



המִזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



PARSHAT CHUKAT
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ISRAEL Parsha Picture

זאת חקמת התורה...
ויקחו אלהיכם פֶרֶה אַדְמָה
במדבר יט:ב

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INSPIRATION

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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All for One and One for All

The Beilis Trial and Shalit Release



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

From one of the most infamous blood libels against an innocent Jew emerges a pivotal lesson about the uniqueness of Jewish solidarity – about what it means to be a Jew.

The Mendel Beilis Blood Libel

A few days before Pesach in Kyiv in 1911, a young Christian boy who had been missing for days was found dead with his hands tied behind his back. An innocent unknown Jewish factory worker, Mendel Beilis, was arrested and falsely suspected of committing the murder. Christian priests began sermonizing that this was done purposely by the Jews in order to, G-d forbid, use young Christian blood for baking matzah for Pesach. Very soon, the knowledge of the terrible blood libel spread across the Jewish world and Jewish communities were shaken by this blatant display of anti-Semitism and the impending unjust potential death of Mendel Beilis. An extensive legal team including leading Christian academics was being gathered on behalf of the prosecution. The impending court case captured the attention of Jewish leaders around the world who understood that not only would an innocent fellow Jew be executed but in essence, the entire Jewish People and Judaism were being put on trial. Rabbinic and lay leaders rallied to provide the best defense for the helpless Beilis. A top lawyer at the time, Oskar Gruzenberg, was brought on board as head of the defense team. Rabbi Yaakov Maza, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, assembled

a consortium of Rabbis and researchers to assist in what undoubtedly would be a tough and biased trial.

Only a Jew is Considered a Person?

During the course of the trial, the following particularly challenging rabbinic source, based on a passuk from this week's parasha, was brought by the prosecution to highlight the ostensible disregard that the Jewish People had for non-Jewish life. Thereby, G-d forbid, Judaism could somehow justify such a terrible murder.

The context is a fascinating law about spiritual impurity: "This is the Law – a person who dies in a tent, that dead body spiritually contaminates for 7 days anyone who is in the tent or who enters into the tent". (Bamidbar 19:14).

This halachic principle is known as *לְאַתָּה תִּקְרֹב* – that one who is in the same room as a dead body contracts spiritual impurity even without any physical contact. Merely being under the same roof for the briefest time is enough to become impure, as Kohanim are familiar with today. Although the terminology in the verse is a general one – **'A person** who dies in a tent – **'אָדָם כִּי מֵת בְּאַתָּה**, our Sages learn that this applies **only to a Jewish** corpse. A human corpse contaminates through direct physical contact, yet only a Jewish corpse contaminates by just being under the same roof.

How does this general term of **אָדָם** – 'a person' become limited to apply only to Jews?

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai explained אתם קריין אדם ואין העובי כוכבים אדם – “Only you, the Jewish People, are considered ‘a person’ and the nations of the world are not considered as a person”.¹

The prosecutor wished to prove from the sharp language used by the Talmud that non-Jews are not considered to be people and hence, G-d forbid, sub-human. Rabbi Maza did not know how to adequately answer this question, especially against a biased judiciary.

►TN – Singular Jewish Solidarity

It was here that Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin gave a brilliant answer to this question which goes to the core of what Jewish solidarity is all about. He explained that there are four Hebrew words used in Tanach for ‘a person’ – אדם, איש, גבר וגוינו. Only three of these have a plural – אישים, גברים, אנוש-אנשים – humans or people. There is only one, אדם, which has no plural. There’s no such word as אדם. Rabbi Shapiro explained that herein lies the reason that אדם refers only to the Jewish People – Jews have the unique quality of a genuine care and concern for every Jew; a deep sense of camaraderie and shared fate and destiny. Would any other people care for a single unknown member of their people from somewhere across the world the way the Jewish People do? There is an unparalleled sense of solidarity – all for one and one for all. Rabbi Shapiro explained that the verse therefore in no way undermines other human beings or portrays them as less than Jews but rather highlights a particular unique quality of Jewish Peoplehood captured in the unique word אדם which is eternally singular and has no plural - care and concern for every single Jew wherever they are – almost as if we are all ‘one person’.²

Incredibly, this brilliant interpretation was accepted by the judges along with other strong evidence from the defense team and Beilis was amazingly acquitted. Although this trial is a stain in the long and dark history of anti-Semitism, it also serves as a shining example of



Would any other people care for a single unknown member of their people from somewhere across the world the way the Jewish People do?

אהבת ישראל – of Jewish solidarity for each and every Jew.

Ransom and Releasing Captives

The premium value of the life of a fellow Jew, throughout Jewish history was and is unfortunately cynically used against the Jewish people by their enemies. Often innocent Jews were hijacked or taken captive simply in order to demand outrageous ransom for their freedom. The Hijackers knew that Jews would pay almost any price to free a fellow Jew. So much so that one of the highest-profile Jewish leaders to be taken captive, the great Maharam of Rottenburg forbade the Jewish community to pay the ransom, choosing heroically to die in prison. He knew that if he agreed to the ridiculous ransom, it would not only impoverish his community but would lead to the kidnapping and extortion of other Jews who would subsequently be hijacked and ransomed.

Indeed, Jews have been prepared to pay almost anything for the mitzvah of “פדיון שבויים” – “releasing captives”. Hamas and Hezbollah and modern enemies of Israel understand this and cynically kidnap Israeli soldiers demanding impossible prices for their release. The most famous and recent example was the release of Gilad Shalit where Israel paid an exorbitant price for his release, exchanging many prisoners with blood on their hands and who have unfortunately subsequently murdered many Jews. The Jewish heart prods us to be prepared to pay almost any price for a fellow Jew.

This is also seen in this week’s Parsha where the Canaanites take one Jewish captive and immediately war is declared to secure their release.

וישמע הכנען מלך ערד ישב הנגב כי בא ישראל לך האתרים וליקם בישראל ויבש ממנה שבי:

“And the Canaanite King of Arad who resided in the Negev heard that Israel had arrived by way of the Aharim and came out to war with Israel and took from them a captive.”

Israel subsequently fought back in order to release this captive. The verse clearly talks of a **single** captive and Rashi cites the opinion of the Sages that this was a lowly member of society, a simple maid-servant. The lesson is clear – the Jewish People were prepared to declare war and risk their lives in order to return one unfairly captured simple fellow member of the tribe. This is not dissimilar from Avraham’s daring raid with 318 men of his household against major regional kings and their armies in order to return one family member, his errant nephew Lot. All for one and one for all.

A Great Lesson

Instead of using the unique quality of Jewish solidarity against the Jews through blood libels and kidnapping, others could learn a great lesson from Jewish life. By placing an unparalleled price on the value of a fellow Jew’s life, the Jewish People and Judaism serve as a shining example of the infinite value of every human life. All people as the Tanach unequivocally declares are created in the image of G-d. Instead of exploiting this beautiful quality others could learn to value the individual lives of all members of their people. In so doing all human life will be valued and the world would be a much better place.

1. Masechet Yevamot 61a
תני ואכן היה ר' שמואון בר יהחאי אמרו, קבורי עובדי כוכבים אין מתמאן באלה, שנאמר: "איתן צאני צאן מרעיטי אדם אתם" (יחזקאל לד,א) אתם קריין אדם ואין העובי כוכבים קריין אדם
2. Perhaps this also explains the above halacha itself - why specifically only a Jewish corpse contaminates by simply being under the same roof as it, even without any physical contact. The deep sense of solidarity of ‘being in the same boat’ together creates a meta-physical bond - one expressed in a connection by simply being under the same roof, independent of any physical contact.

PIRKEI AVOT

The Jewish Home

**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**

Educational Director, World Mizrachi

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יוסי בָן יוֹצֵר אִישׁ צְדָקָה וַיּוֹסֵי בָן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם קִבְלוּ מִרְמָה.

יְסוֹסִי בָן יוֹצֵר אִישׁ צְדָקָה אָוּמָר, הִי בַּיְתָךְ בֵּית וְעַד לְתַכְמִים, וְהוּא מַתְאַבֵּק בַּעֲפָר וְגַלְעָם, וְהוּא שׂוֹתָה בְּצַמְאָאת דְּבָרֶיךָם: (אבות א:ד)
יְסוֹסִי בָן יוֹחָנָן אִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אָוּמָר, הִי בַּיְתָךְ פָּתָחָת לְרֻבָּתָה, וְהִי עֲנָנִים בְּנֵי כִּימָה וְאֶל פְּרַבְּבָה שִׁיחָה עַם קָאָשָׁה... (אבות א:ה)

The Zugot

After Avot's first three mishnayot list the individuals (Moshe and Yehoshua) and groups (Zekeinim, Nevi'im, and Anshei Knesset Hagedolah) who transmitted the *mesorah*, the Mesechet introduces us to the *zugot* – the pairs who continued this chain together. As opposed to earlier and later periods, during the *zugot* period two people worked together on the joint mission of passing on the *mesorah*.

The mishnah in Chagigah (2:2) tells us that the first of each pair was the Nasi, while the second was the Av Beit Din. The two led the community by both deciding on contemporary matters and also by relaying past *mesorah* to future generations.

Rashi points out that these pairs were the beginning of *machloket* amongst the Jewish people. Divergent perspectives, and thus different opinions, concerning Torah matters developed. Despite the differences between them, though, each *zug* shared a certain commonality. We even see this in the similar names of the first *zug* – **Yossi ben Yoezer Ish Tz'redah** and **Yossi ben Yochanan Ish Yerushalayim**.

Each *zug* also worked together on a shared topic that they fleshed out in different ways. The two Yossi's of the first *zug* teach how to build the Jewish home – “*Yehi beit'cha...*” Yossi ben Yoezer speaks about the home being a place of Torah, while Yossi ben Yochanan presents it as a place of *chesed*. The *zug* applies the seminal statement of Shimon Hatzaddik¹ (about the world standing on the pillars of Torah and *gemilut chasadim*) to the context of the home.²

A Torah Home (Yossi Ben Yoezer)

Yossi ben Yoezer³ relates to the importance of Torah. His first statement directs us to

be “*mit'avek*” in the dust at the feet of Torah scholars. We are meant to sit at their feet to learn from their Torah⁴ and walk behind them to learn from their ways.⁵

His second statement encourages us to drink their words with thirst. We should utilize Torah teachings to quench the thirst we ought to have for meaning and direction.

Yossi's first statement – “May your home be the meeting place for scholars” – connects Torah learning to the home. Many commentators explain that hosting shiurim offers family members the opportunity to learn from the wisdom⁶ and behavior⁷ of Torah teachers. Additionally, one can suggest that Torah events in the home define its mission and purpose – they turn the home into a *makom Torah*. Many gatherings and activities go on day and night in homes throughout our communities. Our homes should be ones that host Torah gatherings.

Open and Inclusive (Yossi Ben Yochanan)

Yossi ben Yochanan, the second of this *zug*, speaks about a different aspect of the home – it being a place of *chesed*. He presents this from two perspectives. The first, “Your home should be wide open,” encourages us to be inviting to all those in need. Rabbeinu Yonah points to Avraham's home as a model. The Torah describes how Avraham sat outside his tent seeking guests, ran to invite them in, and rushed to serve them. In order to identify and encourage the maximum number of visitors, his tent had entrances facing every direction. We should learn from Avraham to be passionate about and maximize opportunities to host those in need.⁸

Yossi ben Yochanan's second statement, “The poor should be members of your household,” extends this idea further. One's home should not just be open to servicing the passerby or those in occasional need.

It should also include the poor as household members. This is important for two reasons. First, there are those in need of more than just occasional *chesed*; they need consistent or even constant support. Additionally, we should include the poor as family members because doing so defines our household as including the poor and needy.

Personal Growth and Care For Others

What emerges from the teachings of this first *zug* is that Torah and *chesed* should be more than just what we do in our homes. They should be what **define** our homes. Hosting Torah gatherings emphasizes the importance of our family's Torah identity and personal growth. Actively inviting guests and including the poor as household members expresses our home's commitment to the broader community. We value not only our own growth, but also caring for those who need extra care.

Let's make sure to build our homes on Torah and *gemilut chasadim*!

● Transcribed by Yedidyah Rosenswasser.

1. Mishnayot Masechet Avot 1:2.
2. Interestingly, they do not relate to Shimon Hatzadik's third pillar – *avodah*. They may have felt that *avodah* relates more to the Beit Hamikdash and Shul.
3. Mishnayot Masechet Avot 1:4.
4. Avot D'Rebbi Natan 6:2.
5. Bartenura on Masechet Avot 1:4.
6. Ibid.
7. Tiferet Yisrael (Yachin), Masechet Avot 1:4.
8. This calls to mind the famous words of the Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18) about how celebrating Yom Tov shouldn't be selfish; real *simchah* entails including those less fortunate than ourselves in our celebration.

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

Chukat and Yiftach: Battles & Bargains - The Power of Words



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrachi

This week's haftarah (Shoftim 11:1-33) has both glaring and more subtle associations with the parasha. On a broad contextual level, the haftarah records the story of Yiftach, found in the middle of the book of Shofetim with ten chapters preceding and ten chapters following the story, underscoring the importance of the transition from the first to the second half of the book. Similarly, parashat Chukat, the middle of Sefer Bamidbar, records the transition from the generation that left Egypt to the generation forty years later that will enter the Land of Israel. Both the parasha and haftarah record the history of how Bnei Yisrael conquered the land of Sichon, king of the Emorites, including the areas conquered from Ammon.

In both stories, the political leaders at the time – Moshe and Yiftach respectively, are threatened by the nations on the trans-Jordan. Moshe establishes a precedent for sending messages of peace; first to the king of Edom (20:14-19) and then to Sichon (21:21-22), recounting events of Jewish history. Yiftach employs the same approach of offering peace to the king of Ammon as he recounts events of three-hundred years earlier. In both cases, the monarchs refuse the overtures of peace and in the parasha and haftarah we read of war and of ensuing Israeliite victories and conquest of the land east of the Jordan river.

Perhaps the more subtle association and parshanut on the parsha is evident through a strategic religious tactic adopted by Bnei Yisrael earlier in this week's parasha as they attack the Canaanites in the Negev as retaliation for taking captive(s) of war – "And Israel

vowed a vow to Hashem and said, If You will give this nation into our hands, then we will completely destroy their cities" (Bamidbar 21:3). As Yiftach prepares for battle, he similarly offers a vow to Hashem – "And Yiftach vowed a vow to Hashem and said, 'If you will give the children of Ammon into my hand. Then whatever comes out of the door of my house towards me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it will be devoted to Hashem and offered by me as a burnt offering'" (Shoftim 11:30-31). The glaring terminology of Yiftach's self-centered vow and ambiguous offering is the opposite of Am Yisrael's selfless and devoted commitment to wage war for Hashem with a clear directive. As we compare Yiftach's neder to the first vow mentioned in the Torah, we recognize the devotion of Yaakov Avinu to properly serve and recognize Hashem's presence in his life under duress (see Bereishit Rabba, Vayetze 70) as opposed to Yiftach's inappropriate and vague allegiance (see Vayikra Rabba, Bechukotai 37).

This phenomenon however is actually a continuation of repetitive negotiations in the Yiftach narrative. The story begins in chapter 10 with Bnei Yisrael pleading with Hashem to save them despite their iniquities of worshipping foreign gods. We are introduced to Yiftach when the officers of Gilad negotiate with him to return after being driven from his ancestral home, to lead them in war against the Ammonites in exchange for the titles of "commander" (katzin) and "chieftain" (rosh). Yiftach then negotiates with the Ammonite king, arguing for a peaceful resolution. Despite his lengthy argument, Yiftach is rebuffed and goes out to war,

vowing to offer "whatever comes out of my door to greet me on my safe return" if Hashem delivers the Ammonites into his hands. Each of the aforementioned scenes revolves around negotiations involving Yiftach, a skilled negotiator. Yiftach's skills as a negotiator, however, fail him in the tragic conclusion of the story, not included in the haftarah selection. When his daughter dances to greet him, Yiftach is speechless for the first time; his daughter awaits Yiftach's negotiation with G-d to "bargain" his way out of his fateful deal.

This story is read the week of parashat Chukat which introduces us to the first national vow of Am Yisrael and the power of words in the negotiations with foreign kings and in the fateful story of Meimeriva. The haftarah underscores the message that we may commit ourselves to Hashem but we may not negotiate with Hashem, deluding ourselves to think that we may manipulate His will through our verbal vows. Yiftach's character foreshadows the behavior of Balak and Bilam in next week's parasha who make similar errors in judgment of Divine "behavior." On one hand, Yiftach understands as we learn from the parasha, that Hashem determines the outcome of negotiations; yet, he adopted a distorted sense of manipulation through his vow. He challenged Hashem to triumph over Kemosh, the Moabite god and bargained sacrifice for selfish success. The haftarah ends with the proper interpretation of national victory throughout history – "Yiftach crossed over to the Ammonites and attacked them, and Hashem delivered them into his hands.... So the Ammonites submitted to the Israelites."

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrachi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: Is it better to daven alone on a plane or with a minyan?

Answer: It depends on the situation. If a minyan is done in the proper fashion that does not cause craziness for the flight, or if the people there are Jewish and understand the situation, then it is better to daven with a minyan. If this will negatively affect the other travelers, then it is better to daven alone.

Question: Is it permissible to tie the garbage bag on Shabbat?

Answer: One should not tie garbage bags in a double knot as we are concerned it is considered a professional knot (*kesher uman*).

However, there is room to discuss whether a regular knot with a bow on top is permissible.

The Rambam writes regarding the Yom Kippur service that the strip of crimson was tied onto the scapegoat before it was pushed off the cliff. The Maharil Diskin proves from here that although a knot prohibited from the Torah is one which will remain intact forever (*kesher shel kayama*), in a case where one has nothing to do with it, it is not considered a *kesher shel kayama*. In the case of a knot on a garbage bag, while the knot may remain for a long time, a person only cares about the knot for a very short amount of time and afterwards has nothing to do with it, similar to the knot on the goat. Therefore, on a trash bag, we can lechatchila allow one to tie a regular knot with a bow on top of it. Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata initially thought this should be prohibited but paskined that it is permissible in practice.

Question: Is it permissible to pour water from a dairy cup into a pot of cholent?

Answer: It is best not to do this for two reasons. 1) The steam from the meat touches the dairy cups. 2) There is a connection between the two utensils created through the water, this is called “nitzuk kemechubar.”

If this was done, the cup is not assur unless you actually saw steam from the meat inside of the cup. In that case, you should kasher the cup.

Question: Can I use kedushat shvi'it produce to make a shake?

Answer: There is an issur to change the form of kedushat shvi'it produce from their normal state of usage. Therefore:

Cooking: You can cook any fruit or vegetable which is normally cooked, but you should not cook foods which are not normally cooked (for example, do not cook a watermelon).

Squeezing: You can squeeze fruits which normally are squeezed. When you do so, you should ensure that you squeeze it out as much as you can so you do not cause a loss of shvi'it produce.

Crushing: You can mash kedushat shvi'it produce with a fork or a grater. If you are using a blender that will change the form into a liquid, you should only do it with fruits/vegetables that are normally blended. For a child, you can even blend fruits which are not generally blended. Blending fruits has become much more common in the last few years and therefore most fruits can be classified as fruits that are generally blended.

Question: Can children ride on bikes/scooters on Shabbat?

Answer: The main issue with bicycles is that it infringes on proper kavod Shabbat and the general Shabbat atmosphere. The mitzvah of kavod Shabbat comes from the Nevi'im: “and you honor it by not doing your wanted ways, by not pursuing your affairs and speaking words (Yeshayahu 58:13). According to the Yeraim, this mitzvah is considered from the Torah. According to the Rambam, this mitzvah is medivrei sofrim. Many view this mitzvah as even higher than a normal issur derbanan, because the mitzvah of honoring Shabbat carries heavier weight. The purpose of Shabbat is to leave from our mundane state and to enter into a state of “Me'in Olam Haba.” Therefore, it is of utmost importance to be careful regarding matters of kavod Shabbat and maintaining the proper Shabbat atmosphere.

In practice, one should not allow bike riding on Shabbat. A scooter should not be ridden in the streets, but there is room to allow for this inside of the house or in one's courtyard. A three-wheeled bicycle for a young child is also permissible in this context. Nevertheless, there is no need to scold children who ride scooters in the street as it is not considered as much of a vehicle as a bike.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת חקת

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לגדול העונש. ניתן להרגיש שחטא מי מריבה היה מעין "תירוץ" כדי להביאו לכך שהמנהיגים לא ייכנסו לארץ. חטא מי מריבה מגדים כשלון מהניוגות. ככלון זה הוא קטן מאד, חסר פרופורציה לעומת העונש שקיילו – שלא להכנס לארץ, אך הוא מבירר שיש בעיה במנהיגות, ובגללה לא ייכנסו לארץ. הבעיה המהותית במנהיגות באה לדיביטוי בשני החטאים הגדולים של העם: חטא העגל ובחטא המרגלים. המנהיגים אמנים לא חטא בחטאים אלה, אך המנהיגים הם חלק בלתי נפרד מהעם, ויש להם אחריות על המצב ורווחין של העם. אם העם חוטא, בחטאים כבדים כל כך, ומת במידבר בעקבות החטא, לא יתכן שמנהיגיו ייכנסו אל הארץ.

מוסות של מנהיגי העם מהווים סיום של תקופת ההליכה במידבר, שהיו בה נסائم ונפלאות, אך גם תלות; היו בה הילכה אחר ה', אך גם תלונות ומרידות; חילופי ההנאה קשים לעם, אך יחד עם זאת אפשרים מבט חדש אל העתיד.

יחד עם זאת, סביר להניח שמות שלושת המנהיגים יגיעו לפניו הכניסה לארץ לא התגלה במקורה, אלא הيتها לו סיבה מהותית. במדרש מתוארת התלוות של ישראל במנהיגיהם אשר דאגו לקיום הבסיסי של ירושה, בוצרה נשית. כאשר המשען במידבר מגייע אל ביתו, וישראל נכנסים אל הארץ, לא יהיו זקנים עוד לנסائم אלו. בארץ הגשם יירד מן השמיים והמים נבעו במעניינות וייזמו בנהרות. התבואה צמחה מן הארץ וממנה ייכנו את מזונם. ישראל לא ינדדו עוד בדריכים קשות ומסוכנות. מעטה, עזרתו של הקב"ה

תגעה אליהם בדרך הטבע, ולא בנסائم גלוים.

המעבר מהנאה נשית להנאה טבעית מתחטא במוסות של שלושת המנהיגים הדגולים, שהנאה גם מאופיינת בנסיות. מוסות מהוות משבר עברו העם, שצריך ללמידה להסתדר בעצמו, ללא מנהיגיו הדגולים וללא נסائم. אך משבר זה הוא גם תחילתה של תקופה חדשה בה העם הופך להיות עצמאי.

יתכן שתגובתם הקשה של משה ואהרן באירוע זה קשורה למותה של מרים: יתכן ששחרונה המניוגות לצד רועיו זה, מן הכתוב עולה סיבה אחרת למוסות של משה ואהרן: חטא מי מריבה. אמנם, כל הקורא שהיו נתונים באבלות אישית על מות אחותם ולכך לא היו פנוים וקשובים לצרכי העם בוצרה מדויקת.

שנה לאחרונה של ישראל במידבר, נפטרו משה ואהרן ומרים, מנהיגי העם הדגולים. המדרש מתאר כיצד מותם של המנהיגים גרם להפסקת המן (מזון) הבאר (שתייה) וענני הכבוד (צל), שהם שלושת 'אביות הקיום' החיוניים שאפשרו את קיומו של ישראל במידבר. העלמות המים, ענני הכבוד והבאר, מבטאים את השוקת השבורה' שעמדו ישראל בפניה עם הסתכלות מנהיגיהם. ההנאה המשמעותית של עם ישראל נעלמת, וממשaira אחריה חלל גדול, והחסר מושגש בעצם רבה.

מרקראה של פרק כ' ניכר שגדירת המיתה על משה ואהרן כרוכה עם מות מרים: פרק כ' פותח במוחה של מרים, שבעקבותיו חסרו מים לשירה. חסרון המים גורר תלונה של העם, והتلונה גוררת תגובה לא נכונה של משה ואהרן, שבעקבותיה נגזרה עליהם מיתה. יתרון שתגובתם הקשה של משה ואהרן באירוע זה של מרים הביא אותם לתגובה לא מתאימה, ויתכן שהם נתונים באבלות אישית על מות אחותם ולכך לא היו פנוים וקשובים לצרכי העם בוצרה מדויקת.



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In the Past



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrachi Scholars-in-Residence

In the past, parents could give orders, and the younger generation obeyed. Today it is more complicated. In this week's Portion, Chukat, we encounter a great educational principle. In the past, when Moshe Rabbenu had to provide water for the people to drink, he received clear instruction: "And thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it". But in our Portion, decades later, prior to the entrance into Eretz Israel, the instruction is different: "And speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, that it gives forth its water". Not to hit the rock - to speak to it.

Water is an allegory for Torah. Our commentators explain that there is a clear message here in relation to the Torah, to education, to every value we want to transmit today: the generation has changed. Their parents, who went out of Egypt, were slaves. They were used to the force of arm. In previous generations it was possible to command, to say: "Because this is what I said", and that's it. It was enough. But to the newer generation one must speak differently. Not with force, but also with love, persuasion and approval. A moment before the entrance to Eretz Israel, there is a message here: Exerting external authority is not enough. One needs to speak in a way which the younger generation will understand and internalize. Not with a stick in hand, but with persuasive words and pleasant talk. Good luck.

■ ■ ■

Nothing is easier than mocking what we don't understand. If something sounds not up-to-date and we do not understand it with our limited minds within a second-and-a-half, we deem it irrelevant

and use it to make cynical jokes about our tradition.

This week's *parshah*, Chukat, starts with the words: "This is the statute of the Torah," and describes something that has been considered a mystery to this very day - the mitzvah of the red heifer. Without going into detail, many commentators do not understand this mitzvah and treat it as a "gezeira" - a decree or edict that we keep without really understanding the reason behind it.

Generations of sages have asked: Are there reasons for every mitzvah? Are there obvious reasons as well as hidden ones? Must we understand everything?

Here is just one idea from the Rambam (1135-1204), one of the greatest thinkers of all time, on this deep issue: "It is appropriate for man to observe the laws of the holy Torah and to know their purpose to the best of his ability. But if there is something he cannot find a purpose or reason for, let him not think lightly of it."

The Rambam adds: "A person should not think about it the way one thinks about mundane things."

On the one hand, we must make an effort, invest time and energy, and study. On the other hand, some things are hidden. Even if we do not completely understand something, we must be very careful not to think lightly of it.

■ ■ ■

אֶזְרָאֵל שִׁיר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת

Then Israel sang this song. (Num. 21:17)

Elie Wiesel died in July '16, during the week that we read Chukat. In their eulogies, Barak Obama called him "the

conscience of the world," and Bill Clinton said he was "a monument to memory."

I was never privileged to meet him in person, but years ago, I saw him from afar at the Kotel, along with the thousands of people who throng the plaza and surrounding areas on Shavuot night. He was wrapped in his tallit, standing in prayer next to Rabbi Aharon Bina, the head of Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh in the Old City. I admit I was surprised to see Elie Wiesel there; I had always imagined him in formal attire, wearing tux and tails, and hobnobbing with world leaders, addressing the United Nations or some other exclusive event. I did not expect to see him huddled together with the masses at the Kotel.

On the day that Wiesel was buried in New York, I contacted Rabbi Bina in Jerusalem who gave me insight into an unknown part of the life of the famous Holocaust survivor, author, and Nobel Peace Prize laureate:

"Every Shavuot night, for eighteen consecutive years, Elie Wiesel learned Torah in my house. Ira Rennert, a New York businessman, introduced us, and the three of us would learn together throughout the night and in the morning we would go to the Kotel. Elie really knew how to learn, to ask difficult questions and give good answers. We would spend half the night arguing; when he criticized people's behavior, I would tell him 'to stay off the Jews and concentrate on Judaism.' We learned the Minchat Chinuch, a book that deals with all 613 commandments in the Torah. Each year we would focus on several commandments and I believe we got to study about thirty-five in total.

Continued on next page

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

And Israel took all these cities and Israel dwelt in all the Amorite cities, in Cheshbon and in all its suburbs. For Cheshbon is the city of the Sichon, King of the Amorite, and he fought against the first King of Moav and took all his land from his hand (control) until Arnon. Therefore the poets ('Moshlim') will say: 'Come to Cheshbon, let it be built and established as the city of Sichon' (Bemidbar 21:25-27).

Towards the end of this week's Parsha, Sichon King of Emori refuses to allow the Israelites to travel through his land. In the resultant war, the Israelites captured numerous Amorite cities, including the city of Cheshbon. Uncharacteristically, the Torah brings the history of Cheshbon and then a connected poem - "Therefore the poets say, 'come to Cheshbon'...". What does this poem come to teach us?

The Gemara (Bava Batra 78b) explains that the word 'Moshlim' (poets) also means rulers and that "Cheshbon" (the name of the city) also means calculation. The verse therefore means that those who rule over themselves will come to make

It is obvious that the gains of following in Hashem's ways far outweigh and certainly justify any losses incurred. It is also obvious that the potential losses involved in turning away from Hashem are far greater than the potential gains of such actions. Seeing as the calculation leads to such clear results, why do we still find it difficult to perform Mitzvot and steer away from transgressions?

a calculation - weighing up the losses of keeping Mitzvot against the gains of keeping Mitzvot, and the same calculation for transgressions.

When coming to make such calculations ourselves, the conclusions are exceptionally clear. It is obvious that the gains of following in Hashem's ways far outweigh and certainly justify any losses incurred. It is also obvious that the potential losses

Continued from previous page

"Two years ago he was already a sick person, but he would not give up his annual custom. During the meal, the zemirot he sang were those he remembered from his father, a Vizhnitz Chasid. We were able to learn together for 'only' an hour and a half before he felt weak and had to rest. However, a few hours later he was strong enough to go to the Kotel to

pray. As usual, he requested to read the haftara after the Torah reading.

"Elie Wiesel often asked difficult questions about faith in G-d. I felt that here of all the places in the world, as he stood at the Kotel, in Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Israel, his memories from Auschwitz would return to haunt him. Yet he

involved in turning away from Hashem are far greater than the potential gains of such actions. Seeing as the calculation leads to such clear results, why do we still find it difficult to perform Mitzvot and steer away from transgressions?

The answer lies in the first part of the verse. Who are the ones who say "Come to Cheshbon"? The 'Moshlim' - those who rule over and are in control of themselves. As Ramcha'l writes (Messilat Yesharim, Chapter 3), only those who are in full control of their urges and desires can make such a calculation.

Whilst in theory, this is a simple calculation to make, a person's aspirations and desires can distort their objectivity. The smallest emotional involvement can prevent us from seeing the truth for what it is. Before we can come to "Cheshbon", we need to become "Moshlim".

By successfully controlling ourselves, may we only reach the right conclusions.

Shabbat Shalom!

considered it vital to continue his Jewish heritage, so that the chain should not be broken and that Judaism would continue. He wanted to continue the song of life, the song of the Torah. I always told him, 'Reb Elie, if we should ever think that we understand exactly what G-d does, either we are crazy or we think that we are G-d Himself.'

Anger Management



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

There are some, say the Talmud, who acquire their world in an hour and others who lose it in an hour. No example of the latter is more arresting and bewildering than the famous episode in this week's parsha. The people have asked for water. G-d tells Moses to take a staff and speak to the rock and water will appear. This then follows:

He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them. (Num. 20:10-12)

"Is this the Torah and this its reward?" we are tempted to say. What was Moses' sin that it merited such punishment? In previous years I have expressed my view that Moses did not sin, nor was he punished. It was simply that each generation needs its own leaders. Moses was the right, indeed the only, leader capable of taking the Israelites out of Egypt. They needed another kind of leader, and a different style of leadership, to take the next generation into the Promised Land.

Within the framework of this year's series, though, as we discuss the ethics of the Bible, it seems more appropriate to look at a different explanation, the one given by Maimonides in *Shemoneh Perakim*, the "Eight Chapters" that form the preface to his commentary to the Mishnah, Tractate Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers.

In the course of these chapters Maimonides sets out a surprisingly contemporary account of Judaism as a training in emotional intelligence.¹ Healthy emotions are essential to a good and happy life, but temperament is not something we choose. Some people just happen to be more patient or calm or generous-spirited or optimistic than others. Emotions were at one stage called the "passions," a word that comes from the same root as "passive," implying that they are feelings that happen to us rather than reactions we choose. Despite this, Maimonides believed that with sufficient training it is possible for us to overcome our destructive emotions and reconfigure our affective life.

In general, Maimonides, like Aristotle, believed that emotional intelligence exists in striking a balance between excess and deficiency, too much and too little. Too much fear makes me a coward, too little makes me rash and foolhardy, taking unnecessary risks. The middle way is courage. There are, however, two exceptions, says Maimonides: pride and anger. Even a little pride (some Sages suggested "an eighth of an eighth") is too much. Likewise even a little anger is wrong.

That, says Maimonides, is why Moses was punished: because he lost his temper with the people when he said, "Listen, you rebels." To be sure, there were other occasions on which he lost his temper - or at least appeared to lose it. His reaction to the sin of the Golden Calf, which included smashing the Two Tablets, was hardly eirenic or relaxed. But that case was different. The Israelites had committed a sin. G-d Himself was threatening to destroy the people. Moses had to act decisively and with sufficient force to restore order to a people wildly out of control.

Here, though, the people had not sinned. They were thirsty. They needed water. G-d was not angry with them. Moses' intemperate reaction was therefore wrong, says Maimonides. To be sure, anger is something to which we are all prone. But Moses was a leader, and a leader must be a role model. That is why Moses was punished so heavily for a failure that might have been more lightly punished in someone less exalted.

In addition, says Maimonides, by losing his temper Moses failed to respect the people and might have demoralised them. Knowing that Moses was G-d's emissary, the people might have concluded that if Moses was angry with them, so too was G-d. Yet they had done no more than ask for water. Giving the people the impression that G-d was angry with them was a failure to sanctify G-d's Name. Thus one moment's anger was sufficient to deprive Moses of the reward surely most precious to him, of seeing the culmination of his work by leading the people across the Jordan and into the Promised Land.

The Sages were outspoken in their critique of anger. They would have thoroughly approved of the modern concept of anger management. They did not like anger at all, and reserved some of their sharpest language to describe it.

"The life of those who can't control their anger is not a life," they said. (*Pesahim 113b*) Reish Lakish said, "When a person becomes angry, if he is a sage his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet his prophecy departs from him" (*Pesahim 66b*). Maimonides said that when someone becomes angry it is as if he has become an idolater (*Hilchot Deot 2:3*).

What is dangerous about anger is that it causes us to lose control. It activates the

most primitive part of the human brain that bypasses the neural circuitry we use when we reflect and choose on rational grounds. While in the grip of a hot temper, we lose the ability to step back and judge the possible consequences of our actions. The result is that in a moment of irascibility we can do or say things we may regret for the rest of our lives.

For that reason, rules Maimonides, there is no “middle way” when it comes to anger (*Hilchot Deot* 2:3). Instead we must avoid it under any circumstance. We must go to the opposite extreme. Even when anger is justified, we must avoid it. There may be times when it is necessary to look as if we are angry. That is what Moses did when he saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, and broke the Tablets of stone. Yet even when we outwardly display anger, says Maimonides, inwardly we should be calm.

The *Orchot Tzaddikim* (a 15th century commentator) notes that anger destroys personal relationships.² Short-tempered people scare others, who therefore avoid coming close to them. Anger drives out the positive emotions – forgiveness, compassion, empathy, and sensitivity. The result is that irascible people end up lonely, shunned, and disappointed. Bad tempered people achieve nothing but their bad temper (*Kiddushin* 40b). They lose all else.

The classic role model of patience in the face of provocation was Hillel. The Talmud says that two people once made a wager with each other, saying, “He who makes Hillel angry shall receive four hundred zuz.” One said, “I will go and provoke him.” It was *Erev Shabbat* and Hillel was washing his hair. The man stood by the door of his house and called, “Is Hillel here? Is Hillel here?” Hillel robed himself and came out, saying, “My son, what do you seek?”

“I have a question to ask,” he said.

“Ask, my son,” replied Hillel.

He said, “Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?”

“My son, you ask a good question,” said Hillel. “The reason is that they have no skilled midwives.”

The man left, paused, then returned, crying out, “Is Hillel here? Is Hillel here?”

Again, Hillel abandoned his bathing, robed, and came out, saying, “My son, what do you seek?”

“I have another question.”

“Ask, my son.”

“Why are the eyes of the Palmyreans bleared?”

Hillel replied, “My son, you ask a good question. The reason is that they live in sandy places.”

He left, waited, then came back a third time, calling, “Is Hillel here? Is Hillel here?”

Again, Hillel dressed and came out, saying, “My son, what do you seek?”

“I have another question.”

“Ask, my son.”

“Why are the feet of Africans wide?”

“My son, you ask a good question. The reason is that they live in watery marshes.”

“I have many questions to ask,” said the man, “but I am worried that you might become angry.”

Hillel then sat and said, “Ask all the questions you have to ask.”

“Are you the Hillel who is called the nasi [leader, prince] of Israel?”

“Yes,” said Hillel.

“In that case, said the man, “may there not be many like you in Israel.”

“Why so, my son?” he asked.

“Because I have just lost four hundred zuz because of you!”

“Be careful of your moods,” said Hillel. “You may lose four hundred zuz, and yet another four hundred zuz through Hillel, yet Hillel will not lose his temper.”³

It was this quality of patience under provocation that was one of the factors, according to the Talmud (*Eruvin* 13b), that led the Sages to rule almost entirely according to the School of Hillel rather than of Shammai.

The best way of defeating anger is to pause, stop, reflect, refrain, count to ten, and breathe deeply. If necessary, leave the room, go for a walk, meditate, or vent your toxic feelings alone. It is said that about one of the Rebbes of Lubavitch that whenever he felt angry, he would take down the *Shulchan Aruch* to see whether anger was permitted under the circumstances. By the time he had finished studying, his anger had disappeared.

The moral life is one in which we grapple with anger but never let it win. The verdict of Judaism is simple: either we defeat anger or anger will defeat us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think anger is permitted as an outward display but not as an internal emotion?
- What about when G-d Himself became angry with the people?
- What methods do you find helpful when you become angry?

1. The term was introduced by Peter Salovey and John Mayer. See Peter Salovey, Marc A. Brackett, and John D. Mayer, *Emotional Intelligence: Key Readings on the Mayer and Salovey Model* (Port Chester, NY: Dude Pub., 2004), subsequently popularised by Daniel Goleman in, for instance, his book *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995).

2. *Orchot Tzaddikim, Shaar Kaas*, “The Gate of Anger.”

3. *Shabbat* 30b-31a.

Halachic Formulas



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

The period of the Second Beis HaMikdash was plagued by arguments with the Tzeddukim (Sadducees), who denied the validity of the traditions of the Torah SheBe'al Peh. The Tzeddukim labeled the chachamim as Perushim (Separatists), a derogatory term employed in our times as well by the non-Orthodox when referring to the Orthodox. In truth, it was the Reform and Conservative movements which separated themselves from Klal Yisrael, which had previously been completely Orthodox. During Bayis Sheini as well, the Perushim were the traditionalists, and it was the Tzeddukim who broke away from all the oral traditions of the Jewish People.

One of the disputes centered around the Kohen who prepares the parah adumah. The passuk states, "And the pure person shall sprinkle upon the impure person" (Bamidbar 19:19). This implied to the Tzeddukim that the Kohen must be in a fully tahor state, as is required for contact with terumah and kodshim. Therefore, the Kohen preparing the parah adumah would not be able to be a tevul yom, one who had been tamei, immersed in a mikvah that day, and was now awaiting sundown to attain full taharah. In contrast, the Perushim held that a tevul yom would be eligible to participate in the preparation of the parah adumah. They had a tradition to expound the word טהרה to imply "that he was [previously] tamei. This teaches about a tevul yom that he is fit for the parah" (Yoma 43b), since the Torah does consider someone in this state as tahor with respect to ma'aser sheni.

To demonstrate that we place no credence whatsoever on the opinions of the Tzeddukim, whether they are more strict or

more lenient than those of the Perushim, the Mishnah in Parah (3:7) describes, "They would render tamei the Kohen who was to burn the parah, on account of the Tzeddukim, so that they should not say that [the avodas parah adumah] was performed only by those who had experienced sundown." After immersion in a mikvah, the Kohen would become a tevul yom prior to his undertaking the avodas parah adumah. This was done "to remove from the heart of the Tzeddukim" (Yoma 2a), to discredit the opinion of the Tzeddukim who held that such an individual would be unfit for this avodah.

The chachamim, by having the parah adumah prepared specifically by tevulei yom, were concerned about conveying the impression that they were not careful with taharah while preparing the parah adumah. Rashi (Sukkah 21a) explains that to offset that mistaken impression, many other chumros were instituted regarding the dinim of parah adumah. Our use of the tevul yom should not be taken as a sign of leniency in the taharah necessary for the parah adumah; we use the Kohen tevul yom only in order to publicly repudiate the Tzedduki view and to wage a battle against the Tzeddukim. Therefore, the only keilim used for the procedures of the parah adumah were made of dung, stone, or clay, which do not contract tum'ah, and for a period of seven days, the Kohen who was to burn the parah would be sequestered from his house to the lishkas beis ha'ein in the Beis HaMikdash courtyard (Yoma 2a).

More significantly, as poignantly described in the Mishnah in Parah (3:2): There were courtyards in Yerushalayim built on bedrock, and beneath them was a

hollow, because of [concern for] an underground grave. They would bring pregnant women, and they would give birth there and rear their children there. They would bring oxen with [wooden] doors on their backs [to serve as an ohel, blocking any tum'ah rising from the ground], and the children would sit on top of them with cups of stone in their hands [to fill with spring water, which was later mixed with ashes of the parah]. When they would reach [the spring of] Shilo'ach, they would descend and fill [the cups], and they would then ascend and sit on top of [the doors]. Rabbi Yose says: From his place, he would lower the cup [using ropes] and fill it.

The Acharonim employ a similar approach in reference to the rules of permitting the marriage of an agunah, a woman unable to remarry due to insufficient evidence of her husband's death.

The Tanna'im felt compelled to rule leniently that a single witness is trustworthy regarding his testimony that the agunah's husband has died, in contrast to the usual requirement of the testimony of two witnesses in the area of davar sheb'ervah (a matter pertaining to forbidden marital relationships). They felt this way because during the Roman persecutions, when so many men were murdered in dungeons, it was difficult enough to procure a single witness who could testify to the husband's death.

However, there was a concern that people might get the mistaken impression that this area of halachah is extremely lenient. Thus, other chumros were introduced, such as the rule that the wife of a man presumed to have drowned after falling into מים שאין להם סוף - water that has no end [within the sight of an observer] - is

Continued on next page

Even if We Deserve



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

As we begin to discuss Parshat Chukat, we get to the story of מיריבת ה, and the many different understandings about what Moshe did wrong. The simple understanding that everyone knows is the one brought down by Rashi, that Moshe hit the stone instead of speaking to it. Yet, if this is ultimately the sin of Moshe, we must understand what was so bad about it, and why it warranted the punishment that Moshe and Aharon received. For this, the Netziv uses a bigger concept that we must first understand with regards to Tefilah, in order to explain this question.

The Netziv explains that there are two different types of Tefilah. The first one, that perhaps we are more familiar with, is צפילה בשתע צורה, when we are davening during a time of pain. Sometimes in שמיים we don't have any זכויות, either on a personal level or on a national level, and we need to daven to try to change things around. However, there is a second element to Tefilah. There are times that Hashem is ready to give us something, and we do in fact have זכויות, but Hashem is simply waiting for us to ask for it. Sometimes, the Tefilah is that all we have to do is ask, and Hashem will give us all the blessings that we deserve.

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forbidden to remarry (Yevamos 121a). This is a chumrah “on the books,” but it usually does not impede an agunah’s ability to remarry. This situation is rare on a practical level, and even if present, this chumrah can usually be obviated, as the rabbonim will usually be able to find a

The Netziv continues and explains that we must understand that Tefilah ultimately causes things to happen. “**אפיקלו בזמנן שצוחה הקב”ה תפילה גורמת**”, even at a time that Hashem wants to give, Tefilah is ultimately necessary to bring those blessings into fruition. We see this from the story of אליחו הנביא at Har HaKarmel. Even after Hashem had already said that it was time for the drought to be over, and that He was finally going to give the Jewish people rain, אליחו still needed to daven before the rain came. And we find this also in the story of בראשית ה. The Pasuk there says “**כל שיחתך קשירה**”, which simply refers to things that grow in the field. However, the Netziv points out that the שיח is related to שיחתך, which the Gemara says can also refer to Tefilah. Thus, the Netziv explains that really everything that grows in the field, and all the פרנסה that we get, ultimately comes from our שיחתך, our davening. We know that Tefilah is referred to as “**בבזח**”, and we know that our פרנסה can only come through **בבזח**. In the natural course of things, we need to put in our “physical work” in order to get blessing, but we must also put in our “spiritual work”, our Tefilah, in order to receive the blessing.

Going back to the story of מיריבת ה, we can now understand the mistake of Moshe much better. Up until this point, the Jewish

second rov (probability) pointing in the direction that the husband is dead, so as to be able to rule leniently (Pischei Teshuvah, Even Ha’Ezer 17:133).

The chachamim were interested in introducing leniencies for the agunah.

people had been living totally בדרך נס, through very open miracles. They were being sustained by the נס, and protected by the ענן הכבוד. In this world, Moshe was able to just hit the stone, and then water came out. However, now they were about to enter Eretz Yisrael, and things were about to change. They were transitioning to a world that was going to work בדרך הטבע, that they were going to have to make a פרנסה in the natural way, and work the land in order to get produce. Yet, even in this world of דרך הטבע, as we saw from the Netziv, we still need Tefilah to ultimately bring about the פשרה. Even if we work, and even if we deserve, we sometimes just need to ask Hashem, and that will allow us to receive all the blessings. While we might think that davening only works out of miracle, we must realize that it is not so. Even in the world of דרך הטבע, we must understand that we still need Tefilah to be פשרה, to bring about the פשרה. For that reason, Moshe had to speak to the stone, and in essence Daven that water should come from it, and thereby teach the Jewish people that as they transition into Eretz Yisrael, they still need to ask Hashem in order to receive what they work for. This is what Moshe missed, and for this he was ultimately punished.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

The chumrah of מים שאין להם סוף was only introduced to balance and offset any mistaken impression that those kulos may convey.

● From ‘Rav Schachter on the Parsha’.

The Key to Finding Our Way Through the Maze of Life

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

What's the point of a precept if we don't have a reason for it?

This is a dilemma we face when reading the commencement of Parashat Chukat which introduces us to the concept of a 'chok'. Our 'chukim' are a small proportion of the mitzvot of the Torah for which no reason is given – and the example at the beginning of our parsha is 'parah adumah' – the Red Heifer.

If someone was 'tammei' (impure), in order to become 'tahor' (pure), the ashes of the Red Heifer which had been 'shechted' (slaughtered) in an appropriate way, were administered – and as a result, that person became pure. However, the person who administered the ashes became impure – it doesn't make sense! Yet, it's a law from Hashem, and it's one which we carried out, with great passion!

My appreciation of the chukim is inspired by one of the most wonderful parables I've come across, which is found in the book 'Mesillat Yesharim' (The Path of the Just) – and I'm going to modernise it somewhat.

A man once walked into a maze, and on the other side, there was a tower. The aim of the game was to make one's way through the paths of the maze in order to reach that tower. But though people would try their best, the paths would take them to this side, or that side; to an angle



Sometimes the instructions make sense, sometimes they don't. But if we follow the laws of Hashem we will be on the highway to that tower of meaning, fulfilment, hope, and joy in life.

or backward – and people would become completely lost!

Straight after walking into this maze the person hears a sound. It's a voice, and it says "I am a man standing on the top of the tower, I can see you with my binoculars and through this megaphone, I am guiding you. The man is listening to the instructions – he would love to follow them to reach the tower, but he's got a problem – they don't make sense! Why is he being instructed to walk backward, in order to reach the tower which is ahead of him?

So either he can say: "that person on the top of the tower can see far more than I will ever know or see – I'll put my trust in him" – and as a result, he will follow the instructions and he will find that the path that goes backward actually leads him to the connecting path which will take him all the way to the tower.

Or he could say "no, I reject that – the sounds I'm hearing that can't be authentic, this ancient form of communication is irrelevant to me – I'll find my own way". Perhaps he might still get there by chance or he might become totally lost, or he could find a point somewhere within the maze which he will presume is the tower and from which he will get some form of fulfilment – and that's very much like our lives.

Soon after coming into this world, we discover that it's a maze. We're hedged in. There are doubts. There are problems. There are challenges. We are looking for the tower of happiness, of meaning and fulfilment. We are so privileged because Hashem can see everything that we cannot, he knows all and through His Torah which is the megaphone, He addresses us and gives us instructions.

Sometimes the instructions make sense, sometimes they don't. But if we follow the laws of Hashem we will be on the highway to that tower of meaning, fulfilment, hope, and joy in life.

Yes, this world can sometimes be a maze, but the laws of Hashem are amazing.

Moshe's Meritorious Motivation at Mei Meriva



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There are many explanations offered both by our classical as well as modern commentaries that seek to resolve what “sin” Moshe committed at Mei Meriva (see Shalom Rav, Insights on the Parsha Vol 2, page 258).

There are two questions however, that may be raised regarding this episode. First, the Mishna in Avot states: (5:18)

כל המזקקה את הרבים, אין חטא באלך.
(One who causes the community to be meritorious, no sin will come by his hand). In fact, the Mishna specifically states that Moshe exemplifies this characteristic. If so, then how could Moshe have sinned in connection with the very people upon whom he bestowed such value?

In addition, during the recitation of *tefillat geshem*, we ask that it rain in the merit of our forefathers. Not only is Moshe counted among those righteous individuals, but we specifically reference Moshe’s act of hitting the rock, as depicted in our parsha:

למען נאמן בית משה רבינו [משה רבינו] מספיק לעם מים, סלע

הך ייזובו מים והושיענו כל מעוזנו.

“For the sake of the faithful one [Moshe], water was provided to the nation, he hit the rock and water flowed and we were saved by the mighty God.”

If Moshe indeed transgressed by hitting the rock, why then is this cited in *tefillat geshem* when we seek God’s sympathy to award us with rain. It would seem that this event is portrayed as a positive act, otherwise it would not be inserted in *tefillat geshem*.

Rav Schwab, in *Maayan Beit Hashoeva* offers an interesting perspective on this incident

at Mei Meriva. Looking closely at the text, one recognizes that Hashem requested the following of Moshe and Aharon:

“וְדֹבְרָתֶם אֶל הַסְלָעָה... וְהַשְׁקִיתֶת אֶת הָעֵדָה” (Bamidbar 20:8). Speak to the rock... give the people to drink. The imperative was for Moshe to personally provide water to the people – rather than allowing them to obtain water and drink for themselves. Perhaps this parallels what is required of a Sotah (a woman who is suspected of infidelity). This is how Moshe acted after *chet ha’egel*.

וַיַּקְרֹב אֶת הַסְלָעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂו וַיִּשְׁרֹךְ בָּאָשׁ וַיְתַחַן עַד אֲשֶׁר־
זֶה וַיִּזְרֹר עַל פְּנֵי הַמִּים וַיִּשְׁקֹת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
“Then he took the calf they had made, burned it in fire, ground it to fine powder, scattered [it] upon the surface of the water, and gave [it to] Bnei Yisrael to drink.” (Shemot 32:20).

It is interesting to note that Hashem asked to provide water to the people and their cattle – but there is a distinction between the two. It states: *הַשְׁקִיתֶת אֶת הָעֵדָה וְאֶת בְּעִירָם* – provide drink to the people and to the cattle. The word **אֶת** “to” seems superfluous when appearing prior to the word *be’iram* (cattle). This may be to underscore that God desired to distinguish between the drinking of the people, which was to determine who is guilty and who is righteous, whereas the purpose of providing water to the animals is merely to quench their thirst. In the end, Moshe hits the rock and the people and the animals each drink by themselves, without Moshe personally providing them with the water to drink. As is stated: *הָעֵדָה וְבְעִירָם* – the people and animals drank. (20:11). There is no distinction between the people and

the animals. The drinking was for the sole purpose of quenching thirst and **not** to serve as the *mayim hameoririm*, like the Sotah water to distinguish between the righteous and transgressors.

Moshe determines that, at this juncture, in the 38th year in the desert, all that were decreed to die have already perished. He did not want to again commit an act that was to distinguish between the people as to who was to live and who was to die. He was willing to put his life on the line and “take one for the team”, in order to enable all the remaining people to enter Eretz Yisrael. That is why when Moshe critiques the nation in Devarim (1:37), he states: **גַם בַּי הַתְּאַנֵּף ה' בְּגַלְלָכֶם** – G-d was angry at me because of **you**. Moshe defended the people so they would be able to enter Eretz Yisrael, and in return, he was denied the right of entry.

Rav Schwab skillfully explains that Moshe’s act was not a personal transgression, but an act on behalf of Am Yisrael. That is why it does not conflict with the statement in Pirkei Avot. The sin was not on his account **לא על ידו**. In addition, in *tefillat geshem* we recall Mei Meriva to Moshe’s merit for acting on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, to enable all to enter Israel, without having to drink water that would distinguish whether one merited entering the land of Israel or not. This highlights Moshe’s sacrifice on behalf of the nation. May we learn from Moshe’s courage, care and concern for all members of Klal Yisrael.

Chukas: The Tragic Distance Between Moshe and Moshiach



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In *Parshas Chukas*, the Torah abruptly shifts from year two of desert wanderings to year forty of desert wandering. With Miriam's death, the miraculous well of water that sustained the people through all the years dried up. After the nation complained to Moshe, Hashem instructed Moshe to take his staff in his hand and speak to the rock, and it would give forth water. *And Moshe took his staff and gathered the people before the face of the rock: And he said to them: Listen O you rebels, from this rock shall we bring forth for you water? And Moshe lifted his hand and he struck the rock with his staff two times, and much water came out and the assembly and their flocks drank* (*Bamidbar 20:1-11*). The punishment and consequences were immediate: *And G-d said to Moshe and to Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore, you will not bring this assembly into the Land that which I have given them* (*ibid*, v.12).

Moshe was banned forever from the Holy Land. Despite heartfelt pleas on his own behalf, Hashem did not permit Moshe to cross the Jordan - not in life, and not in death. This painful reality remains an enigma. The shockwaves of this decree extended well past the lifetime of Moshe and his generation... In fact, they are still felt by us today, as we trudge through our long and painful *galus*.

In a novel interpretation, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l teaches that the fault lies not only with Moshe and his sin, but with the people that he loved, and led. The Rav teaches, "Moshe's failure to cross the Jordan complicated matters and caused a tragic change in our historical destiny. Had Moshe entered the Land, the whole history of our people would have taken another turn. It would have been less tragic, less sad and less mysterious, but at the same time, less heroic - and consequently, less great.

"If *Bnei Yisrael* had proven themselves worthy of communing with Moshe, of being his disciples, if they had displayed the intellectual and emotional capacity to receive and absorb *Torat Moshe*, then Moshe would have entered and conquered the Promised Land, and he would have been anointed as the King Messiah. Jewish history would have found its realization and fulfillment immediately upon entering the Land.

"There was no reason to deny the messianic role to Moshe; he was the greatest of all men. His personality as *adon ha'neviim*, the master of prophets, is far superior to that of the King Messiah. Maimonides writes that the Messiah's prophetic capacity will be '*close to that of Moshe*' (*Hilchos Teshuva* 9:2); however, Moshe will nevertheless retain his superiority. If so, the question arises, why did the Almighty not ordain Moshe as the King Messiah? No one else will ever be as qualified as Moshe. Had Moshe entered and hallowed the land, the *kedusha* would have been eternal; the Babylonian legions could never have annulled it.

"The answer is obvious. The messianic era would have commenced if the entire generation, the entire nation, had accepted Moshe's message fully. If his teachings had made a genuine impact upon his contemporaries, if these people had indeed become his disciples, if they had treated him with reverence and love the way the talmid is supposed to treat his *rebbi*, then Moshe would have been ordained as the Messiah.

"Unfortunately, they did not rise to the great and singular occasion. *Torat Moshe* was the possession of a few; the crowd acted like liberated bondmen who could not forget the pots of flesh. After the passage of forty years, the opportunity was missed. The era of the Messiah was postponed for a long period of time; the distance between Moshe's redemption and the Messiah's redemption grew almost *ad infinitum*.

Moshe had to die in the sand-hills of Moav. His teachings were entrusted to Yehoshua, to the people, to countless future generations.

"Only when the *entire congregation* has committed itself to this teaching, when Moshe is accepted as the master, and when we all demonstrate our capability and readiness to become inquisitive disciples of our master and teacher, only then will the hour of redemption strike. In the interim, we must travel a tortuous, long road toward a far destination. Moshe did not cross the Jordan; he did not receive the crown of the Messiah. The congregation of Israel was assigned the task of waiting for the Messiah, who could have led us across the Jordan into the Promised Land 3,500 years ago.

"...Moshe died because his contemporaries did not recognize his greatness and moral perfection. Because of his untimely death, Jewish history became longer, more complex, unintelligible and tragic. Moshe and the King Messiah, who were supposed to join, separated and turned into two identities, and the Jew learned how to believe and to wait. *This is the Torah: when a man dies in a tent...* (*Bamidbar 19:14*)" (*Vision and Leadership*, p.214-216).

As we find ourselves in the month of Tammuz, with *aveilus* for the *churban* upon us once again, we would do well to contemplate the powerful teachings of Rav Soloveitchik. Moshe was not the Messiah because *the people were not ready*, and so, the distance between the two is very, very long indeed. We must sincerely ask ourselves if *we are ready* for the arrival of Moshiach, if *we anticipate his coming*, if *we are prepared to accept his kingship (and His Kingship) in our day and our time*. Perhaps when we can answer 'yes, we are ready,' the Messiah will finally arrive.

Crime and Punishment



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

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Remember that feeling of “it’s just not fair” after the first time you read the story of Mei Meriva? Whatever it may have been that Moshe did wrong – his punishment seems much too harsh.

Although we are most familiar with Rashi’s explanation of Moshe’s sin – that he hits the rock instead of talking to it – other commentators offer numerous different opinions. For example:

Ibn Ezra claims that Moshe hits the rock **twice**, instead of once.

Rambam argues that Moshe ‘loses his temper’ and speaks harshly.

Ramban (quoting Rabeinu Chananel) explains that Moshe’s sin lies in his comments prior to hitting the rock. Instead of saying: “can G-d get water from this rock?” he says: “can we get water from this rock?”

In fact, Abrabanel lists around **ten** different opinions (each of which he later proves incorrect).

Why are there so many opinions?

“...because you did not trust Me enough to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not lead Bnei Yisrael into the land....”

This pasuk indicates that Moshe and Aharon could have done something great [“...to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael”], but failed to do so. However, the Torah never tells us precisely what they did **wrong**.

Therefore, somewhere within the Mei Meriva incident there lies a flaw. But since it is so difficult to pinpoint that flaw, we find such a wide range of opinions.

So let’s do on our own what (most likely) all of the commentators did on their own **before** they wrote their commentaries. Let’s carefully compare what G-d’s

commands Moshe to do with what Moshe actually does! That would be the most logical way to figure out wherein lies his mistake.

G-d’s instructions to Moshe at Mei Meriva seem clear and straightforward:

“And G-d 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.”

Reread these psukim one more time, paying specific attention to the **five** commands that Moshe (and Aharon) must execute.

Now, to determine Moshe’s sin, we must simply examine the following psukim in search for any deviation on Moshe’s part.

Command #1 – “Take the staff”

Moshe’s Execution: “And Moshe **took** the staff from before the Lord, as G-d had commanded him....”

Nothing seems to be wrong here, and the pasuk even confirms: “as G-d commanded him.” Certainly, this could not involve any wrongdoing.

Command #2 – “Gather the eydah (congregation)...”

Moshe’s Execution: “And Moshe and Aharon **gathered** the ‘kahal’ (congregation) together in front of the rock....”

Here, too, no crime appears to have been committed.

Command #3 - “Speak to the rock that it should give water...”

Moshe’s Execution: “...And he [Moshe] said to **them**: Listen here you rebellious people, is it possible that **we** can take water from this rock?”

At first glance, it seems that here we ‘hit the jackpot!’ G-d commands Moshe to speak to the rock, and he never does.

Based on this discrepancy, Rashi claims that Moshe is punished for later hitting the rock instead of speaking.

Rambam and Ramban disagree. They focus instead on Moshe and Aharon’s sharp words of rebuke, which they administer on their own accord, without a divine command. However, whereas **Rambam** stresses the **tone** of this rebuke, **Ramban** sees its **content** as the basis of their sin.

Rambam claims that Moshe’s sharp censure – “listen you rebels...” – reflects an inappropriately angry tone that caused a “chillul Hashem” (a desecration of G-d’s Name).

Ramban claims that by saying ‘we’ in their rhetorical question – “is it possible that **we** can take out water from this rock?” – Moshe and Aharon lead the people to believe that it was **they** (and not G-d) who produced the water from the rock.

One may argue, however, that Moshe’s rebuke is indeed warranted. He may have understood G-d’s command to “speak **to** the rock” as “speak **about** the rock,” i.e. about the possibility that it could “give water” (“v’natan meimav”). After all, rocks don’t have ears, but people do! Doesn’t it stand to reason that G-d wants Moshe to speak to the people about the rock, rather than to the rock itself?!

Command #4 – “Take out for them water from the rock...”

Moshe’s Execution: “... and Moshe lifted his hand and **hit** the rock with his staff **two times**, then much water came out...”

Rashi, as we mentioned above, identifies this pasuk as Moshe’s primary transgression: he hits the rock **instead** of ‘talking’ to it. However, based on our explanation above, G-d may have actually expected

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The Well of Miriam



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This week's parasha, Parashat Hukat, begins with the laws of the para aduma (the red heifer), and then relates the unfortunate death of Miriam.

The Jewish people arrived at the wilderness of Zin... Miriam dies there and was buried there (Bamidbar 20:20).

The Talmud (Moed Katan 28a) asks why the section which relates to the death of Miriam is placed immediately after the section of the red heifer. The Gemara suggests that it teaches the following comparison: "What is the purpose of the sacrifices? They affect atonement! So, too, does the death of the righteous affect atonement!"

Immediately following Miriam's death, the Torah (ibid. 21) relates that "the nation was without water." The Talmud (Taanit 9a) teaches that the well of Miriam dried up after her death, because "during the entire forty years they had the 'well' through Miriam's merit." Upon her death, the water disappeared.

The Torah then relates that after the Well of Miriam dried up, the people complained, saying "If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of the Lord." They asked why G-d even brought the Jewish people, and their animals, to the desert if they are to die of thirst. In response, Moshe Rabbeinu and Aaron fell upon their faces at the entrance to the Ohel Moed.

G-d subsequently tells Moshe and Aharon that they should "take the rod and gather the community and speak to the rock in



Why did Moshe and Aharon need to gather the people? And why did G-d tell Moshe Rabbeinu to bring a stick? And finally, why was Moshe commanded to speak to the rock? What is a person meant to say to a rock?

front of all of the people, and it will yield water." Moshe and Aharon gathered the people by the rock, and said, "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of the rock?" Moshe Rabbeinu then raises his hand and strikes the rock, twice, and out came the water.

This is a very, very troubling story. We might ask why Moshe and Aharon need to gather the people? And why did G-d tell Moshe Rabbeinu to bring a stick? And finally, why was Moshe commanded to speak to the rock? What is a person meant to say to a rock?

Interestingly, the Targum Yonatan ben Uziel explains that when G-d commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to speak to the rock and to bring a stick, the intention was that only if the rock did not yield water should Moshe take the stick and hit the rock. In other words, the stick was intended only as a "backup" plan. Our questions, however, remain.

The Yalkut Shimoni asks a very important question. Why, in Parashat Beshalach (Shemot 17:1-7), is Moshe told to hit the rock, and here he is told to speak to the

rock? He explains that the Jewish people, upon leaving Egypt, were 'young' and they only understand the demonstrative act of hitting. However, forty years later, they are older and more mature, and therefore Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded to speak to the rock, to pray, study, and in the merit of Torah blessing will come to the world. In other words, G-d tells Moshe Rabbeinu that in a time of drought, we should pray, and study Torah, and only then will we merit receiving rain.

If so, G-d intended to teach the Jewish people a lesson. Just as in a time of drought Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to learn Torah next to the rock, and the fire of the Torah was meant to destroy and bring forth water from the rock, so too we are supposed to use our words, and turn to Torah study and prayer in times of crisis. Unfortunately, Moshe Rabbeinu was unable to unite the people behind this solution, and therefore, he needed to use the second option, i.e. to hit the rock. The incident concludes when G-d tells Moshe Rabbeinu that since he was unable to perform this miracle and teach the Jewish people this very important lesson, in "front of the Jewish people," he would not be the leader who would bring the Jewish people into the land of Israel.

What do we learn from the episode? Those who study Torah have special merit. It isn't the horses and chariots which bring victory, but rather the study of the Torah. If we only believe that, and internalize this message, then we will merit great blessing.

The Language of the Generation



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Regarding the nature of Moshe Rebbeinu's sin in striking the rock to bring forth water for the Jewish people, Rav Shmuel Dovid Luzzatto, ה"ץ, the great-grandson of the Ramchal, wrote that "While Moshe Rebbeinu only committed one sin, the commentaries heaped thirteen or more sins upon him because each one attributed some novel sin based on his own understanding..." The Torah tells us very little about the reason for the drastic consequences of Moshe's sin. We must therefore understand the commentaries' explanations rather than inventing any new sins to add to the already-long list.

There is a well-known dispute between the Rambam and Rashi regarding the nature of Moshe's sin. According to the Rambam, his sin was excessive anger when he said "Listen, you rebels." According to Rashi, however, his sin was disobeying G-d by hitting the rock when he was commanded to speak to the rock. While the Ramban takes issue with both of these explanations, the Maharal and Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev explain that on a deeper level, the Rambam and Rashi's explanations are not mutually exclusive. Each refer to a different stage in one process. The process began with Moshe becoming angry and that anger caused him to disobey Hashem's command to speak to the rock.

Hashem speaks to us in every generation through the Torah as if it is being given today. We must therefore understand what we must learn from the nature of Moshe's sin in order to know what is right in our own generation. The first step in that process is understanding the difference between the events in parshas Chukas and the events in parshas Beshalach when Moshe first drew water from a rock. There, the people lacked water and came to complain to Moshe, Moshe told Hashem that he was afraid they would kill him, Hashem told him to hit a rock, he did so, and water

began flowing from the rock to fulfill the Jewish people's need for water. What is the difference between these two events? Why was it a mitzva for Moshe to hit the rock shortly after the Jewish people left Egypt but a grave sin to do so in their last year in the desert before entering Eretz Yisroel?

The difference was the generation. Moshe was commanded to hit the rock for the generation who left Egypt. This older generation grew up as slaves in Egypt. They were familiar with the language of force and harshness. For them, when Moshe hit the rock, using force to extract the water, he was speaking the language of the old style of education understood by that generation. However, the generation in parshas Chukas lived forty years later. They grew up in the desert protected by Hashem who provided for all of their needs. They were a softer, weaker generation. This new generation, on the brink of entering Eretz Yisroel, understood a different language. Hashem expected Moshe to speak to the new generation in a language it understood, the language of conversation, speech, and dialogue. That is why He commanded Moshe only to speak to the rock and not to strike it.

In our times too, we see this distinction between the "old generation" and the "new generation." Our parents and grandparents who lived through the war, grew up for the most part under the control of totalitarian regimes or dictatorships and were accustomed to the harsh language of force. That generation also educated its children using the language of strict discipline and force. That approach does not work in the current generation. The old generation was not broken by the old approach to education. But if anyone tries to use the old way of discipline on the new generation, he will only shatter the lives of his students. Such an approach to education no longer works. It is simply outdated.

What happened to Moshe Rebbeinu in parshas Chukas? When he lifted up his staff to hit the rock just as he had done forty years earlier for the previous generation, he revealed that, on his level, he did not appreciate the difference between the generations. As great as he was, he could not speak the language of the new generation. He was still educating people the way it was done in the "old country." He did not understand how to communicate with the generation in its way, which was through speech, conversation, and dialogue. The new way is one of "And you shall teach your children and speak to them." The way of the new generation is speaking with one's children rather than using force to elicit their compliance.

It was not so much that Moshe was punished by not being allowed to bring the Jewish people into Eretz Yisroel. Rather, it was a natural consequence of the fact that he was no longer able to understand the true nature of the new generation. He could not be the person who would lead them into the land. But Yehoshua, his successor, did lead them into the land. Rashi teaches us that Eldad and Medad has prophesized that "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will bring the Jewish people into the land of Israel." What was Yehoshua's approach to education? At the end of his life, Yehoshua established a large stone as a monument and said that "it has heard all of the words of Hashem which He has spoken to us." Yehoshua understood that one can also speak to a stone and it will hear. He understood that the nature of the new generation is one of conversation rather than coercion.

May we merit to recognize the nature of our generation and education our generation according to its unique path and thereby see the revelation of Moshiach soon in our days.

Is Your Anxiety Killing You?



Rabbi YY Jacobson

TheYeshiva.net

After seventy years of communist oppression and seven hours of flying, Boris, a burly immigrant from Moscow steps off the plane in a free land to begin his new life in his new home, Israel. Standing at the Ben Gurion airport, a young and enthusiastic Israeli reporter plunges a microphone in front of him with a level of excitement that is only seen when an inside scoop is about to be caught. The reporter asks with focus: "Tell me, what was life back in Russia like?"

To which the Russian immigrant replies: "I couldn't complain."

An obviously unexpected answer, the young reporter continues to probe: "Well how were your living quarters there?" To which the Russian responds "I couldn't complain."

Not expecting this answer either, the reporter decides to hit him with a question that is bound to get the answer he is looking for: "What about your standard of living?" To which the Russian replies again: "I couldn't complain."

At this point, the reporter's frustration with the new immigrant's answers reaches a crescendo, and so in a derogatory tone the reporter yells out, "Well, if everything was so wonderful back in Russia, then why did you even bother to come here?" To which the new immigrant replies with gusto: "Oh, here I can complain!"

When poisonous snakes attack the Jews in the desert, G-d instructs Moses to fashion a special healing instrument: a pole topped with the form of a snake. Those who had been afflicted by the snake bite would gaze on the serpentine image on the pole and be cured.

"But is the snake capable of determining life and death?!" the Talmud asks. "Rather, when Israel would gaze upward and bind their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would be healed; and if not, they would perish." Fixing their eyes on the snake alone would

not yield any cure; it was looking upward toward G-d, it was the relationship with G-d, which brought the cure.

The copper snake that Moses made was preserved for centuries. In the passage of time, however, its meaning became distorted, and people began to say that the snake possessed powers of its own. When it reached the point of becoming an image of idolatry, the Jewish King Hezekiah destroyed the copper snake fashioned by Moses, and that was the end of that special copper snake.

Which only reinforces the question: Why ask people to look up at a man-made snake which can lead down the path to a theological error of deifying the snake?

The snake was the reptile that caused the harm in the first place. Healing, it would seem, would come from staying far away from serpents. Why in this case was the remedy born from gazing at the very venomous creature which caused the damage to begin with?

The snake in the biblical story is also a metaphor for all of the "snakes" in our lives. Have you ever been bitten by a "venomous snake"? Poisoned by harmful people, burnt by life, or by abusive situations? Is your anxiety killing you?

What is the deeper meaning of suffering? And how do some people know how to accept affliction with love and grace?

These are good questions that cannot be answered easily, if at all. But one perspective is presented in the story of the serpents. G-d tells Moses: "Make a serpent and place it on a pole. Whoever gets bitten should look at it and he will live." The key to healing, the Torah suggests, is not by fleeing the cause of the suffering, but by gazing at it. Don't run from the snake; look at it. Because deep inside the challenge, you will find the cure. Deep inside the pain, you will find the healing light.

Every experience in life can be seen from two dimensions – from a concrete, earthly perspective, or from a higher, more sublime vantage point, appreciating its true nature and meaning from the Divine perspective. There is the "snake" down here, and there is the very same "snake" up there. I can experience my challenges, struggles, and difficulties in the way they are manifested down here. But I can also look at these very same struggles from a more elevated point of view. The circumstances may not change, but their meaning and significance will. From the "downer" perspective, these challenges, curveballs, painful confrontations, and realizations can throw me into despair or drain me of my sap. From the "higher" perspective, the way G-d sees these very same realities, every challenge contains the seeds for rebirth. Within every crisis lies the possibility of a new and deeper discovery.

To perceive clarity from the midst of agonizing turmoil we must train ourselves to constantly look upward. When faced with a "snake," with a challenge, many people look to their right or to their left. Either they fight, or they cave in. But there is another path: look upwards. See the "snake" from the perspective above.

And in that upward gaze, you might find a new sense of healing: the questions might become the very answers, the problems may become the solutions, and the venom may become the cure.

It's the same idea taught by Moses: The source of the affliction itself becomes the remedy. This is true in all areas of life. As viewed by the Creator, from the perspective above, transgression is the potential for a new self-discovery; failure is the potential for deeper success, holes in a marriage are the seeds of "renovation" to recreate a far deeper relationship, the end of an era is always the beginning of a new one, pain is a springboard for deeper love and frustration is the mother of a new awareness.

Chukas: The Snake & The Tzadik



Rabbi Judah Mischel

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One afternoon, while preparing for davening, the righteous Tzadik, Chacham Eliyahu haKohen hiltamari of Izmir (d. 1729) was unable to find his *gartel*. While looking around, he noticed a black rope on the floor. With the time of *tefillah* having arrived, he kneeled down, picked up the rope, and tied it around his waist.

After finishing Mincha, Chacham Eliyahu began to untie the rope, when it suddenly uncoiled itself and slithered away. It turned out that the ‘rope’ he had worn was actually a poisonous snake. To express his thanks for this miracle, Chacham Eliyahu entitled his next sefer *Eizer Eliyahu*, “The Helper of Eliyahu”.

When Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin zy'a, would recount this *ma'aseh*, he would add the following thought: “Don’t be mistaken as to what is wondrous about this story. That the snake did not bite Chacham Eliyahu and remained still is not surprising, for the Torah tells us, ‘The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth’ (*Bereishis*, 9:2) ... No living creature can harm someone whose *Tzelem Elokim*, Divine image, is fully manifest.

“The truly extraordinary aspect of this story is Chacham Eliyahu’s greatness. In his *deveykus* to Hashem and incredible *kavanah*, even before he began davening, he didn’t even notice that the ‘rope’ he was picking up was actually a live snake.”

■ ■ ■

“Hashem sent *nechashim serafim*, venomous snakes, upon the people; they bit the people, and many died” (21:6). When the Jews cried out in Teshuvah, Hashem instructed Moshe to provide the cure: “Make yourself a *seraf*, venomous snake, and put it on a pole, and let

whoever is bitten look at it and live” (v8). Then Moshe fashioned a copper snake and affixed it atop a pole for Klal Yisrael to gaze upon, to be healed, and to live.

Why, specifically, is a snake used as punishment? And why is a snake then used as a cure? Reb Nosson of Breslov explains that all resistance to holiness, all spiritual ‘failure’, can be traced to the *Nachash haKadmoni*, the Primordial Snake in Gan Eden.

By following the *eitza*, the advice and lure of the *Nachash haKadmoni*, and by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Chavah ingested a ‘forbidden’ sense of separation from Hashem. With this primordial *cheit*, they welcomed and internalized the influence of the *Nachash* into the inner world of all human beings. The venom of the *Nachash* is the *yetzer hara*, the gravitational pull away from G-d and away from our true selves. It is expressed as the poisonous inner voice that tells us how ‘far away’ we are from Hashem: how lowly we are, how we are defined by our failures, that we have no hope to rectify that which we have damaged. As this spiritual syndrome deepens, one begins to criticize himself and everyone around him, driving him ever deeper into fear, darkness and sadness, and ultimately to sickness and death: “...The day that you eat of it you will surely die.” (*Bereishis*, 2:17)

Rav Ofir Erez, a Breslover Mashpiyah in Yerushalayim, refers to this inner voice as “The Torah of the Snake”. When we recite and elaborate on this false “Torah”, we share in the curse of the *Nachash*: “*M'afar tochal*” — you will eat from the dust. You will ‘eat’ and fill yourself with low self-confidence, feelings of baseness and worthlessness, and degraded behavior patterns.

The antidote and Tikun of “The Torah of the Snake” is “The Torah of the Tzadik”, and the template of every Tzadik and master of their *yetzer hara* is Moshe Rabbeinu. The Mishnah (Rosh Hashana 3:8) gives us a glimpse into this antidote:

“When Moshe held up his hands, Israel prevailed” (*Shemos*, 17:1). Did the hands of Moshe wage war? Rather this teaches that as long as Israel would look upwards and subject their hearts to their Father in heaven they prevailed, and if not they fell. Similarly, ‘Make for yourself a fiery serpent and mount it on a pole. And if anyone who is bitten shall look at it, he shall live’ (21:8). Did the *Nachash* kill or keep them alive? Rather, when Yisrael would look upwards, *u'mshabdin libam l'Avihem shebaShamayim*, and subject their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed...

After so many miracles and countless expressions of Hashem’s love and grace, our unwarranted complaints were a classic example of the *yetzer hara*, the voice of the *Nachash haKadmoni* advising us: “We are disgusted with this rotten bread” (21:6), “We do not have water to drink.” The root of this *kefirah*, heresy, was that we considered ourselves undeserving of Hashem’s kindness, unworthy of being provided for.

Being struck by fiery serpents, and then raising our eyes Heavenward to gaze upon the snake that Moshe made, reminded us of what lies beneath the surface of every moment of our lives. That is, the *bechirah*, choice, between *tov v'r'a*, good and evil — what is right and what is wrong, between the refreshment of the *yetzer tov*, and the venom of the *yetzer hara*.

Perhaps all of this explains the miracle of Chacham Eliyahu’s ‘*gartel*’. As the

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Song of Strength

Mrs. Shira Smiles

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Although it is only four pesukim (Bamidbar 21:17-20), Shirat Habe'er holds tremendous lessons and powerful symbolism. What inspired this song? What miracle transpired and how is it relevant to us?

An earlier passuk shares with us a clue, “A gift of the sea of reeds and the rivers of Arnon.” (Bamidbar 21:14).

Ramban explains that the cities mentioned in this section were all Moavi cities conquered by Sichon king of Emori. Am Yisrael was forbidden to fight Moav directly, but since these cities no longer belonged to Moav the Jews were able to capture them from Sichon and incorporate them into their territory. Am Yisrael is thanking Hashem for gifting them with these lands by enabling Sichon to defeat Moav. Thus, the song expresses appreciation that Hashem orchestrates world events for the benefit of the Jews. Although we may not always see the greater picture, Hashem is the all-powerful political coordinator and manager. Being constantly aware of this reality as global affairs shift and swirl through nations and powers gives us not only serenity but joy in knowing that

Hashem is always invested in our welfare and best interests.

Rashi cites the midrash that describes an astounding miracle that occurred at this juncture. The Emori nation hid in caves above a narrow pass that Bnei Yisrael traversed near the border of Moav. Their intention was to push huge boulders on the Jews to crush them as they passed. Instead, Hashem performed a miracle; the boulders that formed the gorge in which they were hiding came together crushing the Emori people. The Jews only became aware of this miracle when they saw bones and blood flowing down the gorge. Am Yisrael was then motivated to sing a song of praise to Hashem for their incredible salvation.

Rav Gamliel Rabinowitz learns two fundamental ideas from this episode. Firstly, just as one must teach his children about the miracle at Kriat Yam Suf, so one must teach his children this miraculous story. This must be part of our tradition; to tell of Hashem’s kindnesses and miracles that He has done for our people at the beginning of our nationhood. The second lesson is the importance of singing praises to

Hashem when one experiences a miracle. This expression of thanks should be in a public forum so others can be inspired as well by Hashem’s overflowing chesed. Rav Soloveitchik in Kol Dodi Dofek emphasizes the moral responsibility one has to respond to the beneficence bestowed upon him in the form of concrete deeds. Even more so, this obligation rests on one who receives kindness from Hashem in a supernatural fashion.

Rav Pinchas Friedman in Shvilei Pinchas sees these events as symbolic of what will transpire in the future before Mashiach comes. The Jewish people will have traveled through the ‘midbar ha’amim’ to come back to Eretz Yisrael. Once they return, the kedushah of Eretz Yisrael will expand outwards and pulverize all negative influences in the world. The crushed mountains are a ‘poel dimyonim’, a physical demonstration of that which will ensue in the future. Hence, ‘az yashir’ is not just about Am Yisrael singing at that point in time, but a foreshadowing of the song we will soon sing when, be’ezrat HaShem we return to our land and all evil is vanquished from the world.

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Moshe to hit the rock. After all, this is exactly how G-d had instructed him to produce water from the ‘rock at Chorev’ many years earlier. Moshe is commanded to **take out** water from the rock – why shouldn’t he assume that this was to be accomplished by hitting?

Furthermore, once Moshe understands that ‘speak **to** the rock’ means ‘speak **about** the rock,’ then obviously “take out water” must refer to an action that would extract water

– i.e. to hit the rock! Certainly, this would be no less of a miracle now than it was forty years earlier!

Ibn Ezra, after refuting all the other opinions, finds Moshe’s flaw in a tiny detail in this pasuk. He focuses on the word “pa’amayim” (= two times), claiming that Moshe transgresses by hitting the rock **twice** instead of only once.

Command #5 – “Give drink to the people and their animals.”

Moshe’s Execution: “...and the people and their animals drank.”

Clearly, Moshe does nothing wrong in this final stage.

Thus, by comparing Moshe’s actions to G-d’s command, we found the underlying reasons for the opinions of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rambam, and Malbim, etc.

Teachers Will Not Die



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

So what really happened on Gimmel Tammuz? You should not rush to the answer. According to Chazal, it is precisely our parsha that tells of the departure of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam that will usher in their eternal life.

"And why was the death of Miriam announced with a parah adumah? Because a parah adumah teaches about the rest of the soul and this chapter (parah adumah) is a great introduction to the death of the righteous and thus teaches: what made Miriam Miriam and what made Ahron Ahron did not die with their death. Their essence is eternal. She left the perishable earthly and returned to G-d, who is the source of life... Indeed, the death of a tzaddik testifies to the whereabouts of the soul like a thousand witnesses, for only he whose eyes are blind will recognize the tzaddik with his body lying there motionless... only a blind man will not see that the body of the tzaddik is only the garment of a human being" (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Parshas Hukat).

At high school graduation ceremonies, I ask students to tell me about a teacher who shaped them during those years. It always makes me cry when none of them say anything related to learning

the material. They then remember a phrase like, "That was a leader's answer!" (True!) "You make me think," or alternatively, "If you were like your sister..." or "That's not how you become." (Also true, unfortunately.)

Teachers have one basic immortal quality: they do not die. They will never be a passing task, ever. They teach tirelessly, even in death, in a kind of zoom where the "leave session" button cannot be clicked.

And the conclusion: a teacher who wants to leave his power in the hearts of his students must not act by force. And Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, in one of his wonderful teachings, explains the sin of Moshe Rabbeinu in a way that must remain alive in our hearts forever: "And this is a mistake that Moshe committed... he struck the rock twice with his staff, as if he had struck the upper heart, as if he had taken a thing by force and rape, because he came by the force of his good deeds and did not ally himself with the multitude..." (Torah 20, Likutei Moharan)

Moshe wanted so much to quench the thirst of his beloved people that he used his own power only when he was sure of his right. And it is true, he brought them water, but what will happen to them when he is gone? What will happen

when the teacher's power will no longer be the semblance of everything? How will Moshe Rabbeinu continue to live in them so that they can draw water themselves?

Please listen, teachers, do not be too good teachers. Do not do everything for them. Share with them a dilemma and explain to them that you must pray together for the same goal. The result he gives out must be shared by both of you.

This is how the Rebbe of Lubavitch behaved. Rabbi Yonatan Zacks testified that when he consulted the Rebbe, he felt that there was only one person in the room: no, not the teacher. He himself, the student, filled the entire room when the Rebbe was seemingly no longer in the room, but that was only because he had moved completely into the student's heart and would live there forever.

"There are no graduations," the Rebbe said. Graduation, he explained, is the power to decide that one will continue, "He will complete in His mind to..."

On the third day of Tammuz, a powerful presence filled the space of the world. A holy, wonderful, fascinating and beautiful presence. This presence was us and still is.

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Mishna taught, the *Nachash* neither kills nor heals. However, when we believe we are separate from Hashem and look down on ourselves, we internalize the deadly 'venom' of the *yetzer hara*. And when, like Chacham Eliyahu, we gaze upwards, *u'mshabdin libam l'Avihem shebaShamayim*, and subject our hearts to our Father in

Heaven, we gain mastery over our *yetzer hara*, and are healed.

May we merit to attach ourselves to the true Tzadikim, internalize their words of Torah, and cultivate deep *deveykus* and *kavannah* in our lives. The word *Mashiach* has the same numerical value as *Nachash*,

demonstrating that our redeemer, the Tzadik of all Tzadikim, will provide humanity the ultimate cure of the primordial snake bite. May it be so, soon and in our days.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
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In Parashat Chukat, the people of Israel once again complain against God and Moshe. And again, the people are punished. This time, they are attacked by snakes (Bamidbar 21:6):

וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' בָּעֵם אֶת הַשְׁנִינָאִים הַשְׁרָפִים וַיַּנְשֹׁךְ אֶת-הָעָם
וַיַּחֲמֹת עַם-זֶבֶחֶם מִיְּשְׂרָאֵל:

The type of snakes mentioned have received various translations. Some translate the verse as:

"The LORD sent seraph serpents against the people. They bit the people and many of the Israelites died."

In this case, the word שְׁרָפִים are a type of serpent. This fits biblical verses (like Bamidbar 21:8 and Yeshaya 14:29) where שְׁרָף does not come to modify נָשָׁש – "snake." In a similar fashion, one translation renders the phrase "viper-serpents."

Others suggest that שְׁרָף is an adjective. So we find translations such as "fiery serpents," "poisonous snakes," and "burning snakes." All of these associate the root שְׁרָף with "burn" – either literal fire or from the burning feeling of the venom.

The root שְׁרָף has several related roots in Hebrew, all associated with burning:

- צַרְבָּ – "to burn, scorch, sting." This is the source of the word צַרְבָּת – "heartburn."
- שְׁרָבָ – "to glow, be parched." The word for "heat wave," שְׁרָבָ, has its origin in this root.
- צַרְפָּ – "to smelt, refine" as used to extract metal from ore via burning. Later it developed the sense "to attach, to join."

This last root gave us a few surprising words. First, the word צַרְפָּ – now meaning

"shack" or "bunk." In the Talmud it meant a cone-shaped hut, and it probably got its name due to the materials used being joined together.

Next, we have the place name צַרְפָּת. In the Bible (Melachim I 17:9-10; Ovadia 1:20), it referred to a Phoenician town. Later, it became associated with the country of France, perhaps because of the mention of סְפָרָה in the verse in Ovadia (later associated with nearby Spain), or because of the similarity of sound of צַרְפָּת with the name of France at the time. And how did the Phoenician צַרְפָּת get its name? From the root צַרְפָּ, since glass refining developed in that area.

Lastly, we have the English word "silver." One theory says originally it meant "refined silver," and ultimately derived from the Akkadian "sarapu," which is cognate with the Hebrew word צַרְפָּת.

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

I appear three times in Chukat. Two of those times in connection with other nations.
What am I?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

The sword appears 3 times: the first time in the laws of Tumat Met 19:16 דין-דין,
a second time with Edom 20:18, a third time with the Emoriites 21:24.



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The Denver Kehillah		Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
CONNECTICUT		Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Beth David Synagogue		Young Israel of New Rochelle
Congregation Agudath Sholom		Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of West Hartford		Young Israel of Oceanside
FLORIDA		Young Israel of Scarsdale
Beth Israel Congregation		OHIO
Hebrew Academy RASG		Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Torah Ohr		Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls		Congregation Torat Emet
Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale		Green Road Synagogue
GEORGIA		Fuchs Mizrachi School
Congregation Beth Jacob		Heights Jewish Center
Congregation Ohr HaTorah		PENNSYLVANIA
HAWAII		Shaare Torah Congregation
Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim		SOUTH CAROLINA
ILLINOIS		Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Mizrachi–Religious Zionists of Chicago		Congregation Dor Tikvah
MARYLAND		TENNESSEE
Kemp Mill Synagogue		Baron Hirsch Congregation
Pikesville Jewish Congregation		TEXAS
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation		Robert M. Beren Academy
MASSACHUSETTS		United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston
Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel		VIRGINIA
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah		Keneseth Beth Israel
Young Israel of Brookline		WASHINGTON
MICHIGAN		Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Young Israel of Oak Park		Northwest Yeshiva High School
Young Israel of Southfield		Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe		VENEZUELA
MINNESOTA		CARACAS
Congregation Darchei Noam		Ashkenazi Kehilla
MISSOURI		Mizrachi Venezuela
Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach		
Hari B'nai Zion Congregation		
Young Israel of St. Louis		



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