. Yes, we do some things that do make sense to us but it's not so with Chukim.

However, it is not an act of blind faith or even a leap of faith. Many Mitzvos do have a Taam, a reason, literally a taste that may overlap with the human mind. Let us say someone goes to a doctor and he delivers cure and after cure, and the remedies are sensible and the results are real. Then this person goes to the same doctor with a more serious and urgent ailment and the doctor prescribes some bizarre and bitter medicine. Would the patient then defer taking the medicine until he took enough classes in pharmacology to understand how this particular pill works?! Of course not. Why should he?! The doctor has proven his medical expertise in enough revealed areas that by the time he is asking him to do something that does not make immediate sense, he already trusts his wise judgment.

Maybe now we can understand a question the Sefas Emes asks about the question of the "wise son" at the Pesach Seder, "What are these testimonies and (Chukim) statutes, and judgments that HASHEM our G-d has commanded you!?" The wise son is curious to understand Chukim and Chukim cannot be understood. He is not told that his question has a mistaken premise. No! The answer he gets is not to eat anything after the Afikomin.

He should conclude the holy night of Pesach with the taste of Matzah in his mouth. How is that an answer? Firstly, it is no mistake that the same letters that spell MATZOS are exactly the same that spell MITZVOS. Matzos are a prototype of all Mitzvos. Amongst the types of Mitzvos there is a category called CHUKIM. Like Matzos they seem to be bland and tasteless and much less attractive from the outside.

However, once they are eaten everything changes. This is the Naaseh V' Nishmah affect! At Mount Sinai the entire Jewish Nation declared unanimously "We will do and we will learn!" Sometimes a person does not understand or appreciate a certain Mitzvah until it is practiced. Once one has an experience of the Mitzvah a flavor of appreciation is gained. I remember taking education classes and as eager as I was to gain the information it didn't make that much sense until I got into the saddle and started to teach a class of students. Then I was a better student of the dynamics of the classroom.

Matzos and some Mitzvos start out as a Chok. Try to figure them out in the abstract and you will be met with frustration. However, once experienced or tasted then it assumes a TAAM.

A flavor emerges, and it begins to make sense. Aha! Naaseh V'Nishmah- We will do and then we will learn. Some aspect of every Mitzvos starts out as a Chok and ends up with a Taam, a taste, a good reason.

In the material world of superficiality and impulsivity things work the other way around. Many even very smart people begin engaging in certain behaviors that at first make sense to them because they have some attractive quality, but later on they find themselves stuck, addicted, imprisoned by those same actions. Ask them why they do it, if they already find it wasteful and destructive and they have no good explanation.

It's a bad habit – an impractical joke. They may start out with a Taam but after a while they become a flavorless Chok. While a Chok in the Torah begins with no flavor but the doing of it leads one to acquire educated taste buds.

#### **Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

#### **Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l**

#### **The Sin of Moshe and Aharon**

"And God said to Moshe and Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the land which I have given them." (20:12)

This verse describes a great tragedy – Moshe and Aharon, who have been the leaders of Am Yisrael for a generation and a half, and who have done so much for the nation, will not be permitted to enter the land. This tragedy disturbed Chazal and the various commentators greatly, especially in light of the fact that the Torah does not state explicitly what they did wrong. Because their sin is not altogether clear, the commentators offer several different explanations.

Rashi maintains that God had commanded them to speak to the rock (verse 8) and they sinned by striking it (verse 11). This, then, represented a deviation from the command that they were given, and Rashi explains that their action also diminished the scale of the kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Divine Name): "For had you spoken to the rock and then it gave water, I would have been sanctified in the eyes of the nation. They would have said, 'This rock - which does not speak, nor does it hear, nor has it any need of sustenance – obeys the command of the Holy One; how much more so should we.'" (Rashi on verse 12)

Briefly, the crux of the sin according to this view lies in the deviation from God's command.

The Rambam, in his Eight Chapters (chapter 4), explains that Moshe and Aharon's sin was that they became angry and said, "Hear now, rebels..." (verse 10). Although the Rambam teaches that in every trait man should adopt the "golden mean," there are nevertheless a few

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traits concerning which a person must adopt the one extreme and distance himself from the other. One such trait is anger (Hilkhot De'ot 2:3). The Rashbam, too, suggests that Moshe struck the rock "out of a sort of anger and rage." It appears that this anger itself had a negative result: the nation then thought that God was angry with them, while this was not the case.

A third possibility is cited by the Ramban in the name of Rabbeinu Chanael (quoted also in Rabbeinu Behaye): Moshe and Aharon sinned in that they said, "Shall WE bring forth water from this rock?" instead of "Shall GOD bring forth water for you?" The nation may have received the impression that it was Moshe and Aharon who had brought forth the water by their own wisdom, and the opportunity for a kiddush Hashem was thereby lost. For that reason, according to this view, God says, "Why did you not believe in Me TO SANCTIFY ME..."

The Midrash (19:5) follows Rashi's understanding of the sin (hitting the rock instead of speaking to it), and raises the question that since it was specifically Moshe who struck the rock, why was Aharon also punished?

"This may be compared to a creditor who came to claim the threshing floor of the debtor, as well as that of his neighbor. The debtor asked, 'I may be guilty, but what has my neighbor done?' Similarly, Moshe here says, 'I may have been too strict, but what is Aharon's sin?' Therefore the Torah praises him: 'And to [the tribe of] Levi he said: Your tumim and urim be to Your righteous one whom You tested at Masa and with whom You strove at the waters of Meriva' (Devarim 33:8)."

The verse in Devarim shows that Aharon in fact did not sin at Meriva. The question then becomes even more problematic – why was he punished? Further on, the Midrash (19:6) answers this based on the following verse: "There is vanity which is performed upon the earth, where the righteous suffer in accordance with the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people who enjoy the benefits of the deeds of the righteous; I said that this, too, is vanity." (Kohelet 8:14)

The Midrash compares this to the snake who was punished by God, although he could have argued that Adam was at fault for having listened to him instead of to God – "If the rabbi speaks and his student speaks, to whom do we listen?" (Sanhedrin 29a). Likewise, Aharon could have claimed, "I did not transgress Your words; why, then, should I die?" But God gave him no opportunity for such an appeal, nor did He argue on Aharon's behalf. The Midrash explains his fate as falling under the category of "the righteous who suffer."

It is certainly difficult to accept the line of thinking proposed by the Midrash, especially in light of the fact that Moshe pleads at length

for God to cancel this tragic decree, to the point where God is forced to say, "Enough – do not speak to Me any longer concerning this matter" (Devarim 3:26). Why does Aharon not offer his own plea, especially since his claim is much stronger?

In light of all of the above, it seems that we must seek some other way of understanding the sin. The verse does not state that they sinned, but rather that they did not sanctify God's name: "Why did you not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael?" and likewise "Because you did not sanctify Me amongst Bnei Yisrael" (Devarim 32:51). The punishment, it seems, is not for a sin which was committed, but rather for something which they did not do. (Rabbeinu Behaye similarly explains that they did not sin, but he explains the punishment in accordance with kabbalistic principles.)

Had they spoken to the rock, God's name would have been sanctified to a much greater degree: everyone would have witnessed the obedience of the rock, and there would have been a clear demonstration of the verse, "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit..." Moshe and Aharon missed a golden opportunity that would perhaps never be repeated. Although it was Moshe who struck rather than speaking, Aharon was also punished because he hesitated rather than speaking immediately to the rock, and did not object when Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Both were therefore responsible for the missed opportunity.

This failure is not only severely punished but is also referred to with great severity. Later on in the parasha God says, "Aharon will be gathered to his people... because you REBELLED AGAINST MY WORD... at the waters of Meriva." (20:24)

Their sin is regarded as rebellion. Similarly, in parashat Haazinu (32:51) we read, "For you ACTED TREACHEROUSLY (ma'altem) against Me amongst Bnei Yisrael." The Gemara (Me'ilah 18a) compares acting treacherously (me'ilah) to idolatry and adultery.

This severe attitude is certainly related to the fact that God is very exacting of the righteous. We read, "These are the waters of Meriva, for Bnei Yisrael strove with God and He was SANCTIFIED THROUGH THEM" (20:13), corresponding to the verse, "By means of those close to Me I shall be sanctified" (Vayikra 10:3). It was not even as though Moshe and Aharon missed completely the opportunity for a kiddush Hashem; they merely brought about a kiddush Hashem that was on a smaller scale than what would have been possible.

The very fact that God punishes them although they did not actually sin but rather missed an opportunity for something greater, holds a lesson for us. God relates to each individual according to the relationship between what he does and what he could have done. A person

can learn Torah and fulfill the mitzvot but nevertheless be punished because there was more that he could have done, but he did not. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99a) teaches that anyone who could study Torah but does not do so is included in the verse, "For he has spurned the word of God." The Gemara (Berakhot 12b) teaches that someone who could have pleaded for mercy on behalf of his fellow but does not do so is called a sinner. Nowhere is it written that a person is commanded to pray for his fellow, but nevertheless a person who fails to do so is called a sinner since he could have helped his fellow but did not.

There are two reasons for such a severe view of someone who all in all does not do as much as he is able:

- i. Wasted potential is considered like actual damage. The Rambam (Hilkhot Sekhirut 20:3) writes in the name of his teachers (i.e. the Ri Migash) that someone who gave over his vineyard to a watchman or tenant on condition that the latter will dig or prune, and he does not do perform these acts of cultivation, "he is as culpable as one who actively caused a loss."
- ii. Such a missed opportunity arises at best from laziness and at worst from apathy. If someone fails to pray for his fellow, it is a sign that his fellow is unimportant to him.

The Gemara (Berakhot 5a) teaches that if a person is overcome with suffering he should examine his deeds, and if he finds no fitting reason, he should assume that he is being punished for wasting time that could have been spent on Torah study. In other words, if someone finds no specific sin that could be the cause of his suffering, he should assume that the punishment is for missed opportunities. It is unclear whether missing an opportunity for Torah study is forbidden from the formal halakhic perspective – a person is not obligated to study Torah every minute of his whole life; but there is certainly an element of wasted opportunity.

All of this teaches us that a person should always strive to achieve the maximum that he is able to. A person may never set himself a standard for action in accordance with what his peers are doing, or what previous generations did, since his potential may differ from theirs. Each person has to recognize his own personal potential and then strive with all his might to fulfill it. (Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Chukat 5755 [1995]. Summarized by Matan Glidai; Translated by Kaeren Fish)

### Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

#### Spiritual Leadership: The Moral Risks

I begin this sermon with an apology. I have never liked dramatists who write plays about playwrights, actors who act the roles of actors, or authors who write about novelists. I have always considered this a self-serving kind of literary inbreeding. Similarly, I am weary of rabbis who preach sermons about the rabbinate.

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So I beg your leave if this morning I violate my own principle. My reasoning is that, first, I rarely do speak about the subject; second, I tell myself that the nature of the rabbinate and its destiny is of some interest to the congregation at large; third, the role of the kohen (priest) in the special reading of this morning, Parashat Parah, suggests the topic itself.

Religious leadership – whether of the pulpit or classroom or institution – moves between two poles, and the tension between them is characteristic of all spiritual leadership. We may locate it, as I have indicated, in the role of the kohen.

Parashat Parah tells us of the פָרָה אֲדֹםָה or red heifer. The law is that if a man had contracted impurity (tumah) and desired to reattain the state of purity (taharah), then he must be sprinkled with the ashes of the heifer. The kohen who ministers at this procedure, in which purity is granted to the one who is defiled, himself becomes tamei or defiled. It is for this reason that טמאים ומטמא טהרה :the red heifer is considered a paradigm of the mysterious or the non-rational in Judaism .the red heifer purifies the impure and defiles the pure

What is the nature or the essence of this mystery? Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vorker left us a pithy saying in response: סוד פָרָה אֲדֹםָה הוּא אַהֲבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, the mystery or the secret of the red heifer – is the love of Israel. Now, that is a cryptic remark, appropriate to one who is known in Hasidic lore as *דָעֵר שׁוֹגִינְשֶׁר*, "the silent one." A student of Reb Menachem Mendel expanded and explained his mysterious statement: it refers to the kohen who embraces tumah in order to bestow taharah upon his fellow Israelites. Here is this kohen who leads a normal life of purity, as all priests are expected to. And yet we ask him to submit to impurity in order that thereby some other Jew rise from tumah to taharah.

So it is that spiritual leadership involves self-sacrifice, not of a material kind but, more important, that of moral risk-taking, the acceptance of tumah in order to elevate fellow Jews who are defiled. The kohen exercises his spiritual leadership when he takes moral risks for the love of his fellow Jews.

And this is not only true of the kohen or priest but of the prophet too, for both are species of spiritual leadership.

When I was a student, I used to "daven" in the small synagogue of a saintly Hasidic Rebbe, the Kozhnicer Rebbe, Rabbi Israel Hopstein, of blessed memory. He was a gentle and saintly man. I remember well a talk he once gave, which went something as follows: when Moses came down from the mountain with the Tablets in his hand, and found the people dancing around the Golden Calf, he raised the Tablets over his head and smashed them at the foot of the mountain. Whereupon, according to tradition, the Lord revealed himself to Moses with the words I congratulate you, Moses, upon breaking the Tablets!" Now, says the "ישר כחך ששברת," Kozhnicer Rebbe, that is strange indeed. Moses smashed the Tablets in a fit of temper, and the Lord congratulated him – but do we not know that כעס or temper is always wrong? Did not Maimonides teach us that the cardinal sin of Moses when he smote the rock was that he lost

his temper, and for this show of anger he was punished by being banished from the Promised Land? How, then, can the Rabbis say that God congratulated him when, in **כעס** or temper, he broke the Tablets?

The answer that the Rebbe gave is good Hasidic doctrine and, indeed, good Jewish doctrine. It is that the **צדיק** *יריית הצדיק* is necessary for the teshuvah of the people; the leader must be willing to descend to the level of his people in order to raise them to repentance thereafter. Only if the **צדיק** or spiritual leader himself somehow participates in the sin of his people, can he himself perform the act of teshuvah and thereby draw his fellow Jews along with him. When we speak of the Golden Calf, however, how can we expect of Moses to descend to the level of idolatry and paganism? The answer is, that the Rabbis said **כל הכוועס נאילו עבדה וורה**, one who

loses his temper is an idolator, for he shows that he worships his own ego and affirms the centrality of his own emotions and sentiments. Thus, when Moses broke the Tablets in anger, he thereby descended into a kind of idolatry, and was thus enabled to help his people reattain, in repentance, their former eminence. Thus he saved them and that is why God congratulated him upon his show of anger.

That is a quaint Hasidic interpretation, and my more austere friends would probably not approve of it. Yet the idea stands on its own merits. If Moses or the tzaddik or the kohen or the spiritual leader will not risk his own contamination, his people must sink ever lower, until they are irremediably lost. If he is concerned with his own moral integrity exclusively, he must abdicate leadership entirely. This is the first pole, that of the willingness of the leader to come down and to sully himself. There is an opposing principle: if the leader identifies too closely with his people, ultimately he is not better than they are, and can be of no help to them. The moral risks the leader must take can often result in moral abandon. Indeed, it is a most dangerous idea. It can leave the kohen with a sense of fascination with tumah under the guise of self-sacrificing leadership.

The most blatant historic example of the extremes to which these ideas can be taken is that of the apostate pseudo-Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi. Here was a man who developed to its utmost the theory of "the holy sin," the idea that the highest kind of individual must descend to the very depths of sin, to the very bowels of hell, and thus raise the world up with him. What happened was that Sabbatai Zevi himself became an apostate, converted to Islam – and instead of raising anyone up with him, left in his wake a train of disaster that began 300 years ago and has still not been completely spent.

No wonder that some of the halakhic commentators (especially **משך הכמה**) tell us that even though technically the kohen would not be required to undergo **טהרה במקווה**, purification in **טומאה** *הוורתה בצבור*, water, as a result of his contamination with the red heifer – on the principle of that he had been working for the community, that his contamination was for the purpose of the public weal, for the love of Israel – still, he must do so, and undergo his own purification. The purpose of this is to remind himself, as it were, of the risks he had taken, and

thus make sure that he will guard against his own further deterioration, and not allow himself to fall into a pattern of impurity.

Contemporary Jewish life offers illustration of these principles. For the tension between the two extremes troubles the spiritual leadership of the Jewry of our times. One the one had, there are some who are characterized by remoteness, by unattainable perfectionism, by an unawareness of the stubborn and irreducible facts of social, economic, and cultural life. And on the other extreme are those who practice identification and involvement with the masses to the point where the leaders are no different from the followers, and they are unable to raise anyone to a higher level.

I grant, of course, the good intentions of each group. And I recognize, too, that each is necessary, within limits, to counterbalance the other.

Thus, in Orthodox Jewish life today, we have the heads of yeshivot who are often spiritual and academic purists. Here are people who are unquestionably sincere, indisputably wise and scholarly, who demand full compliance to all ideals. And this is the way it should be. But often they do not understand the temptations and difficulties of life outside the academy, and therefore they cannot sympathize with it. As a result, they often engage in well-intentioned but misdirected activities.

For instance, twenty or forty years ago it was thoroughly legitimate to strive against Conservatism and Reform. For at that time these groups were drawing away the best talents of Orthodox Judaism. But that is no longer true. The entire situation has changed. Thus, to call a mass meeting for tomorrow (as the Yiddish press has informed us) of Rabbis and Heads of yeshivot to meet with people who are like-minded in order to give battle to a grab-bag of antagonists and enemies – ranging from Conservative and Reform to "Jews for Jesus" and missionary efforts on campus – is to misunderstand the whole structure of American Jewry and to evince profound ignorance of what is happening amongst young Jews in this country. You cannot influence American Jews when you have prohibited your own students from attending colleges, even from working with other young Jews for good Jewish causes (such as Soviet Jewry), and when you have discouraged them even from becoming Orthodox Rabbis who serve in pulpits because it is **תורה של לא לשותה**, and because it involves the moral risks of which we have spoken. You cannot clean up the situation of American Jewry without dirtying your own hands. You cannot produce taharah without your own tumah. You cannot influence others if you practice insularity. And if you insist upon your ivory tower aloofness and on your inviolate spiritual innocence, you must expect to be a spiritual leader with fewer and fewer followers; or, better, very spiritual but hardly a leader.

And yet, when I consider the other extreme, I find it even more depressing. Those who accept the moral risks and become defiled for the sake of their fellow Jews, often accept that situation as the norm, and proceed to chip away their ideals even more, until before long there are no ideals left, and the fragmented reality is idealized as the

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perfect state. Jewish spiritual leadership from the pulpit often tends to be so involved, so outgoing, so "relevant," so concerned, so sympathetic, that it may be leadership, but it is hardly spiritual. There is precious little taharah that can come from a kohen who is altogether tamei or contaminated. I can think of rabbis – and I here specifically refer to Orthodox rabbis – who fall into a dangerous pattern in the pulpit. They are involved in pastoral work, in hospital visits, in consultation, in luncheon talks, in invocations and benedictions, in cocktail parties and meetings and fundraising and administration and golf, in being a "regular fellow" – and who have lost entirely the quality of authentic leadership, and are deaf to that cry of conscience that comes to us from R. Shimon bar Yochai of 1800 years ago, **תורה נא עלייה**, "and what will be of Torah?"

When a rabbi begins to overflow with a love of Israel to the extent that he identifies with them, that he sympathizes with them, that he understands them so well that he feels he no longer can rebuke them, then he will not improve them. He leaves them tamei or impure because he will not get into hot water – or into any water at all.

And what can we say of the Reform rabbinate which, according to the Lenn Report which they themselves commissioned, informs us that some 40% of the Reform rabbinate sanctions (either by direct participation or by referral) mixed marriages? I have spoken to some of these people. Their rationale is simple: **אהבת ישראל**, they love individual Jews and would not cause them heartbreak by refusing to officiate. Furthermore, they love all of Israel: they believe, perhaps sincerely, although I do not see how this is possible, that ecclesiastic approval of a mixed marriage will keep the people within the Jewish fold and contribute to Jewish survival! Our response? -- **טמא טמא טמא**, impure, corrupt, vile!

Thus, spiritual leadership – whether of a rabbi or a teacher or the head of an institution or school or any other function that society devises – is full of inner tension, dangers, pitfalls. No wonder that sincere rabbinic students are often perplexed and frightened about their future in the rabbinate. Their major concern is not the material one, but the moral problem. And no wonder

that authentic Jewish personalities, from Moses to our days, will never grab at leadership and aspire to power for its own sake, but they worry and brood and mull over it; they are full of doubt and tension and hesitation; they have this painful awareness of the dilemma of failing to spread taharah, which perhaps is their reason for existence and their historic role, against the danger of losing their own soul in tumah.

In a sense, refined Jewish religious personalities feel that this dilemma reflects the tension in our conception of God, who is both far and near, both remote and close, transcendent and immanent, abstract and personal. Spiritual leadership must imitate divine leadership – but it is so, so difficult, so frustrating to try to keep one's equilibrium and balance and not fall into either extreme, that of **ונפשי הצלתי**, a concern with saving your own soul and ignoring the rest of the world, or – losing your own soul completely.

Perhaps all this can be summarized in a brilliant saying of the Kotzker rebbe. The Talmud declares

שלמה בני חכם שתיקון עירובין שירובין, “My son Solomon is a wise man, and the washing of the hands before eating bread before man, for he decreed the laws of is the act whereby two people who have adjacent property declare their property to be mutually owned so that they may carry from one to the other on Shabbat. The washing of the hands before the meal was ordained by Solomon too.

Why should these decrees mark Solomon as a wise man, a חכם? The Kotzker answers: means the reverse: pulling away יידים means involvement, sharing, identification עירובין one's hands, the act of withdrawal and renunciation and retirement. A wise man must be able to do both, to keep them in balance, to know when to veer towards either extreme. He must know when to become involved and when to withdraw; when to throw himself into the world and when to tune himself out of it; when to go all the way down to the people and when to stay far away; when to risk tumah and when to insist upon his own taharah.

So we have been able to establish only the parameters, only the limits. One must never be so remote from his people that, because of his selfish concern with his spiritual integrity, he is willing to risk nothing for their sake. And one must never be so neglectful of his own spiritual status that he is willing to abandon his own soul in the process of helping his people. As to where the point of balance lies, when to incline towards one extreme or the other – for this there are no prescriptions, for this one must have both intuitive wisdom and the experience of leadership. For, this one must be, like Solomon, a It is for this balance that a spiritual leader must pray, and pray hard. He must always retain his אהבת ישראל, his love of Israel, by opening up to the world; and his אהבת האל, his love of God, by knowing when to turn away from it. Spiritual leadership requires both loves, clash though they sometimes do. And genuine spiritual Jewish leadership will seek to reconcile them in the Torah, אהבת התורה, the love of Torah. For only in the Torah, זהות וחוקת התורה, can these two great loves, of God and Israel, reconcile.



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**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

**Peace in Heaven and on Earth**

The death of Aharon Hakohen in Parshas Chukas had a significant impact on Klal Yisroel. Chazal note that the mourning for Aharon was even greater than the response of the Jewish People following the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu. In his role as one who interceded to promote peace between spouses and within the greater community, Aharon was sorely missed by all. Even the day of his death is noted by the Torah in Parshas Masei. Rosh Chodesh Av is not only the day to mourn the individual Aharon Hakohen; it became a day associated with mourning for future generations. Chazal teach us that the halachic period of mourning preceding Tisha Ba'v begins on Rosh Chodesh Av. Although there are several customs that are observed during the period of the Three Weeks, actual prohibitions begin on Rosh Chodesh which begins the period known as The Nine Days. Is it just coincidental that the day that begins the formal observance of commemorating the churban is the yohrtzeit of the first kohen gadol, or is the death of Aharon linked to the subsequent churban?

In Parshas Yisro we are commanded not to use metal when preparing the stones of the mizbeach. Chazal comment that the role of the mizbeach is to bring peace between Hashem and the Jewish People, and it is therefore inappropriate for metal, which is associated with weapons, to be used in the construction of the mizbeach. When there is a distance between Hashem and His people it is analogous to a lack of peace. Korbanos, which reconnect us to Hashem, are a vehicle of shalom. Hashem blessing us with closeness and a peaceful relationship with His people is contingent upon our seeking peace with one another. The same kohen gadol who performs the avodah on Yom Kippur, thereby repairing the rift between Hashem and us, is the same kohen gadol who is instructed to be the lover and pursuer of peace which was the hallmark of the first kohen gadol, Aharon Hakohen.

There are numerous prophecies relating the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash to a breakdown in the realm of bein adam lachaveiro. When there is strife within the Jewish People, Hashem distances Himself from us. Chazal point to an unwillingness to compromise in monetary matters as a cause of the churban. When peace and harmony are replaced by every individual's demand for his own rights, Hashem declares there is no need for the Beis Hamikdash which is a source of peace between Himself and His nation.

As we are approaching the period of aveilus for the churban, it is appropriate to look to Aharon Hakohen as a role model. The day of his death, which marked the loss of a great force of peace, became the beginning of churban. We must emulate the traits of, "ovev shalom v'rodef shalom" and by doing so bring about the gift of peace from Above. May we soon witness, "haporeis sukkas shalom aleinu v'al kol amo Yisroel, v'al Yerushalayim."

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**Descartes' Error**

**CHUKAT**

In his 2011 bestseller, The Social Animal, New York Times columnist David Brooks writes:

We are living in the middle of the revolution in consciousness. Over the past few years, geneticists, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and others have made great strides in understanding the building blocks of human flourishing. And a core finding of their work is that we are not primarily products of our conscious thinking. We are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness.<sup>[1]</sup>

Too much takes place in the mind for us to be fully aware of it. Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia estimates that the human mind can absorb 11 million pieces of information at any given moment. We can be conscious of only a tiny fraction of this. Most of what is going on mentally lies below the threshold of awareness.

One result of the new neuroscience is that we are becoming aware of the hugely significant part played by emotion in decision-making. The French Enlightenment emphasised the role of reason and regarded emotion as a distraction and distortion. We now know scientifically how wrong this is. Antonio Damasio, in his Descartes' Error, tells the story of a man who, as the result of a tumour, suffered damage to the frontal lobes of his brain. He had been known to have a high IQ, was well-informed, and had an excellent memory. But after surgery to remove the tumour, his life went into free-fall. He was unable to organise his time. He made bad investments that cost him his savings. He divorced his wife, married a second time, and rapidly divorced again. He could still reason perfectly but had lost the ability to feel emotion. As a result, he was unable to make sensible choices.

Another man with a similar injury found it impossible to make decisions at all. At the end of one session, Damasio suggested two possible dates for their next meeting. The man then took out a notebook, began listing the pros and cons of each, talked about possible weather conditions, potential conflicts with other engagements and so on, for half an hour, until Damasio finally interrupted him, and made the decision for him. The man immediately said, "That's fine," and went away.

It is less reason than emotion that lies behind our choices, and it takes emotional intelligence to make good choices. The problem is that much of our emotional life lies beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

That, as we can now see, is the logic of the chukim, the "statutes" of Judaism, the laws that seem to make no sense in terms of rationality. These are laws like the prohibition of sowing mixed seeds together (kelayim); of wearing cloth of mixed wool and linen (shaatnez); and of eating milk and meat together. The law of the Red Heifer with which our parsha begins, is described as the chok par excellence. As it is written:

"This is the statute of the Torah."

Num. 19:2

There have been many interpretations of the chukim throughout the ages. But in the light of recent neuroscience, we can suggest that they are laws designed to bypass the prefrontal cortex, the rational brain, and create instinctive patterns of behaviour to counteract some of the darker emotional drives at work in the human mind.

We know for example – Jared Diamond has chronicled this in his book *Collapse* – that wherever humans have settled throughout history they have left behind them a trail of environmental disaster, wiping out whole species of animals and birds, destroying forests, damaging the soil by over-farming and so on.

The prohibitions against sowing mixed seeds, mixing meat and milk, combining wool and linen, and so on, create an instinctual respect for the integrity of nature. They establish boundaries. They set limits. They inculcate the feeling that we may not treat our animal and plant environment however we wish. Some things are forbidden – like the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The whole Eden story, set at the dawn of human history, is a parable whose message we can understand today better than any previous generation: Without a sense of limits, we will destroy our ecology and discover that we have lost paradise.

As for the ritual of the Red Heifer, this is directed at the most destructive pre-rational instinct of all: what Sigmund Freud called thanatos, the death instinct. He described it as something “more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides”.[2] In his essay *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he wrote that “a portion of the [death] instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness”, which he saw as “the greatest impediment to civilisation.”

The Red Heifer ritual is a powerful statement that the holy is to be found in life, not death. Anyone who had been in contact with a dead body needed purification before entering the sanctuary or Temple. Priests had to obey stricter rules, and the High Priest even more so.

This made biblical Judaism highly distinctive. It contains no cult of worship of dead ancestors, or seeking to make contact with their spirits. It was probably to avoid the tomb of Moses becoming a holy site that the Torah says, “to this day no one knows where his grave is” (Deut. 34:6). God and the holy are to be found in life. Death defiles.

The point is – and that is what recent neuroscience has made eminently clear – this cannot be achieved by reason alone. Freud was right to suggest that the death instinct is powerful, irrational, and largely unconscious, yet under certain conditions it can be utterly devastating in what it leads people to do. The Hebrew term *chok* comes from the verb meaning, “to engrave”. Just as a statute is carved into stone, so a behavioural habit is carved in depth into our unconscious mind and alters our instinctual responses. The result is a personality trained to see death and holiness as two utterly opposed states – just as meat (death) and milk (life) are.

Chukim are Judaism’s way of training us in emotional intelligence, above all a conditioning in associating holiness with life, and defilement with death. It is fascinating to see how this has been vindicated by modern neuroscience. Rationality, vitally important in its own right, is only half the story of why we are as we are. We will need to shape and control the other half if we are successfully to conquer the instinct to aggression, violence, and death that lurks not far beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

[1] David Brooks, *The Social Animal*, Random House, 2011, x.

[2] Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” in *On Metapsychology*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984, p. 294.

<https://www.5jt.com/the-quickening-and-realignment-of-history/>

## The Quickening And Realignment Of History

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

July 8, 2024

After a forty-year detour we finally arrived at the doorstep of Israel. The ground began to shake with historical tremors. Bilaam and Balak, normally

sworn enemies, hastily built a coalition to defeat the Jewish occupiers who, they feared, would consume them “as an ox consumes the grass.” Rachav, the woman who lived in the walls of Yericho, and secretly hosted Yehoshua’s spies, reported that the inhabitants of Canaan, upon hearing of the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf, resigned themselves to defeat. The entire region and everyone who stood in the way of Jewish destiny, trembled. In truth, the regional political upheaval started well before we arrived. The end of Parshat Chukat describes legendary wars between the armies of Emor and the warriors of Moab. Emor, led by its mighty warrior-king Sichon, emerged as the big winners and saw their empire vastly expanded.

### The Return of Hashgachah

The Torah describes these “unrelated” wars for several reasons. Firstly, the Emori victory showcased their ferocious military prowess. Yet, facing off against the children of Hashem, their armies collapsed like a house of cards. This impressive defeat of the “invincible” Sichon demonstrated that Hashem had restored His hashgachah to us after a forty-year dark period of limited miracles and little prophetic communication. Defeating Sichon, who himself had routed Moab, gave us the confidence that, with Hashem’s help, we could easily vanquish the 30 chieftains of Canaan.

### The Quickening and the Accounting

Additionally, the Emori-Moab wars reflect the broader instability that spread throughout the region. Jewish redemption wasn’t a local or national event, but radiated to the entire planet. Jewish redemption introduces heightened spirituality and broader prosperity to the world. Our initial arrival in Israel was meant to conclude history, leading to a Messianic utopia. Whenever history reaches a redemptive “end,” it must account for itself. Empires rise as others fall so that history ends with a balanced ledger. Therefore, as history lurches toward redemption, its pace accelerates. As history advances toward its redemptive terminus, it rocks and sways...and it quickens. The quickening of history always brings rapid change and severe political turmoil.

### Three Pharaohs

Our first geulah also brought rapid political shifts. Egyptian Pharaohs possessed absolute authority and reigned for the duration of their lifetimes. Yet, as Yetzias Mitzrayim approached, three different Egyptian kings ascend the stage: the Pharaoh of the beginning, of Sh’mot, the “new king” who didn’t recall Yosef and who hatched the hateful conspiracy against us, and the Pharaoh who succeeded him after his sudden death. It is difficult to determine the exact timelines of the three Pharaohs, but at least textually, they were all coronated in rapid succession.

### The Carousel of Babylonia and Persia

The first geulah from Bavel was no different. In a span of about eighty years, numerous Babylonian empires ruled and suddenly, the indomitable Babylonian empire was unseated by Persia. Approximately four or five Persian Emperors sat on the throne until we finally returned to Israel. Depending on the timelines, seven or eight different dictators ruled this region between our exit from Yerushalayim and our return.

Political tumult and instability are harbingers of Jewish redemption. It was true in the desert as we approached Israel, and it is just as true as we began the complicated process of returning to Yerushalayim after the Babylonian exile. It remained true in the 20th century as we embarked on the final redemption.

### The Quicksand of the 20th Century

During this fraught century two World Wars took the lives of over 100 million people. Powerful ideologies such as Fascism, Naziism, and Communism came and went. Long-standing maps were redrawn and, a few years later, redrawn again. Vast European empires receded, as former colonies achieved their independence. We have just begun the 21st century, but it appears to be even more chaotic. As we arrive at the end of history, history itself quickens.

Chazal assert that that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is “chishev et haketz,” which means that He calculates the exact time of the geulah. This commonly refers

to Hashem commuting our exile and redeeming us prior to our designated time.

Additionally, though, chishev et haketz means that He recomputes the overall historical calculus. As we approach geulah, history accounts for itself and political tumult ensues. It was true in Egypt; it was true forty years later on the East Bank of the Jordan; it was true 1,300 years later in Persia; and it was true during the past century.

#### Redemptive Realignment

There is an additional reason that the Torah describes the wars of Emor and Moab in such detail. Evidently, there is a different message and a different reason that we were informed of the precise territories conquered by Emor. The outcome of this war and the redrawing of maps directly influenced Jewish history. Moab was a descendant of Lot and therefore, we are banned from any military encounter with them and prohibited from settling their lands. Had the Moabite armies triumphed in this war, the East Bank of the Jordan would not have been available for Jewish settlement. Once the victorious Emorite kingdom absorbed these lands, they could now be included in future Jewish settlement. The final borders of Eretz Yisrael depended on the outcome of this seemingly “unrelated” war. Of course, nothing is unrelated to Jewish history. History was realigned to facilitate Jewish destiny.

Jewish history is cyclical. What happened once, happens again. Just as history was rearranged to accommodate our arrival from the desert, it was similarly reengineered as we arrived home from our 2,000-year journey through the desert of exile. Once again, historical realignment began well before our arrival.

#### The 17th Century

Two important events of the 17th century deeply influenced our return to Israel three hundred years later. The Puritan Revolution of the 1640s led by Oliver Cromwell established an environment of relative religious freedom, making the UK more hospitable to Jews. Two decades later, in the aftermath of the horrific Khmelnitsky rebellion in Poland, during which hundreds of thousands of Jews were brutally murdered, we began to look westward to the British Isles for safe haven. In a perfect historical confluence, Britain and the West became more hospitable to us just when we most needed it. Jews settled into Britain, gaining political and cultural influence.

About three hundred years later, this influence was crucial for the establishment of the Jewish State. In addition to broader Jewish lobbying, several politically well-placed British Jews including Chaim Weizman, who would eventually become the first President of Israel, and Edmond de Rothschild were instrumental in garnering British support for the State. Of course, WWI had a lot to do with this as well. Britain emerged from the war with both a vastly expanded empire and a greater global influence. By contrast, the Ottoman empire suffered catastrophic losses, disappeared as a political entity, and ceded Palestine to a more friendly Great Britain. While British influence in Europe increased after the war, Germany and Austria-Hungary, two countries with far less affection for the Jews, lost much of their political influence. All historical circumstances were well-aligned to facilitate the return of Hashem’s people, to His land. It is hard to imagine the events of 1948 without these after-effects of WWI.

#### The “Century of America”

The 20th century, often nicknamed “the century of America,” saw the U.S. become a dominant military, economic, and cultural superpower. In 1948, at the height of its powers, U.S. support for the State of Israel was decisive, and in the ensuing decades, they have been our staunchest ally. During the 20th century Britain passed the torch of its international influence to the United States. It also passed the torch of supporting Jewish destiny to the new emergent superpower.

#### A Brief Window

Let’s not forget Russia. For the overwhelming majority of the past 200 years, Russia was antagonistic to our people. The 19th century was marred by malicious state-sponsored antisemitism and discrimination in Tzarist Russia. In the 20th century, Stalin persecuted, executed, and deported millions of

Jews. In the more recent past Russia launched a virulent propaganda crusade against Israel, portraying us as an aggressor and oppressor of Palestinians. Much of the false canards being hurled at us in 2024 originated from their venomous campaigns.

However, there was a brief pocket of history during which the Soviet Union supported us. Without their endorsement in 1947 and their support in 1948, we would not have achieved statehood. A few months after we declared independence, the Soviet Union turned against us, aligning with our Arab enemies. For a very brief period of history—no more than a year or so—our most aggressive enemy aligned themselves with Jewish destiny.

Redemption is the inevitable conclusion to history. As the horizons of redemption appear, history quickens. It also realigns to pave the path to redemption. n

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<https://en.yhb.org.il/supporting-rabbis-through-tithes-and-offerings/>

#### Supporting Rabbis through Tithes and Offerings

##### Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The commandment of giving tithes and offerings from agricultural produce is intended to maintain the spiritual-religious dimension in the People of Israel through the priests and Levites, whose role is to engage in Torah study and education \* From the right of every person in Israel to decide which priest and which Levite to give their gifts, we should learn that the public is the one who should choose their rabbis \* The proposal to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis is bad \* It is appropriate for lecturers in synagogues and teachers in schools to teach how to separate tithes and offerings through practical demonstration in front of the students

In this week’s Torah portion, ‘Korach’, we learn about the commandment of terumot and ma’asrot (tithes and offerings) from agricultural produce, which is intended to maintain the spiritual-religious dimension in the People of Israel through the Kohanim (priests) and Levites, whose role is to engage in Torah study and education, as the Torah says: “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel” (Deuteronomy 33:10). This is how the Jewish nation is built in a proper manner, as a nation with its feet planted on the ground, and its head reaching the heavens, making both the people of action and the people of spirit partners in maintaining a meaningful life, full of content.

##### Israelites Choose to Whom They Give Their Gifts

This partnership is also expressed in the fact that the owner of the produce has the right to choose which priest and Levite to give his gifts to, as it is written: “Every man’s holy things shall be his, and what a man gives to the priest shall be his” (Numbers 5:10) (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 7:4). This right creates a personal connection between the Israelites and the priests and Levites, and encourages the priests and Levites to be dedicated to their holy work among the members of their communities, so that in turn, the community members will want to give them their gifts. One who has made an effort to teach Torah to children and adults, and from whom people benefited counsel and wisdom, merits that they prefer to give him the gifts. On the other hand, one who has alienated himself from his community members, refused to participate in the war to defend the People and the Land, or was lazy and did not teach Torah, receives similar treatment when the gifts are distributed.

##### The Public’s Influence on Selecting Rabbis

From the right of every Jew to decide which priest and Levite to give their gifts, we can learn that the public are the ones who should choose their rabbis, and indeed, this is how it was practiced in all Jewish communities from time immemorial.

Therefore, the proposal currently being promoted to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis is a bad proposal. The Ministry of Religious Affairs already has too much power in selecting rabbis, and instead of correcting the situation and transferring all selection authority to public representatives in cities, neighborhoods, and synagogues, they are going in the opposite direction, and continue to degrade the status of the rabbinate. Although rabbinic ordination is granted by rabbis, the public has the right and authority to determine which ordained rabbi they will choose.

#### Example from the Elections of Chief Rabbis

We recently received an example of the negative influence on the selection of rabbis from the issue of postponing the elections for Chief Rabbis for more than a year. Various people whom I consider reliable are certain that the only reason for this is that the decision-makers in different parties have not yet managed to decide whom to support, or have not managed to secure a majority for this in the electing body. There is no certainty that this is the reason, but the very fact that reliable people are certain of this, indicates that these improper considerations are plausible. It's important to note that these same individuals are also pushing the proposal to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis at the expense of community representatives.

The political situation is very complex, and not just in this area. To begin the process of correction, each community needs to choose a rabbi and strengthen his status, regardless of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The more communities do this, the more the status of the rabbinate will rise thanks to the good example of rabbis who study and teach the true Torah, elevating the honor of the Torah.

Regarding the selection of Chief Rabbis and other rabbis, the electing body should be greatly expanded to include various representatives from all parts of the public, as long as the Torah and Jewish tradition are very important to them.

#### Fruits Growing in the Yard

Q: Does every fruit we pick from a tree growing in our yard need to have terumot and ma'asrot separated immediately, or only after bringing the fruit into the house are we obligated to separate terumot and ma'asrot, and as long as I'm in the yard, can I eat it without separating the tithes?

A: If you pick only one small fruit that is eaten in one bite, you can eat it without separating terumot and ma'asrot. But if you pick two small fruits, or a larger fruit that is not eaten in one bite, it is forbidden to eat from it without separating terumot and ma'asrot.

This is because we are dealing with a guarded yard, meaning, a yard that a stranger is not allowed to enter. In such a case, it is permitted to eat from the fruits growing there in a casual manner only before 'gemar melachtam' (the "completion of their work") that is, before their 'isufam' ("gathering"). For example, one grape or one fig, which are eaten in one bite. But if one picks two grapes, or two figs, or a large fruit that is not eaten in one bite, like an apple or a large fig, already upon picking them they are considered "gathered" and "their work is completed", and they become obligated in terumot and ma'asrot, because this is the way of their "gathering" in the yard. And since they are in a guarded yard that establishes obligation for tithes, even casual eating is forbidden before separating terumot and ma'asrot from them (Rambam Ma'aser 4:15; 17; Radbaz ibid. 18; Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 8:8).

However, if one climbed the tree and picked many fruits there in a way that "completed their work", as long as he is on the tree and has not descended to the ground of the guarded yard – the fruits have not yet been established for tithes, and since his eating on the tree is casual eating, he is allowed to eat from them without separating terumot and ma'asrot (Rambam ibid.).

#### What Should One Do Who Doesn't Know How to Separate Terumot and Ma'asrot

Q: What can be done when we are not sure that we know how to properly separate terumot and ma'asrot? Until now, for this reason, we have refrained from eating from the fruits.

A: The best advice is to learn how to separate terumot and ma'asrot. For this purpose, I will write here the order of separating terumot and ma'asrot with explanations in parentheses. It seems that if you read the text slowly and carefully, you will understand the order of the commandment, and will be able to merit fulfilling it whenever you want to eat from the fruits.

In addition, it is appropriate for synagogues lecturers and in schools teachers to teach how to separate terumot and ma'asrot through practical demonstration in front of the students. When it appears that the students still have not gained confidence that they know how to fulfill the commandment, repeat it several times, and perhaps, appoint a different student each time to perform the commandment himself, until everyone knows how to separate terumot and ma'asrot.

#### Another Solution: Declaring the Fruits Ownerless

Another solution is to declare the fruits hefker (ownerless), and then, since the fruits are ownerless, they are exempt from terumot and ma'asrot. The act of declaring them ownerless is done as follows: One needs to say in front of three people "My fruits are ownerless," and by doing so, they become hefker, and any person can acquire them. At least two of the listeners need to be qualified to testify, so that if the third comes to acquire the fruits, the two will testify that he acquired them legally (Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 273:7). However, you can announce that anyone who wants to pick from the fruits can come at a certain time of the day, because even though the fruits are ownerless, the yard is not ownerless, and as long as you allow anyone who wants to pick at a certain time, the declaration of hefker is valid. The declaration of hefker that is effective to exempt the fruits from tithes is from the time they became fit for eating in pressing circumstances until they are picked, but after they are picked, they have already become obligated in terumot and ma'asrot, and the declaration of hefker does not exempt them (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 8:3).

#### Introduction to the Order of Separating Tithes and Offerings

Terumot need to be separated and removed from the fruits, because they are intended for the Kohanim and have kedusha (holiness), and since there is no possibility to eat them, they are placed, wrapped, in the trash. In contrast, the ma'asrot are separated by designating a place on one side of the fruits, such as the right side, or the north side, thereby separating them from the rest of the fruits, with the intention to give the value of the ma'aser rishon ('first tithe') to the Levite, and the value of the ma'aser ani ('tithes for the poor') to the poor, and to redeem the ma'aser sheini ('second tithe') on a coin. Afterwards, those fruits that were designated for tithes will be eaten together with the rest of the fruits.

#### Order of Separating Terumot and Ma'asrot

First, bless: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to separate tithes and offerings" (when there is doubt whether tithes and offerings have been separated from the fruits, we do not bless).

Take a little more than one percent of the fruits and separate it from the rest of the fruits, and it is designated for terumah gedola ('great offering') and terumat ma'aser, and say: "The part exceeding one hundredth of what I have separated that is on my right side shall be 'terumah gedola' (in what was initially separated, there is a percentage and a bit more, and we intend that the part exceeding the percentage will be 'teruma gedola', and its place is on the right side of the fruits designated for terumot). The one hundredth that remains here (in what was initially separated for terumot) with nine more parts like it on the right side of these fruits shall be 'ma'aser rishon' (thus, we have separated 'ma'aser rishon' – the fruits, or their value, will be given later to the Levite). That one hundredth that I made 'ma'aser rishon', and is placed separated from the fruits, is 'terumat ma'aser' (and with this, we have separated 'terumat ma'aser'. The terumot are wrapped, and placed in the trash).

A tenth of what remains (ten percent of what remains after what we have already separated) on the left side of the fruits shall be 'ma'aser sheini' (and with this we have designated a place for 'ma'aser sheini'), and if they are obligated in 'ma'aser ani' – they are 'ma'aser ani' (because in years 1, 2, 4, 5

of the Shemita cycle, we separate ‘ma’aser sheini’, and in years 3, 6 ‘ma’aser ani’). (When separating ‘ma’aser ani’, give the fruits, or their value, later to a poor person.)

#### Redemption of Ma’aser Sheini

When separating ‘ma’aser sheini’, like this year, 5784 (2024), it needs to be redeemed, to make it chulin (non-sacred). If the separation of terumot and ma’asrot is done from fruits that are certainly not tithed, and it is clear that they are from a year from which we separate ‘ma’aser sheini’, one should first bless: “Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to redeem the second tithe”. And if there is doubt in the matter, we redeem without a blessing.

And say: “This ‘ma’aser sheini’ (referring to what we designated a place for on the left side), it, and its fifth (it’s a Torah commandment to add a fifth during redemption), shall be redeemed on one pruta (low-value coin) from the coin I have designated for redeeming ‘ma’aser sheini’.” One who has not designated a coin for this, can redeem it on a spoonful of sugar worth a pruta, and rinse the sugar in water in the sink, or place it respectfully in the trash.

#### Blessings for the Approval of the Settlements

Blessings to Minister Bezalel Smotrich and all his partners in the legal regularization of five settlements in Judea and Samaria, and in the constant strengthening of the settlement in Judea and Samaria, and the removal of the danger of enemy takeover of the Land of Israel. This article appears in the ‘Besheva’ newspaper and was translated

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from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorah@ohrtorahstone.ccsend.com>

reply-to: parsha@ots.org.il

date: Jul 11, 2024, 9:10 AM

subject: OTS for YOU: Parshat Chukat

#### Parshat Chukat: From Jerusalem to Ashes to Life Eternal

#### Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“This is the statute of the law which God commanded, saying, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer.’” (Numbers 19:1–2) One of the most profound mysteries of the Bible is the rite of the red heifer, called a chok (statute) because it belongs to the group of divine decrees which human logic cannot penetrate.

Detailed in the first twenty-two verses of our Torah reading, the ceremony certainly sounds strange to the modern ear: a heifer, which is completely red, without blemish, and upon which no yoke has been brought, shall be slaughtered outside of the encampment of Israel; cedar wood, hyssop, and a scarlet thread shall be cast into the burning pyre of ashes, and a “personage of purity” (ish tahor) shall gather the ashes in a sacred place, mix them with spring water (mayim chayim, waters of life) and use the mixture to purify those who have been contaminated by contact with a corpse. What can we possibly make of such a primitive sounding ritual?

We must be mindful of the fact that all other impurities other than a death impurity find their purification by the defiled individual’s immersing himself or herself in a mikveh, a gathering of freshly running spring water or specially collected life-giving rainwater; in effect, in all these instances, the defiled individual actually purifies him- or herself! Only in this rite of the red heifer does the kohen, representing God Himself, effectuate the purification. It is as though the Bible is teaching us that we can save ourselves from many of our weaknesses, we can rise above many of our temptations, but only God can ultimately redeem us from death.

And from this perspective, the symbolism of the red heifer ritual begins to make sense. A heifer is the consummate symbol of life, the cow’s mother-milk serving as the universal expression of maternal nurturing of her young; red is likewise the color of blood, and blood is the life-force, the very nefesh of the living organism. However, although human beings come in various shapes, sizes, personalities, and powers – they can be as tall and proud as the cedar tree and as mean and humble as the hyssop plant – the angel of death

ultimately conquers them all, because the scarlet thread of human sin condemns each of us to the common destiny of mortality.

Following the sacrifice, the personage of purity gathers the ashes of the remains, mixes them with the life-giving waters of the divine and, born-again, purified life emerges even from the surrealistic specter of death itself. Inherent in this symbolism is that historic Israel – mother nurturer of the continuity of humanity by means of the Abrahamic “compassionate rightness and moral justice” which Israel taught and must continue to teach – is destined to be slaughtered, but will always rise again to life and to the fulfillment of her mission and destiny.

This symbolism of the red heifer assumed new significance for me after a trip to Frankfurt and Berlin I took just a few years ago. Ohr Torah Stone’s Joseph Straus Rabbinical Seminary has sent close to three hundred rabbis and their families to communities throughout the world, from Caesarea to Curacao to Guatemala City to Johannesburg to Lincoln Center – with eight of our graduates presently in Germany. While in Berlin, I made it my concern to visit their newly completed Holocaust Memorial at the very center of the city, not far from the last bunker from which the “mad Führer” (may his name be blotted out) committed suicide.

The open-air memorial consists of 2,711 stones, monuments of various shapes and sizes. Walking amongst the narrow, massive slabs of stone, one becomes lost within a giant cemetery, feeling helplessly and hopelessly minute and insignificant within a maze of monuments whose eerie, death-imbedded caskets seem to have overtaken world and life; I even felt a panic attack, was almost ready to scream out loud in fear and anxiety, when I saw the sight of blessed steps of exit from this mass and massive tomb. One then descends into a netherworld of hell, where pictures and stories of Holocaust victims evoke their life experiences and all of their future potential that was snuffed out, inexplicably and cruelly torn asunder from the tree of life by monstrous and subhuman hands. How many medical and scientific advances were simply burned to ashes in the death factory called Auschwitz! How many Nobel Prize winners, how many giants of humanity!

I stumbled away from the experience feeling as though I had just awakened from a horrific nightmare. The symbolism of the monuments continued to haunt me months after I returned to Efrat; after all, those who lost loved ones in the Holocaust don’t even have graveside monuments to weep over. Each empty stone screams out with any name, with every name, with my name, and with my children’s names, because a part of each human being was killed in those death camps whose perpetrators attempted to destroy every last vestige of humanness.

But I also came away from the experience feeling cheated by the memorial. Something was missing, the essence was missing, the victorious ending was missing. Because, you see, the Jewish people won the war which Hitler tried to wage against us. Yes, he succeeded in destroying six million of us, but as he records in Mein Kampf, he wasn’t waging a war against six million Jews. He was waging a war against the last Jew, against Judaism, against what he called a slave morality of compassionate righteousness and moral justice, of sensitive concern for the weaker vessels, of a God of ultimate power who insists upon human protection of the powerless. And in that war, Hitler failed!

Yes, we won that war. Alas, the brilliantly alive “red heifer,” a metaphor for the Jewish people, a people who nurture the world with the milk of morality of the Ten Commandments and the milk of human kindness of “You shall love the stranger” and “You shall love your neighbor like yourself” was, to a large extent, tragically and inexplicably slaughtered beyond the “human encampment” in Auschwitz and Treblinka. But the Almighty God, the “Personage of Purity” Himself, gathered the ashes, Himself mixed them with living waters of rebirth, and Himself transformed those ashes into the fertile soil of the recreated sovereign State of Israel. And the “Personage of Purity” Himself mixed the ashes with the life-giving wellsprings of Torah, our tree of eternal life, and in addition to our national physical being, likewise revived our spiritual being, Torah centers, and Daf Yomi Talmud study groups to an unprecedented and unparalleled degree all over the world. In the

immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, who could have predicted the rise of the State of Israel; who could have foreseen hundreds of thousands of Jews studying Daf Yomi every day?

Indeed, it boggles the mind to think that Judaism is reawakening even in the failed Führer's own capital city of Berlin, where three new yeshivot have been dedicated over the past several years. Imagine the historical irony of the fact that the only two growing Jewish communities in the world today are in Israel and in Germany!

And take note: there are 2,711 monument stones in the memorial, and when the artist Peter Eisenman was asked as to the significance of that number, he said there was no significance, it was purely arbitrary. However, if you check Google, you will find that there are 2,711 folio pages in the Babylonian Talmud studied in Daf Yomi! And this is more than coincidence. Adolf Hitler is now mercifully long dead. Curiously enough, one of his personal effects within his self-inflicted suicide bunker was the tractate Pesachim, a Gemara of the Vilna Shas (six orders of the Talmud) which tells of the Pesach festival of Jewish freedom and redemption. The American State Department decided to give this sacred text to Rabbi Herzog, then chief rabbi of Israel, whose wife showed it to me in the early 1970s. Apparently the devil incarnate, who was obsessed with Judaism, had hoped to bury the last Talmud tome in existence. Instead the Talmud tome buried him! Indeed, 2,711 pages of the Talmud have literally walked out of the 2,711 monument stones, and have granted to the Jewish victims the eternal life of Jewish victors, who will yet teach the world the message of universal freedom and redemption which is the vision of the Pesach Seder.

#### A Biblical and Historical Postscript

We learn from the rite of the red heifer that only God, the Personage of Purity, can redeem from death; and in our post-Holocaust generation, He has certainly done so. There ought to be a final glorious exhibit in the Berlin Holocaust Memorial which features pulsating present-day religious Jewish life in Germany, as well as a magnificent tribute to the reborn State of Israel. "Thus says the Lord your God... 'I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the Land of Israel.... And I shall put My spirit in you and you shall live and I shall place you in your land.'" (Ezekiel 37:13–14)

Shabbat Shalom

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from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Jul 11, 2024, 7:01 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Chukas

"נִנְחָא אֶת-הַפְּלָעָה מִן-לְאַדְמָנוֹת בְּלֶקֶשְׁנִי"

"And he hit the rock with his stick...because you had not trusted in Me to sanctify Me" (Bamidbar 20:10-11)

Moshe Rabbeinu performed a great miracle of bringing forth water from the rock. However, Moshe was punished and barred from entering Eretz Yisrael because he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l states that this was a neis no matter what means was used to bring forth this supernatural occurrence. What was lacking by Moshe's failure to speak to the rock?

Rav Moshe explains that this event was intended to demonstrate the importance of delivering words of instruction even to one who may not be able to fully grasp the concept. For example, a young child who appears to a parent as not quite ready to understand a certain message. Hashem demonstrated that just as a Divine message can penetrate even a rock and compel it to serve Hashem, we must speak to and be mechaneich even someone with limited understanding, as eventually the lessons will penetrate.

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from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiy@theyeshiva.net>

date: Jul 11, 2024, 3:22 PM

subject: A Finger on the Pulse of Our Generation - Essay by Rabbi YY

#### A Finger on the Pulse of Our Generation: Why Was Moses Denied The Promised Land?

Slaves Respond to a Stick; Free People Need Inspiration

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

#### From Abstract to Concrete

There was a rabbi known for his constant preaching about the need to nurture children with warmth and love. One time he noticed some children who were playing in the freshly laid concrete outside his newly renovated home, their little feet leaving lasting impressions. He became irritated and started chastising the children.

A congregant asked, "How can you, a person who devoted his entire life to teaching warmth to children, speak this way?" To which the rabbi replied: "You must understand. I love children in the abstract, not the concrete."

#### Speak to the Rock

At last, the moment had arrived. For 40 years they had wandered together in a wilderness. Most of the older generation had already passed on. Even the beloved Miriam was no more. By now, the young nation of Israel was finally ready to enter the Promised Land, under the leadership of Moses. However, an incident occurred that would transform the nation's destiny.

"The congregation had no water," the weekly Torah portion Chukas relates[1], "so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses, saying, 'If only we had died with the death of our brothers before the Lord. Why have you brought the congregation of the Lord to this desert so that we and our livestock should die there? Why have you taken us out of Egypt to bring us to this bad place; it is not a place for seeds or fig trees, grapevines, or pomegranate trees, and there is no water to drink...!'

"G-d spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock in their presence so that it will give forth its water. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock, and give the congregation and their livestock to drink.'

"Moses took the staff from before the Lord as He had commanded him. Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock, and he said to them, 'Now listen, you rebels, can we draw water for you from this rock?'

"Moses raised his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice when an abundance of water gushed forth, and the congregation and their livestock drank.

"G-d said to Moses and Aaron, 'Since you did not have faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them.'"

#### The Questions

What exactly was Moses' and Aaron's sin? What did they do wrong? G-d instructed them to produce water from a rock and quench the thirst of the people. This they did. Why were they penalized?

The most famous answer is presented by Rashi. A subtle examination of the text reveals the nature of Moses' and Aaron's transgression. G-d told Moses to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses struck the rock (his brother Aaron complied). It was this error of Moses that prevented him from entering the Holy Land.

Yet, this explanation leaves us with many questions. Here are a few of them.

- 1) What compelled Moses to make the change? If G-d instructed him to speak to the rock, why did he strike it?
- 2) Does it make a difference whether you communicate to a rock verbally or by force? The miracle is the same if you get the water through your mouth or your staff!
- 3) Why was Moses punished so severely for this sin, as to be denied his dream to enter the Promised Land? A penalty ought to be commensurate with the sin!
- 4) G-d claimed that by striking the rock, Moses and Aaron failed to sanctify His name. How so?
- 5) Why did Moses need to strike the rock twice before it would emit abundant water? If G-d did not allow the water to come out after the first blow because it was contrary to His will, why did He allow the water to flow after the second blow?

Forty Years Earlier

Forty years earlier, shortly after the Egyptian exodus, a similar incident occurred. But in that instance, G-d told Moses to strike the rock[2]. Here is the story in Exodus: "There was no water for the people to drink. So the people quarreled with Moses, saying, 'Give us water that we may drink!' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test G-d?' "The people thirsted there for water, and complained against Moses, saying, 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to make me and my children and my livestock die of thirst?' "Moses cried out to G-d, saying, 'What shall I do for this people? Just a little longer and they will stone me!'

"G-d said to Moses... 'take into your hand your staff, with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I shall stand there before you on the rock in Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink.'

"Moses did so before the eyes of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah [testing] and Meribah [quarreling] because of the quarrel of the children of Israel and because of their testing G-d, saying, 'Is the Lord in our midst or not?'

This episode might explain why 40 years later Moses was under the impression that striking the rock was the way to go. After all, G-d Himself commanded him once before to smite the rock in order to produce its waters. Why did G-d indeed change His position? What is the reason that in the first incident, G-d instructed Moses to strike the rock, while in the second incident, He insisted on verbal communication? And the difference must have been so colossal -- as to jeopardize Moses' entry into the Land!

#### A Process of Education

Over the centuries, more than one hundred different interpretations have been offered to explain this disturbing episode. Today, I wish to present only one, based on a Midrashic tradition.

This particular Midrash, known as Yalkut Shiloni, makes the following comment[3]: "Speak to the rock, do not strike it. G-d told Moses, 'When a child is young, the educator may [at times] hit the lad in order to teach. When the child grows into adulthood, however, the educator must rebuke verbally. Similarly, when the rock was but a 'small child,' I instructed you to strike it; but now [after 40 years when it has grown larger] you must only speak to it. Teach it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water.'

This is a strange Midrash. What is the comparison between a rock and a child? And how are you supposed to teach a rock a chapter of the Torah? Obviously, according to the Midrash, the story with the rock was more than a physical event concerning an attempt to draw water from a hard inanimate object. It was also a psychological and moral tale about how to educate and refine human "rocks" so that they can produce water.

#### A Rock Feels No Pain

"I am a rock," goes the famous ballad. "A rock feels no pain, and an island never cries." How do you open a sealed heart? Do you smite it or do you speak to it? Do you impact the rock by force or do you negotiate with it verbally, attempting to explain, persuade and enlighten?

When the Jewish people departed from Egypt after decades of physical and psychological oppression, they were slaves. Recall Moses' cry to G-d shortly after the Exodus[4], "What shall I do for this people? Just a little longer and they will stone me!"

There is a critical difference between slaves and free human beings. Slaves respond to orders. Free people do not. They must be educated, informed, instructed, and inspired -- for if not, they will not internalize the message and will never make it their own. Slave masters compel obedience through the stick, either literally or figuratively.

Free human beings must not be struck. They respond, not to power but to persuasion. They need to be spoken to. The difference between G-d's command then and now ("strike the rock" vs. "speak to the rock") represented the souls of two different generations: Jews who grew up in slavery and Jews who grew up in freedom. You strike a slave, but speak to a free person.

That is why the generation that emerged from Egyptian bondage was constantly rebelling, hollering, fighting, and arguing. They had simply been

through too much trauma to develop a sense of loyalty, confidence, optimism, hope, and an attitude of trust. They had been beaten for too long. The first time Moses encounters a Jew in Egypt he is being beaten by an Egyptian officer. Ultimately, this generation was emotionally unequipped to conquer and settle the Holy Land. They died in the desert.

The generation that departed Egypt possessed extraordinarily lofty souls, never to be repeated in our history. They are the founders of Jewish nationhood, the only generation to experience G-d face-to-face and enjoy His miracles for forty years. Their inner light was infinite, but the outer "rock" needed to be cracked. The "hard skin" they developed over 210 years in exile, needed to be penetrated before its inner vibrant and fresh waters could be discovered. That is why, immediately after the Exodus, G-d instructed Moses to strike the rock. At this point in Jewish history, smiting the "rock" was appropriate, indeed critical.

We all have moments in our lives when our hearts are in jail when we are so emotionally numb that we need a tough wake-up call, to break through the dense husks we created to protect ourselves from pain, love, and truth.

#### A New Generation

Forty years later, their children and grandchildren, born and raised in liberty and a highly spiritual environment, developed a sense of self quite different from their parents and grandparents. Forty years in the wilderness, in the presence of Moses, Aaron, and divine miracles, the nation had spiritually matured.

But suddenly, they, too, began to lament and kvetch about a lack of water. Yet a subtle reading of the text exposes us to a tune quite different from the tune present in their parents' cry 40 years earlier. This new generation of Jews asks only for water, not for meat or other delicacies. They do not express their craving to return to Egypt. Nor do they wish to stone Moses. They are simply terrified of the prospect of death by thirst. G-d was sensitive to the nuanced distinctions. He commanded Moses to speak to the rock, rather than strike it. "Now you must speak to it, teach it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water," in the above-recorded words of the Midrash. The Jews have come a long way.

The model of smiting must be replaced with the model of teaching and inspiring. The husk is not thick, you need not a staff, you need empathy and compassion. At that critical juncture, Moses was unable to metamorphose himself. Moses, who came to identify so deeply with the generation he painstakingly liberated from Egyptian genocide and slavery and worked incessantly for their development as a free and holy people, could not assume a new model of leadership. Moses, calling the people "rebels," struck the rock. He continued to employ the former method. And he struck it twice because when you attempt to change things through pressure, rather than through persuasion, you must always do it more than once.

Because of Moses' profound love and attachment to that generation — about whom he told G-d, that should He not forgive them, He could erase Moses' name from the Torah[5] — Moses did not abandon his connection to them even now.

That is why G-d told Moses, "You did not have faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel." Instead of trusting G-d's assessment of the new generation, and exposing their elevated spiritual status, instead of trusting G-d who trusted the people, believing in their potential to get it on their own, Moses diminished their state of consciousness. Moses' place, it turned out, was in the desert with his beloved people, these heroic souls who began the march from slavery to freedom.

The fact that Moses was not destined to enter the promised land was not a punishment, but the result of the truth that he belonged to the generation that left Egypt.

#### Two Types of Stones

The above explanation will explain another curious anomaly in the biblical description of the two incidents with the water. The description for the "rock" in the first incident is the Hebrew term "tzur." The description of the rock in the second incident is the Hebrew term "selah." Why? In English, we translate both Hebrew words — tzur and selah — to mean a rock.

But in Hebrew, there is a significant difference between the two terms. A *tzur* is a rock that is hard and solid both in its exterior and interior parts. It is all rock. A *selah*, on the other hand, is a rock that is hard and rocky on its outside, but its interior contains water or moisture[6].

When you are dealing with a "rock" that has no moisture stored in it, you have no choice but to smite it. However, when you are confronted with a rock that is merely rocky on the outside but soft on the inside, you have no right to smite it. Now, you must speak to it and inspire it to reveal its internal waters of wisdom, love, and inspiration.

#### Understanding the Generation

Leaders, parents, and educators must always understand and feel the *zeitgeist* of their generation. There is a time when you strike the rock, and there is a time when you must talk to the rock.

To be sure, discipline is vital. It fosters self-confidence and responsibility, but only when it follows genuine love, safety, and attachment. If my child and student do not feel understood, celebrated, cherished, and safe, all forms of emotional striking might cause the rock to retreat behind heavier layers of rockness. You defeat your objective.

In the wise words of King Solomon[7]: "There is a time for everything under the heaven... A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to wreck and a time to build... A time to embrace and a time to shun embrace... A time to love and a time to loathe; a time for war and a time for peace." May we add: A time for smiting a rock and a time for speaking to a rock. We must always be ready to change our mentality based on the reality confronting us.

But we can only do this for others if we do it for ourselves. If the only method I know is to strike my own inner rock, this is what I will do to my children and students. Only when I learn how to speak with empathy to my own inner rock, can I radiate this to my loved ones.

When the opportunity is ripe for love and respect, when you see that you can change reality through empathy, enlightenment, and seeing the infinite light stored inside the rock, you must employ this path with the same vigor and passion that you employed previously the method of coercion. Only then can you mold a generation that is ready to change the world and enter their Promised Land.

(This essay is based on a discourse by the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, the third Chabad Rebbe (1789-1866); and on a discourse of the year 1872 by his youngest son, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1834-1882); and on a discourse of 1909 by his son, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch (1860-1920) [8]).

[1] Numbers 20:2:12.

[2] Exodus 17:2-7.

[3] *Yalkut Shimoni Chukas Remez* 763 toward the end. This book is one of the most popular early Midrashic collections on the Bible, compiled by Rabbi Shimon Ashkenazi HaDarshan of Frankfurt (circa 1260). Many Midrashim are known only because they are cited in this work.

[4] Exodus 17:2-7.

[5] Exodus 32:32.

[6] An interesting observation only demonstrates the extraordinary meticulousness of the Hebrew tongue. The word *selah* is comprised of three Hebrew letters, *samach*, *lamed* and *ayin*. Now, when you spell out the letter *samach* fully, the middle letter will be *mem*. When you spell out the letter *lamed*, the middle letter is *mem*. Finally, when you spell out *ayin*, the middle letter is *yud*. Together they make up the word *mayim*, which means water. This represents the fact that the *selah* is only rock on its outside. But if you probe its strata, and you reach its most inner point, you will encounter water. (Beer Mayim Chaim Chukas).

[7] Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

[8] These discourses are published in *Or HaTorah Chukas*; *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5632 vol. 2 *Parshas Chukas*; *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5669 *Parshas Chukas*. Some of their ideas may be based on *Klei Yakar*'s final explanation of this episode (*Klei Yakar* to *Numbers* Ibid.).

Office of the Chief Rabbi - Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

#### Chukat

##### The best way to influence people.

##### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

People will most likely be influenced by you, if they know that you love them.

In *Parshat Chukat*, we're told about the sad passing of Aharon, the High Priest, and the reaction of the people to his passing was quite extraordinary. The Torah tells us "vayivku oto shlosim yom kol Beit Yisrael" – the entire house of Israel wept for him for thirty days.

When Aharon's brother Moshe, the leader of the nation, passed away, as is described in the last chapter of the Torah, again we are told there that the nation wept for him for thirty days.

However, we are not told 'kol Beit Yisrael', the entire house of Israel.

Why this difference?

The *sifrei* explains Moshe's role was to be the national authority.

Rav Yisroel Salanter used to say, "If I am a Rabbi and everybody loves me, I am not a Rabbi, and if I am a Rabbi and nobody loves me, I am not a mensch."

You cannot be an authority and carry out leadership with conviction, if you are trying to please everybody all the time.

Some decisions will be unpopular because you have to do what is right. And that was why the grief for Moshe was not as intense as it might have been.

Aharon's role however was very different.

He was the high Priest. He was the spiritual role model. He reached out to people with compassion and with love.

In *Pirkei Avot*, Hillel tells us 'Hevei MiTalmidav shel Aharon', all of us should be like the disciples of Aharon: 'ohev shalom v'rodef shalom' – like Aharon we need to love peace and pursue it.

'Ohev et habriot umerkarvan laTorah' – and like Aharon we should love everybody and bring them close to Torah.

Notice, the two are connected, because you only stand a good chance of bringing people close to Torah, if they know that you love them.

If you want to enhance the lives of others, if you want them to improve their ways, if you want to inspire, guide and influence them, they need to know that you're doing it because you're interested in them – because you love them.

From Aharon we learn that if I would like to influence and inspire you, then you need to know that I want you to be the best you that you can possibly be and not because I want you to be just like me.

Shabbat Shalom

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<https://rabbiefremgoldberg.org/>

#### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

##### The Infinite Depth of Profundity of Each and Every Mitzva

Parshas Chukas begins with the mitzva of *parah adumah*, which is often seen as the quintessential *chok* – law whose reasoning and rationale elude our comprehension. We cannot possibly understand how burning a red cow, and then mixing its ashes with water, which is sprinkled on a person who had become *tamei* (impure), makes him *tahor* (pure). This all seems very random. This mitzva does not appear to have any logic. The Torah therefore introduces this section with the words *הזהר והזקח זאת*, pronouncing that these laws are a *chok*, a law which we must faithfully obey despite our inability to understand its reason.

Many commentators raised the question of why the Torah introduces this mitzva with the expression *הזהר והזקח זאת*, rather than *הפרא והזקח זאת*. If the Torah wants to teach us that the law of the *parah adumah* is a *chok*, then it should refer to it as *הפרא חוקת הזהר* – the inscrutable law of the *parah adumah*. But instead, the Torah speaks of this law as *הזהר חוקת התורה* – the statute of the Torah," as though it somehow embodies the entire Torah. Why?

The *Beis Ha'levi* explains that this mitzva is called *חוקת התורה* because it sheds light on the nature of all mitzvos in the Torah. Many other mitzvos

have reasons which we can understand, and numerous scholars throughout the ages have uncovered these reasons. However, the Beis Ha'levi writes, we must not make the mistake of thinking that these explanations exhaust the full depth of the meaning and significance of the mitzvos. To the contrary, any reasons that we can find barely begin to scratch the surface of the profundity of the Torah's laws. The true reasons behind the mitzvos are far deeper than the furthest limits of human comprehension can grasp. In this sense, the Beis Ha'levi explains, the law of the Torah פָּרָה אֲדֹמָה – the statute of the Torah." The mysterious, inscrutable nature of this mitzva must inform our attitude toward all mitzvos. Just as we cannot even begin to understand the reason behind the פָּרָה אֲדֹמָה, we are similarly incapable of fully comprehending the reasons behind any other mitzva.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, adds that the Beis Ha'levi's insight is expressed in the term used by halachic texts in reference to the third Shabbos meal – **סעודה שליש**, which means, "three meals." This term seems very odd.

After all, this is just one meal, not three. Indeed, many prefer the term **שלישת טעודה** – the third meal," which more accurately expresses what this meal is. In halachic jargon, however, this meal is known as **סעודה שליש**. The common explanation for this term is that this meal reflects the nature of all three Shabbos meals. When we eat a meal on Friday night, there is no clear indication that we eat for the sake of honoring Shabbos, because we eat supper every night. The same is true of Shabbos lunch. **סעודה שליש**, by contrast, is generally eaten when we do not have much of an appetite. In the winter, particularly, **סעודה שליש** is eaten not long after we completed a big lunch, when we are not very interested in eating a meal. This meal, then, is truly **שליש** – the embodiment of all three Shabbos meals, as it demonstrates that they were all eaten not simply because we wanted to eat, but in fulfillment of the mitzva to give honor to Shabbos.

By the same token, the mitzva of **פָּרָה אֲדֹמָה** reflects the nature of our observance of all the Torah's mitzvos. Just as we clearly recognize our inability to understand this mitzva, so must we acknowledge the infinite depth and profundity of all the mitzvos, even those whose reasoning we can comprehend on some level.

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fw from allen.klein@gmail.com  
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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

## **Weekly Parsha CHUKAT**

### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The Torah interrupts, so to speak, its narrative of the events that befell the Jewish people in the desert with the description of a commandment that admittedly has no rational human understanding in logical terms. Even the great King Solomon, the wisest and most analytical of all humans, was forced to admit that understanding this parsha of the Torah was beyond his most gifted intellect and talents.

If the Torah is meant to instruct us in life and its values, to improve and influence our behavior and lifestyle and to help us achieve our goal of being a holy people then why insert this parsha in the Torah when it can seemingly have no practical impact on our daily life or broaden our understanding of God's omnipresence in our lives?

Though there is a section of Mishna devoted to the laws and halachic technicalities of the sacrifice of the "red cow" it does not deal with the underlying motives for the existence of this commandment, and it also does not address why this parsha is inserted in the midst of the description of the events that occurred in the desert to the generation of Jews who left Egypt and stood at Mount Sinai.

We have historical record and description in the Mishna and from non-rabbinic sources as to the actual performance of the commandment in Temple times. This comes as a reminder of our necessary obeisance to God's commandments even if they are not always subject to actual human

understanding. Yet, some glimmer of comprehension is demanded by us to make this parsha meaningful to us.

I think that perhaps the Torah comes to point out the very fact that human life is in fact always irrational and that human behavior many times defies any logic or good sense. How could the generation that left Egypt and witnessed the revelation at Sinai complain about food when there was adequate Heavenly food? How could they prefer Egypt or the desert itself over living in the Land of Israel? And how could Moshe's and Aharon's own tribe and relatives rise against them in defiant and open rebellion? Are these not basically incoherent and irrational decisions with a terrible downside to them? And yet they occurred and continue to recur constantly in Jewish and general life throughout history. In spite of our best efforts and our constant delusion that we exist in a rational world, the Torah here comes to inform us that that is a false premise.

If everyday life defies logic and accurate prediction then it is most unfair and in fact illogical to demand of Torah and God to provide us with perfect understanding of commandments and laws. The Torah inserts this parsha into the middle of its narrative about the adventures of the Jewish people in the desert to point out that the mysteries of life abound in the spiritual world just as they do in the mundane and seemingly practical world.

One of the great lessons of Judaism is that we are to attempt to behave rationally even if at the very same time, we realize that much in our personal and national lives is simply beyond our understanding.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - The Power Of Prayer  
Parshas Chukas

### **The Power Of Prayer**

"And Moshe sent emissaries from Kadesh to the king of Edom..."(20:14) Moshe sends a delegation to the king of Edom requesting permission to pass through his country. He instructs his emissaries to relate the Jews' experience in Egypt to the king. The Torah records that one of the statements which was made to the king was "vanitz'ak el Hashem vayishma koleinu" – "and we cried out to Hashem and He heard our voice".<sup>1</sup> From the fact that the verse states that Hashem heard our voice, rather than our cries, Rashi interprets that Moshe is sending a warning to Edom that we have the legacy of our Patriarchal blessing received from Yitzchak, "hakol kol Yaakov", the power of the voice of Torah; Bnei Yisroel are infused with the blessing that when we pray, we are answered.<sup>2</sup>

The king of Edom responds by saying that he will come out with sword in hand if Bnei Yisroel attempt to traverse his land. Rashi again comments that through his words the king of Edom is invoking the Patriarchal legacy which was conferred upon Eisav, the father of Edom, "by the sword you shall live".<sup>3</sup>

Moshe must have been aware that just as Bnei Yisroel have the power of prayer to facilitate their success, the Edomites have the power of war. Why does Moshe assume that Bnei Yisroel's Patriarchal legacy is superior?

The key to solving this dilemma lies in Rashi's comment on the preceding verse. The emissaries relate "and with us the Egyptians dealt evilly and with our fathers."<sup>4</sup> The construct of the verse appears convoluted. Why does the verse not simply state that "the Egyptians dealt evilly with us and our fathers"? Rashi explains that the verse is stressing the notion that the affliction suffered by our fathers is a byproduct of our affliction. The "fathers" referred to in the verse are not our biological fathers who endured the servitude in Egypt with us, rather our Patriarchal Fathers who, although they were not present with us in Egypt, suffered our pain.<sup>5</sup>

Why is it necessary for Moshe to allude to this concept in his message to the king of Edom? The power of prayer which Bnei Yisroel have rests not only in our capacity to extricate ourselves from our own predicament, but also in

our ability to relieve our Patriarchs of the distress caused to them by our situation. It is this ability which motivates Hashem to answer our prayers, not only in our merit, but in the merit of our Forefathers as well. The ability with which Edom is imbued benefits only them, and not their forefathers. Their forefathers do not feel the distress of the later generations, for they do not enjoy a closeness to them as do the Forefathers of Bnei Yisroel to the Jewish nation.

1.20:16 2.Rashi ibid. 3.Ibid. 4.20:15 5.Ibid.

Community Minded

“And Moshe raised his arm and struck the rock...” (20:11)

The Talmud relates that after Miriam died, the well, which was a water source for Bnei Yisroel in the desert, disappeared. 1 Hashem commanded Moshe to bring forth water from a rock. The Torah records that Moshe and Aharon sinned. 2 However, the exact nature of the sin is not specified in the verses. Rashi understands that Moshe’s sin was a result of striking the rock to bring forth water rather than communicating with it. 3 The Ramban questions Rashi’s approach, for Hashem instructed Moshe to take the staff from the Holy of Holies and bring it with him. If Hashem had not intended for Moshe to strike the rock, why had He commanded Moshe to bring the staff along with him?<sup>4</sup>

The Maharsha points out an apparent contradiction between two Talmudic statements: The Talmud in Tractate Ta’anis relates that the well, the source of water for the entire Bnei Yisroel, was in the merit of the prophetess Miriam. 5 However, the Talmud in Tractate Bava Metzia relates that since Avraham Avinu supplied the angels with water, his descendants had water in the desert. Was the well in the merit of Avraham or Miriam?<sup>6</sup>

The Talmud states that the merits of an individual help for the needs of that individual. However, an environmental change that will benefit the needs of many can only be achieved through the merits of the entire community. 7 An individual is generally concerned with his own short-term needs and of those close to him, while the responsibility and concern for long-term needs is borne by the community. A community, by nature, is an ongoing perpetual entity and therefore, it has the responsibility to ensure that not only its short-term needs are met, but, to whatever extent possible, that all of its future members’ needs will be met as well. Consequently, all matters that might have long-term societal implications such as ecological and environmental issues must be addressed on a communal level, and then filtered down to the individuals. For a miracle to occur which would create a long-term environmental change, Bnei Yisroel had to ask as a community.

Once the well of Miriam was no longer available in the desert, the individual was concerned with his immediate need for water. Hashem instructed Moshe to give over the message to Bnei Yisroel that they should not request water to satiate only their individual needs, rather that their concern should be on a communal level, for this would ensure the availability of a long-term reservoir that would serve as a perpetual source of water. The staff symbolizes leadership, as we find in the blessing to Yehuda “the staff will not depart from Yehuda”. 8 Moshe was not instructed to bring along the staff in order to strike the rock, rather as a representation of his leadership, for as leader he would herald the energies of the entire community, bringing them together to request a perpetual water source.

In Avraham’s merit the needs of the individual were met. What Miriam’s merit accomplished was that Bnei Yisroel would have a perpetual source of water for the ongoing community. The Talmud refers to this quality of Miriam an “parnes”, a person who ensures that all of the needs of the entire community are met.<sup>9</sup>

1.Ta’anis 9a 2.20:12 3.20:11 4.20:1 5.9a 6.86b, See Maharsha 7.Ta’anis 9a.

8.Ibid., See Rashi 9.Ta’anis ibid

## 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

### **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'emantem 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.]

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#### **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 "kehah" and "eydah", but these two words in Chumash are usually synonymous. [It should be noted that Malbim disagrees.]

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#### **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).

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#### **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.

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#### **COMMAND #5 - Give drink to the people and their animals. (20:8)**

MOSHE'S EXECUTION:

"...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.

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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 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 "chilul 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 Chorev; 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'eydut" - [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 - "matey'hu").

[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 "kivrot 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); Kaleb 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 been 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, lmei 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 "l'mei m'riva".
4. Read Devarim 32:51. What does "m'altem" mean?

( What is "me'liah", 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.

#### **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 "girma" 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 year 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'mergalim* 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 KADESH 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, KADESH in 1:46 must be KADESH 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 KADESH in 1:46 must be KADESH 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 **for PARSHAT PARAH - Maftir**

### WHAT'S A CHOK, AND WHAT'S A TORAH?

What does the phrase CHUKAT HA'TORAH (19:2) mean? Usually, the word TORAH is understood as 'the entire Chumash', while CHOK is understood as a 'law without reason'; and hence - the laws of Parah Adumah become the example 'par excellance' of a CHOK that doesn't make any sense - correct?

In the following shiur we suggest an alternate definition for the words CHOK and TORAH that will help us not only make sense out of the complex details of these laws, but will also help us uncover a deeper understanding of this enigmatic opening phrase.

### INTRODUCTION

Recall our explanation of the word Torah in our study of Parshat Tzav. In that shiur we concluded that the word TORAH (at least in Sefer Vayikra) refers to a PROCEDURAL law - i.e. a set of actions that must be taken in order to complete a certain process. For example, in Parshat Tzav, "zot TORAT ha'mincha..." (see 6:7-10) is translated: "this is the PROCEDURE for offering the korban mincha" - for it details HOW the kohanim are to offer it. Similarly, TORAT HA'CHATAT introduces the laws of HOW the "korban chatat" is to be offered (see 6:18 and 7:1).

In a similar manner, we can explain the word TORAH in Parshat Parah! Therefore, we will begin our shiur by identifying the specific procedure that TORAH refers to in Bamidbar chapter 19, i.e Parshat Parah.

### TWO PROCEDURES IN THE LAWS OF TUMAT MEYT

For those of you who are not familiar with the basic laws of "tumat meyt", let's review a few basics. According to Jewish law, if a person touches (or is in the same room with) a dead body, he becomes "tamey" [spiritually unclean], and hence he is not permitted to enter the Temple courtyard. To rid himself of this "tumah", a special procedure is required. He must be sprinkled by a solution of spring water mixed with the ashes of the "para adumah". This sprinkling must take place after three days, and then again on the seventh day. At sunset of that seventh day, he becomes "tahor" and is then permitted to enter the Temple.

As we will soon explain in more detail, there are two distinct procedures [and hence TOROT] that are required in order to complete this ritual of "tahara" from "tumat meyt":

PROCEDURE #1 - Making the 'ashes' of the parah adumah.

[as detailed in 19:2-9!]

PROCEDURE #2 - Sprinkling these ashes (mixed with water).[as detailed in 19:17-19!]

Before we take a closer look at these psukim to show how these two procedures contain many CHUKIM as well, we must first explain what a CHOK" is.

### WHAT'S A CHOK?

Actually, let's first explain what a CHOK isn't! In contrast to popular opinion, a CHOK (by definition) is not a law that doesn't make sense. [As we will see, the fact that a CHOK doesn't always make sense may be a characteristic, but certainly not a definition.]

To clarify this, let's take an example from a law that you are all familiar with: the Korban Pesach. Everyone knows why we offer the Korban Pesach - to commemorate how God saved Am Yisrael from the Tenth Plague. Certainly, this mitzvah makes a lot of sense, but to your surprise - the Torah refers to this law as a CHOK and gives a reason! Let's take a look:

"... and you should keep this commandment (of Korban Pesach) as a CHOK for you and your children for ever. When you come into the Land that God shall give you... keep this ritual. And when your children will ask: What is this ritual for you? Tell them it is the Pesach offering, for God passed over the houses of Bnei Yisrael when He smote the Egyptians..." (Shmot 12:24-27!)

In fact, not only Korban Pesach, but ALL of the Jewish Holidays are defined as CHUKIM (in Parshat Emor - see Vayikra 23:14,21,31 & 41), in regard to the fact that they must be kept forever during the cycle of the year!

The reason why is quite simple. The word "chok" describes a fixed law or statute. In fact, Chumash even uses the word "chok" to describe statutes that are not mitzvot. For example, when Sefer Breishit describes how Yosef purchased of the land from the Egyptians, we are informed that he cannot acquire the land belonging to the priests - because:

"... it is the CHOK of the priests by Pharaoh, that they eat their portion [lechem CHUKAM] that Pharaoh had given them..."

(See Breishit 47:20-22 and its context)

For a similar reason, when Bnei Yisrael are required to produce a certain daily output of bricks, Sefer Shmot describes this set quota as a CHOK:

"...and the taskmasters of Bnei Yisrael scolded them saying - Why did you not complete CHOK'CHEM [your quota] to make bricks as before..." (see Shmot 5:14 and its context)

Note also how Yirmiyahu refers to the laws of astronomy, i.e. the constant and unchanging cycles of the sun and moon around the earth, as "CHUKOT shamayim v'aretz" (see Yirmiyahu 33:25 and even better, see Yirmiyahu 31:35-36!).

For this reason, the holidays in Parshat Emor are referred to as CHUKIM for they celebrated on a REGULAR basis, once a year based on the solar (agricultural) calendar. Once again, a "chok" implies something constant that doesn't change - a statute.

Therefore, in regard to "tumat meyt" - the law that a person who touches a dead body becomes "tamey" for seven days should definitely be considered a "chok" - for it is a law that never changes - it remains constant.

[In modern Hebrew we find a similar use, where the 'laws of nature' are called CHUKEI ha'TEVA. Take for example Newton's laws of motion - they are set by definition, and don't change.]

Based on this definition, a CHOK can be logical, but it doesn't have to be! Certain CHUKIM may be beyond our comprehension, however many other CHUKIM can actually make a lot of sense. Therefore we find some "chukim" that are quite

logical, while others are not - however, an 'unlogical law' does not define a CHOK!

In contrast, a MISHPAT, as its name implies, is a JUDGEMENT - based on reason. The very concept of a MISHPAT relates to a decision or judgement that must be made between two claims. Hence, the Torah refers to the entire set of civil laws relating to damages etc. in Shmot chapters 21->23 as MISHPATIM (see Shmot 21:1 & 24:3).

With this background, let's read through Parshat Parah and attempt to identify more precisely where we find a TORAH and where we find a CHOK, and how they relate to one another. As we read, we will notice how the chapter neatly divides into two halves, according to the two procedures that we mentioned above.

[As a teacher's note - to explain this concept of TORAH as a procedure, take the word 'recipe' as an example. A recipe demands a certain procedure to attain a certain goal, i.e. a sponge cake recipe requires that we take 4 eggs, flour, water, sugar; mix them into a batter, and bake it etc. The result - a cake - and hence the recipe card is titled: Sponge cake. In a similar manner, the Parshat Parah informs us of the proper 'recipe' [i.e. the TORAH] to make the ashes for "efer parah"]]

### PROCEDURE #1 & its CHUKIM

Recall that our first PROCEDURE [TORAH] defines how the "efer ha'parah" (the ashes that will later be used for sprinkling) are to be prepared. Note how 19:2-6 describes the first set of necessary procedures [or recipe] to make this "efer parah":

19:2-3 Take a red heifer (one without a blemish) and give it to Elazar (the deputy high priest) who must slaughter it outside the camp.

19:4 Sprinkle the blood of the heifer seven times opposite the entrance to the Ohel Moed.

19:5-6 Burn the carcass of the heifer together with branches from both a hyssop and cedar tree, etc., until in turns into ashes.

Now that the 'ashes' have been prepared, the Torah informs us of two special CHUKIM that accompany this process:

19:7 - The kohen who PERFORMS this procedure becomes "tamey" [that's a CHOK], therefore he must wash his clothes and remains "tamey" until the evening ["tumat yom"].

19:8 - The kohen who BURNS the animal becomes "tamey" [that's also a CHOK], and must wash his clothes etc.

Then we continue with the final stages of this procedure:

19:9 A clean person must COLLECT the ashes and stores them outside the camp. This is actually the final stage of the procedure [i.e. part of the TORAH].

19:10 This person who collects the ashes also become "tamey" [just like the other two]. That's yet another CHOK!

Hence, we find that this specific procedure of making the "efer" is accompanied by several special CHUKIM. Note how these CHUKIM, even though they are not an integral part of the procedure, they are a direct consequence - and therefore should be defined as related "chukim" [statutes], but not an integral part of the TORAH.

[If we use again our "mashal" from the cake recipe, the person mixing the batter must later wash his hands, but that does not affect how the cake comes out!]

To prove these definitions, let's take a more careful look at this last pasuk, as it explains the purpose of this procedure. i.e. for these ashes must be used for the CHOK of "tumat meyt":.

"The person who collects the ashes must wash his clothes, and [these ashes] are to be [used] for Bnei Yisrael for a CHUKAT OLAM - an everlasting statute [i.e. the CHOK of:] - One who touches a dead body becomes "tamey" for seven days. If he is sprinkled upon on the third & seventh day, he becomes "tahor"; if not he remains "tamey"... and should he enter the Mikdash, he is to be cut off from Israel."

(see 19:10-13)

These psukim end the first section of Parshat Parah. Now that the "efer" is prepared, we are ready to discuss the second TORAH [procedure] found in this chapter, i.e. the precise details of this 'sprinkling process' - known in Hebrew as "torat ha'haza'ah".

### PROCEDURE #2 and its CHUKIM

Let's take a look now at 19:14. Note how this pasuk (at first glance) seems to contradict our definition of a TORAH:

"And this is the TORAH - a person who dies in a tent, everything in the tent becomes tamey [unclean] for seven days. And any open vessel... it too becomes tamey..."

(19:14-15)

Based on our above definitions of CHOK & TORAH, this law [of how one contracts "tumat meyt"] should be considered a "chok" for it describes a set law that never changes! Why then does 19:14 introduce this law as a TORAH?

The answer is quite simple. If one reads the next set of psukim carefully, it becomes clear that the phrase "ZOT HA'TORAH" in 19:14 is INTRODUCING the procedure that is defined later on 19:17-19. Or, in other words, we need to add the word 'for' in 19:14 [i.e. a "lamed" after "zot ha'torah L'adam asher yamut b'ohel..."] [which is implicit based on the context]. In this manner, 19:14-16 should be translated as follows:

"This is the TORAH - FOR:

a) the case when a person dies in a tent, then everything in the tent becomes "tamey" (19:14), [and for...]

b) any open vessel in that tent (19:15), or

c) any person who touched a dead body in the field or bone or grave (who also becomes "tamey" (19:16)

THEN: for any of these "tamey" persons or objects, we must take from the "efer" [the ashes of the heifer] and put it into a vessel with water (see 19:17) in order to perform PROCEDURE #2 [i.e. "torat ha'za'ah"], as explained in the next set of psukim:

"A person who is TAHOR [clean] shall take an hyssop branch, dip it in the water [mixed with the ashes], and then sprinkle it on (either) the tent and vessels, or on the person who touched the bones... or who touched a grave..."

(see 19:18).

This procedure, as described in 19:18, was first introduced by the phrase "zot ha'TORAH" in 19:14. The next pasuk (19:19) informs us that this procedure must be repeated on both the third and seventh days (see 19:19).

### THE CHUKIM OF PROCEDURE #2

This second procedure, just like the first procedure, is also accompanied by certain consequential "chukim":

a) he who sprinkles the water becomes "tamey" (19:21);

b) anyone who touches this water also becomes "tamey"

(19:22).

[i.e. "tamey for one day, he must wash his clothes and then he becomes "tahor" at sunset.]

Note how both Procedures #1 and #2 carry with them very similar consequential CHUKIM, i.e. anyone who is involved in this process of either making the "efer", or sprinkling it on someone else, becomes "tamey".

### CHUKAT ha'TORAH

Based on these definitions, we can suggest an explanation for the opening phrase "CHUKAT ha'TORAH" that introduces these laws (see 19:1). As we have shown, this chapter contains many special CHUKIM that relate to the TORAH (procedures) of "tahara" from "tumat meyt", i.e. (1) making the ashes and (2) sprinkling the "mei chatat" - water w/ashes.

Each of these two procedures carry special "chukim" that accompany these procedures: The special chukim all have one common denominator. Anyone involved in these procedures for cleansing one who is "tamey" - he himself becomes "tamey". This strange CHOK that by making someone else TAHOR you become TAMEY is an inherit 'statute' [CHOK] of this 'procedure' [TORAH]. Hence, this may be the technical meaning of this

introductory phrase "chukat ha'torah", i.e.

- the CHOK that everyone involved becomes "tamey" in
- the TORAH [procedure] required to cleanse "tumat meyt".

Clearly, this CHOK appears to negate all logic - for why should the person involved in the process of making someone else TAHOR become TAMEY? For this reason, this specific CHOK becomes a classic example of a law that doesn't make sense, HOWEVER, this does not mean that the definition of a CHOK is a law that doesn't make sense! As we explained above, a CHOK is a set law. CHUKIM don't have to make sense, but certainly it is OK if they do.

## THE RAMBAM

A similar explanation of CHUKIM is found in the Rambam in his concluding section of Sefer Avodah in Hilchot Meilla. Note how Rambam differentiates between CHUKIM and MISHPATIM:

"... the MISHPATIM are laws whose reason is evident ["taamam geluyah"] and the benefit for keeping them is apparent in this world, e.g. the prohibition to steal or to murder, or honoring one's parents; while the CHUKIM are laws whose reason is not evident ["taamam eino geluyah"]... and the laws of Korbanot fall under category of CHUKIM..." [see Hilchot Meilla 8:8]

Note the examples that Rambam uses for Mishpatim - stealing, murder, and honoring one's parents. Even though these are mitzvot in the Torah, they are based on a very obvious rational. Even without the Torah, most societies establish similar laws for they are based on common sense. In contrast, CHUKIM are divine decrees and as such do not necessarily need to be based on any obvious reason. Nevertheless, note how Rambam demands that we make every effort to understand God's reason for the CHUKIM as well:

"It is fitting that one should contemplate the laws of the Torah to understand their reasoning to the best of his ability. But should he find a law that he does not understand (or does not make sense to him)... he should not conclude that they are any less important, rather he must keep them and treat them with the utmost respect... (see Meillah - beginning of 8:8)

Even though CHUKIM (by their very nature) don't have to make sense ["ein taamam glu'yah"], nevertheless Rambam implores that we make every effort to try to understand them. Should one be unable to find a reason for a certain CHOK, he must relate this lack of understanding to his own inability to grasp God's infinite wisdom rather than conclude that the CHOK has no purpose.

[Note for example how Ramban mentions if this final halacha that "korbanot" are a classic example of CHUKIM, yet in his MOREH NEVUCHIM he makes effort to explain the reason and logic for each and every type of korban! In fact, Rambam claims that if we were aware of all the various types of Avodah Zarah that existed in the time of Yetziat Mitzraim, we would be able to understand the reason for ALL of the CHUKIM of korbanot! [See Moreh III, the closing two paragraphs of chapter 49.] In fact, one could consider Rambam's attempt in Moreh Nevuchim to provide a reason for the various laws korbanot an example of what he suggested in Hilchot Meillah 8:8 - i.e. that we attempt with the best of our ability to understand the reasons for CHUKIM as well.]

This dialectic, where on the one hand we must 'blindly' accept each and every one of God's CHUKIM, even though we may not understand them, yet at the same time we are encouraged to make every intellectual effort to attempt to comprehend their reason - is a beautiful example of the challenge of our faith in God. In Judaism, our faith in God can only be enhanced by our constant quest for reason and truth.

shabbat shalom,

menachem

## ===== FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. In Sefer Devarim, it appears that the word TORAH is used in a very general context, referring to entire set of mitzvot including many chukim and mishpatim. See 1:5, 4:44 - "v'zot ha'Torah asher sam Moshe...", 27:3 etc.

However, if you remember our study of the main speech of Sefer Devarim, the use of the word Torah may remain in its original context as a procedure. To determine what the goal of that overall procedure is, note carefully 5:1-2, 5:28, 6:1, and most important -the closing psukim of that speech in 26:16-19, and relate to Shmot 19:5-6!

2. Can you find the logic of this chok that one who makes someone else tahor becomes tamey? Is there a law of 'the conservation of tumah'?! [Ask anyone in the "kiruv" business!]

3. Note that the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim III chapter 26 seems (at first glance) to contradict our above definitions, as well as himself in Hilchot Meillah 8:8. However, it is possible to reconcile this - but that is a very complicated shiur.

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 ("derech Yam Suf" and "as God commanded")- and KADESH in 1:46 can still be KADESH 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 KADESH 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 KADESH.

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

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#### **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.)

## 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 B 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) B 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 B they only mention Au-mayim ayin lish=tot@ (there is no water to drink) as an apparent afterthought B 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 Agood, wide land@ should have any of those resources?

In numerous essays, I=ve underscored that a successful reader of Tanakh must become Apart of the story@ B 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 B and we know that Moses will never enter the Land. We have to remember that none of the players know that until they do B either when it happens or when they are prophetically given that information.

The Israelites do not know where they are B 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 Aflowing 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 and 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* (Asham), we must have arrived at the Land!

We can now understand the catalyst for the crisis and the people believe that they've arrived but the *A*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 *A*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 *A*what=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): *A*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 *B* or disappointed with *B* 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 B as confirmed by v. 2
- 2) A disenchantment with the ALand@ 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 Ave-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 (Abekiu@) 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 Areal@ concordance; there are dozens of examples in the canon where the two are interchanged) and read, rather, Aspeak 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 Asin@**

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

Instead, Moses used the device of a rhetorical question to make his point Aha-min ha-sela ha-zeh notzi lakhem mayim?@ B but a rhetorical question will only work if the intended audience knows how to interpret it. When a teen=s mother declares ADo you call this a clean room@ B her son understands that she is calling it a mess B but if an immigrant has just moved in and she says the same thing B 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 B 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 Awizard@ 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 Alo tavo=u@ B you shall not come B rather Alo tavi=u@ B 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 Awaters 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 Abetween 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 Aanticipatory reading@, we allowed ourselves to be surprised by the text and to take a fresh look at this well-studied Parashah.

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