

Parshat Chukat

By: Andrew Zimmerman, MD

במדבר כ':י"א-י"ב

(יא) וַיָּרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעֲמָיִם וַיִּצְאוּ מִיָּם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׁתּוּ הָעֵדָה וּבָעִיָּרָם: (ס) (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן, יַעַן לֹא־הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן לֹא תְבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם

Bamidbar 20:11-12

(11) And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their animals drank. (12) But Hashem said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them."

רש"י על במדבר כ':י"ב:א'

(יב) יַעַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי. גְלַה הַפְּתוּב שְׂאֵלוֹלֵי חֲטָא זֶה בְּלִבְד, הָיוּ נִכְנָסִין לָאָרֶץ, כַּדִּי שְׂלֵא יֹאמְרוּ עֲלֵיהֶם כַּעֲוֹן דּוֹר הַמִּדְבָּר שְׂנֵגְזֹר עֲלֵיהֶם שְׂלֵא יִכְנָסוּ, כַּד הָיָה עוֹן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן; וְהֵלֵא "הִצְאוּ וּבָקְרוּ יִשְׁחַט" (במדבר יא, כב) קִשָּׁה מְזוּזָה? אֵלֵא לְפִי שְׂבִסְתֵר, חֲסֵד עָלָיו הַפְּתוּב, וְכֵאן שְׂבִמְעֵמֵד כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֹא חֲסֵד עָלָיו הַפְּתוּב מִפְּנֵי קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם:

Rashi on Numbers 20:12:1

(12) BECAUSE YOU DID NOT TRUST ME — The Torah tells us the the fact that but for this sin alone, they (Moshe and Aharon) would have entered the land of Israel, in order that people should not say of them, "Even as the sin of the generation of the Wilderness (a term used of those who left Egypt) on whom it was decreed that they should not enter the Land was the sin of Moshe and Aharon" (cf. Rashi on Numbers 27:13). But was not the doubting question (cf. Rashi on Numbers 11:22), "shall the sheep and oxen be slaughtered for them?" a more grievous lack of faith in God than this? But because that had been said in private (none of the Jewish people being present, and therefore it could have no evil influence upon them), the Torah (Hashem) spared him, but here, where all of the Jewish people were standing by, the Torah does not spare him because of the sanctification of Hashem's name (cf. Tanchuma).

In the middle of this week's parsha we read about the sin that prevents Moshe and Aharon from leading the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. The Jewish people complain about lacking water, and cry out to Moshe and Aharon. Moshe and Aharon then go to the Mishkan and pray to Hashem. Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon to speak to a rock, and the rock will provide water for the Jewish people. Moshe

and Aharon then ask the Jewish people “listen you rebels, shall we get water for you from this rock?” Rather than speaking to the rock, Moshe then hits the rock two times, and enough water comes out to provide for the Jewish people, and their animals. Immediately after this Hashem informs Moshe and Aharon that “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Jewish people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them.”

Rashi wants to know what is it about this sin in particular that results in Moshe and Aharon not being allowed to enter the land. There were after all other times when Moshe and Aharon erred in their judgement. Rashi gives an example of a more severe sin committed by Moshe earlier in Bamidbar. There the Jewish people complain about the mann (the special food that Hashem provided for them in the desert), and request meat. Moshe then complains to Hashem that he is not sure how will be able to take care of the Jewish people, and fulfill their request. Hashem tells Moshe to gather 70 elders, and that Hashem will provide more than enough meat for the Jewish people. Moshe responds by doubting Hashem’s abilities, saying “the people who are with me number six hundred thousand men; yet You say, ‘I will give them enough meat to eat for a whole month.’ Could enough flocks and herds be slaughtered to suffice them? Or could all the fish of the sea be gathered for them to suffice them?” This denial seems to be the greater of these two sins, yet it does not result in punishment. Why does Hashem punish Moshe for what is apparently the lesser of the two sins?

To answer this question, Rashi draws an important distinction between the context of each sin. Moshe’s questioning Hashem’s ability earlier in Bamdibar is done in private. The conversation takes place away from the Jewish people, and therefore Hashem has mercy on him. However, in this week’s parsha Moshe’s sin is done in full view of the entire Jewish people, and because of the importance of sanctifying Hashem’s name in public, Hashem does not have mercy on him, resulting in Moshe being punished.

Rav Moshe Taragin notes that Moshe is not punished for desecrating Hashem’s name, rather he is punished for simply not sanctifying Hashem’s name in public. Whenever we have an opportunity to sanctify Hashem’s name in public, and we don’t, we pass up an opportunity to augment Hashem’s presence in the world. As religious Jews in the public eye, these opportunities are innumerable. May we merit to use these occasions wisely, and sanctify Hashem’s name every chance we get.

Shabbat Shalom!