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HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY

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PARSHAT CHUKAT 5783 • 2023










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

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פְּעָמָיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ מֵיָם רַבִּים
 במדבר כ"א

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Does the Crime Match the Punishment?

The Essence of Education



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

One of the most enigmatic episodes in Chumash is the seemingly disproportionate, if not irrational, punishment to Moshe's striking of the rock. What could Moshe or Aharon possibly have done to have warranted the most drastic consequence – dying in the desert and not leading the children of Israel into the land?!

After all, this was the very purpose of their mission of the exodus – to leave Egypt, receive the Torah and then to bring the people to the destination of their journey – entry into the land of their forefathers.

This question has plagued commentators since time immemorial. Let us glance at the cryptic episode and attempt to solve the mystery.

Keep in mind, it is now the first month of the 40th year in the desert and there was once again a water shortage and the people gathered against Moshe and Aharon.

The Pesukim

'...They quarrelled with Moshe and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before Hashem! Why did you bring Hashem's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"...Hashem said to Moshe, "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aharon gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." So Moshe took the staff from before Hashem, just as he commanded him. He and Aharon

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

'Hashem said to Moses and Aharon, "Since you did not believe in me to sanctify me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." These are the waters of Meriva (strife) where the Children of Israel fought with Hashem and He was sanctified through them' (Bamidbar 20:3-12).

Questions

The enigma is threefold:

1. What exactly did Moshe and Aharon do wrong? The verses do not clearly point out what was their error – what precisely is their sin that deserved a punishment?
2. Whatever it is they did wrong, did this warrant the harshest of punishments of all – death in the desert and disqualification from completing their core mission that they had laboured selflessly for 40 years to fulfil?
3. The description of their crime is strange: "Since you did not believe in me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel..." Where was the lack of belief and profaning of Hashem? What was done where G-d's name was not glorified?

There are so many different answers regarding the crime, which in and of itself highlights just how murky and unclear the depiction of this episode is.

Some say the crime was in not executing what Hashem had commanded – hitting

the rock as opposed to speaking to it (Rashi), or perhaps hitting the rock twice. Others say it was Moshe's inappropriate display of anger, unbecoming of such a great leader (Rambam), whereas Ramban rejects these and sees their sin in attributing the miracles to themselves where they inadvertently diminished Hashem's role in the miracle.¹ Many more commentaries abound.

These explain the crime, but none seem to adequately explain or justify the harsh punishment.

Changing of Generations

Two points which I believe unlock the mystery is both the *timing* of this episode as well as a key verse which changes everything.

This episode marks the transition of generations. It occurs in the 40th and final year in the desert.² We no longer find ourselves in the first generation of the Exodus, but rather in the next generation, raised in the desert.

This is a critical key point apparently overlooked by Moshe and Aharon – they are talking to a brand new generation, not merely a continuation of the previous generation.

These people are not the ones who came out of Egypt and lived under the harsh servitude of Pharaoh but rather we are now in the 40th year, at the end of the long sojourn in the desert. All those up to the age of 40 were born in the desert. These people had no history of servitude. This was a generation born in transition – with the anticipation and expectation of youth, knowing that they were on their way to the land of their forefathers to be redeemed.

And here is the critical verse. They do not complain at all about any desire to go back to Egypt or any nostalgic memory of the food that they ate in Egypt, as was the case with their fathers (Bamidbar 11). They rather are brimming with expectation to go into a land blessed with grains and fruits: 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? *It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates.* And there is no water to drink.'

Their lack of water elicited in them *not* a desire to return to exile but a frustration that the redemption had not yet arrived. This was not the complaints of those pining with hindsight for the days of yesterday but rather those yearning with foresight for a better tomorrow. They had

not yet arrived in the land and they were still frustrated at being in the arid, barren desert.

When Moshe and Aharon hear the complaints, they hear an echo of their incessantly complaining fathers, whose protests and rejections eventually caused their demise. They hear a continuation of the last 40 years of dealing with those who came out of Egypt and their many complaints, especially during their first few years about their lack of water, food and blandness of the manna, desire not to go to the land and their nostalgic memories of their times in Egypt. It is for this reason they seem to brand them as rebelling against G-d as opposed to those who are anticipating a better future.

Moshe responds to their request for water in the form of an angry admonition – "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?" (20:10). This is a first – branding the *whole* people of Israel as a bunch of rebels instead of as a younger generation, frustrated at not having yet entered the land.

Moshe's anger is misguided as in his mind he is talking to yesterday's generation, instead of talking to a new generation in their own language of the future. This, though, is a different generation with different memories, different experiences and different dreams for the future.

Shedding New Light

Perhaps this now sheds new light on the commentaries of Rashi and Rambam. Perhaps the very command to *speak* to the rock and not strike it, was a reflection of the need to *speak* to the next generation and that did not need to be dealt with the harshness of striking. The staff itself was a symbol of the miracles of striking the sea to split it and the rock to bring out water. The rod or staff can also perhaps be a weapon to strike down others and a symbol of aggression. Perhaps the striking of the rock signalled the harshness that that first generation needed to be spoken to and it was the language that they understood from their servitude in Egypt. This generation though, needed a different language, a softer mindset and more nuanced educational language.

Therefore the misplaced anger and the striking instead of speaking, reflected a mismatch between Moshe and Aharon's

much needed leadership approach to those who came out of Egypt as opposed to the softer approach for that generation who were about to enter the land.

Moshe and Aharon are now both 120 and 123 years old respectively and are from the previous generations. The incident of the waters of Meriva demonstrated that Moshe could no longer serve as Bnei Yisrael's leader due to the generation gap between them. Not the sin, but rather the rift seals the fate of Moshe and Aharon and denies them the privilege of leading them into the land. They were the leaders of the previous generation, one which was destined to die in the desert. It was therefore decreed that Moshe and Aharon, too, will be denied the right to enter the land. Moshe and Aharon are no longer able to sanctify G-d's Name as they did in the past.

A Critical Lesson in Education

To sanctify G-d's name in education, one has to be fully attuned to their needs and believe wholeheartedly in them. Every generation often comes with differing cultural norms and needs. In some ways, each generation has its own soul and therefore requires a different language. It is this that Rav Kook clarifies in his famous article called "מאמר הדור" – "The Article of the Generation", where Rav Kook saw at the turn of the 20th century a generation restless for a better future, restless to return to the land and restless to rebuild a society in Israel after so many years in exile. That generation needed to be spoken to, not in the language and yesterday but rather in the language of tomorrow.

So too today in our generation. May we all as parents and educators rise to the challenge of the needs and modes of a generation and speak on the one hand with the eternal, timeless words of Torah while at the same time ensuring that they are relevant, meaningful and inspirational to the culture milieu and norms of our time.

1. This explains, according to the Ramban, why the focus of the punishment is on the diminishing of the sanctification of Hashem.

2. 38 years have passed from the end of Parashat Korach last week to the beginning of Parashat Chukat. These years are literally skipped over with little known about them other than the fact that the generations of males between ages 20 and 60 all died out in the desert as well as the locations of their different places of encampment as described in the beginning of Parashat Masei.

PERSONAL GROWTH

The Ultimate Decisor



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi
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Over the past weeks, we studied the first of the Thirteen Principles, which recognizes Hashem's control over all occurrences. This week, we will see how this principle applies to the actions and decisions of man as well.

Though we have free choice and make our own decisions, Hashem steers the results of these decisions and even implants ideas that influence them.

Steering the Result

Yosef made the first of these points when he reconciled with his brothers at the beginning of Parshat Vayigash. He encouraged his brothers to avoid anger¹ or sadness² for having sold him into slavery because Hashem had turned the slavery into a *shlichut*³ (mission) to sustain the family (Bereishit 45:5) and (eventually) develop them into a great nation.⁴

Yosef sharpened this point again in Parshat Vayechi. After Yaakov's death, the brothers feared that Yosef would take revenge. Yosef's response to their pleas for mercy was "Am I in G-d's place? You intended it for the bad, but G-d intended it for the good." (Bereishit 50:19-20). The brothers had negative intentions, but Hashem had positive ones and steered Yosef's fate in a totally different direction. Yosef felt responsible to carry out these heavenly intentions. Revenge was irrelevant.⁵

What Hashem Tells Us

Dovid HaMelech took Yosef's teaching a step further. When he was on the run from Avshalom, Shimi ben Geira cursed and stoned him. Dovid's general, Avishai, offered to kill Shimi to avenge the affront to Dovid. Dovid responded (Shmuel Bet 16:10) that "Hashem is the one who told Shimi to curse." Avishai saw Shimi cursing; Dovid saw Hashem operating behind the scenes.

As opposed to Yosef who saw Hashem's Hand in the determining the results of our decisions, Dovid saw Hashem as behind the decision itself! Though Shimi made the decision to curse Dovid, it was Hashem who put the idea in his head.

Address To Sender

The Chinuch (Mitzvah 241) uses Dovid HaMelech's words to explain the *issur* (prohibition) to take revenge against someone who wronged us. He explains that revenge is foolish because one who recognizes that Hashem is behind their suffering – even when it emanates from the actions of other people – realizes that Hashem is the one they should be channeling their frustration towards.

Dogs often bite the stick their owners use to direct and discipline them. They do not realize that the stick is merely a tool in the hand of their owner. Taking out our frustration on the person who hurt us is both senseless and misguided. We should remember that Hashem is the true origin of the (thoughts that inspire the) actions of others against us.

The Message of Megillat Ester

This idea is the message of Megillat Ester. Though the storyline seems driven by the decisions of the *megillah's* central characters — (mainly) Achashveirosh and Haman — the result is completely contrary to their intentions. This occurs because of Hashem's involvement behind the scenes.

The Maharal (Or Chadash, pg. 59) sees this as the significance of the *gemara's* assertion that the term "*ha'melech*" in the *megillah* actually refers to Hashem (Ester Rabbah 3:10). Though Achashveirosh is the one who took action, Hashem is the one who planted the ideas and drove the events.

It was Hashem who inspired Mordechai to charge Esther with saving the Jews;

gave Esther the idea to invite Haman to the meal with Achashveirosh; arranged for Haman to encounter Mordechai upon exiting the meal; gave Haman's advisors the idea of erecting gallows to hang Mordechai on; kept Achashveirosh up at night nervous about a potential plot against him; convinced Haman to visit Achashveirosh unannounced; gave Achashveirosh the idea to test Haman's ambitions; and convinced Haman to unabashedly express his royal ambitions.

Reflection upon the Purim story reminds us that, though Hashem does not (generally) perform open miracles, He directs behind the scenes – not only nature, but also man's decisions. Though we make our own decisions, Hashem steers the results of these decisions and plants ideas that help us decide.

Embracing this perspective yields a fundamental attitude shift. We should remind ourselves that what happens to us, including the actions of other people, actually emanates from Hashem. May this help us internalize, reflect, and respond properly to the events we experience each day.

● Summarized by Josh Pomerantz.

1. The Ba'al HaTanya (Iggeret Hakodesh 25) used this idea to explain why a person who gets (uncontrollably) angry is considered to have served *avodah zarah*. His anger reflects his lack of recognition of Hashem's Hand behind the events frustrating him.
2. The Ba'al HaTanya (Iggeret Hakodesh 11) saw these words of Yosef as a broader principle. Our reminding ourselves of the fact that all occurrences are driven by Hashem should help us avoid sadness. Events are not random; they are the acts of a good and caring G-d.
3. The root "*shalach*" appears 28 times in these *parshiyot*.
4. Yosef's formulation in *pasuk chet* ("You are not the ones who sent me here") goes even further.
5. Chazal express a similar idea regarding the episode of Yehudah and Tamar. The *medrash* (Bereishit Rabbah 85:1) describes what Yaakov and each of his children were involved in (after the sale of Yosef) and then adds that Hashem was busy creating *Mashiach* (by bringing Yehudah and Tamar together).

HAFTARAH - PARSHANUT ON THE PARSHA

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



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

This year, we are reading Chukat together with Balak. When Chukat is read on its own we read Shoftim 11:1-33 which 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 Shoftim 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 Israelite victories and conquest of the land east of the Jordan river.

Perhaps the more subtle association and *parshanut* on the *parasha* 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 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 Mei-meriva. 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

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Question: Chicken was heated up in the microwave in a meat container with a dairy plastic cover. What is the status of the meat, container, and cover?

Answer: If the cover was not used for dairy within 24 hours (*aino ben yomo*), the chicken and the container are kosher. The cover should be kashered through *hag'alah*.

If the cover was used within 24 hours (*ben yomo*), the chicken must be thrown out and the cover and container should be kashered.

Question: A dirty meat plastic utensil was placed in the dairy dishwasher by mistake and went through a cycle together with dairy dishes. The water in the dishwasher reaches 70 degrees Celsius. What is the status of the vessels?

Answer: Seemingly, if the meat vessel was dirty, one would need to kasher all of the vessels. However, there are a few factors to consider:

Maybe the meat on the vessel was *batel b'shishim* (nullified in sixty).

Maybe the hot water only begins after the soap has been dispersed, in which case this soap spoils the flavor of the meat and dairy and prevents the issue.

In practice, we may rule leniently because it is difficult to kasher all of the vessels and there is a doubt here. Additionally, once 24 hours have passed, this is only a *safek derabanan*. Additionally, the last round of hot water of the cycle may constitute *hag'alah* and kasher the vessels. While we generally require boiling water for *haga'alah*, here we can apply the principle of *kebolo kach polto*: just

as the vessels received the flavor with heat of 70 degrees, they will be extracted at 70 degrees as well).

In practice, you may use the vessels. The meat vessel should be kashered as it certainly received more dairy flavor from the other dairy vessels.

Question: Does one need to separate *terumot u'ma'asrot* from fruit of an ownerless, public tree? If so, am I allowed to deem my fruit tree ownerless and then eat from it without separating *terumot u'ma'asrot*?

Answer: If a tree is definitely ownerless, one is exempt from separating *ma'asrot*. If there is a doubt, you should separate without a *bracha*. Fundamentally, you may deem your tree ownerless in front of three people as long as you would allow them to come into your garden and take it whenever they want. However, I generally do not recommend doing this as an alternative to separating. Leaf greenery (that are not eaten alone, such as spices) are subject to a *machloket* whether one needs to separate (we generally do so without a *bracha*), and therefore you are allowed to deem these ownerless and then take without separating.

Question: Is there an issue with moving apartments during the 9 days (from renting one apartment to renting another apartment)?

Answer: One certainly should try not to get new things over the 9 days, including an apartment. However:

1. You are not buying the apartment

2. In many cases, entering the apartment at a later point can constitute a *hefsed*, loss.

3. If you are not expanding but rather transferring from one apartment to another, this is allowed *mitzad hadin*.

Therefore, if there is a need, one may move in such a scenario.

Question: If I realize that I did not say "v'tein tal u'matar livracha" right before I start saying the end of the bracha (before "Baruch Ata"), what should I do?

Answer: The *Rishonim* discuss what to do in this situation. According to the Ra'avya, you say "v'tein tal u'matar livracha" and continue the normal text of the bracha from those words on. According to the Rosh, you say "v'tein tal u'matar livracha al pnei ha'adama" but continue right into the bracha as opposed to going back. Seemingly, the Ra'avya understood that the placement of the *bakasha* within the bracha is essential, whereas the Rosh disagreed. The Mishnah Berurah (117:15) paskins like the Rosh, but writes that *lechatchila* one should follow the Ra'avya.

If one realizes after saying "baruch ata Hashem", the Biur Halacha says that you can say "lamdeinu chukecha" because it is a *passuk* in Tehillim, and afterwards say "v'tein tal u'matar livracha" and continue with the rest of the bracha. Rav Feinstein did not accept this solution as one should not mention *pesukim* that are not part of *tefillah*. Nevertheless, many poskim agreed with the Biur Halacha (Eshel Avraham, Yabiyah Omer).

● Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.

שלושת המנהיגים

הרבנית שרון רימון
Tanach teacher and author



לצד רעיון זה, מן הכתוב עולה סיבה אחרת למותם של משה ואהרן: חטא מי מריבה. אמנם, כל הקורא את הסיפור מרגיש מיד שיש פער בין גודל החטא לגודל העונש. ניתן להרגיש שחטא מי מריבה היה מעין 'תירוץ' כדי להביא לכך שהמנהיגים לא ייכנסו לארץ. חטא מי מריבה מדגים כישלון מנהיגותי. כישלון זה הוא קטן מאד, חסר פרופורציה לעומת העונש שקיבלו – שלא ייכנסו לארץ, אך הוא מבהיר שיש בעיה במנהיגות, ובגללה לא ייכנסו לארץ. הבעיה המהותית במנהיגות באה לידי ביטוי בשני החטאים הגדולים של העם: חטא העגל וחטא המרגלים. המנהיגים אמנם לא חטאו בחטאים אלה, אך המנהיגים הם חלק בלתי נפרד מהעם, ויש להם אחריות על המצב הרוחני של העם. אם העם חוטא, בחטאים כבדים כל כך, ומת במדבר בעקבות החטא, לא ייתכן שמנהיגיו ייכנסו אל הארץ.

מותם של מנהיגי העם מהווה סיוע של תקופת ההליכה במדבר, שהיו בה ניסים ונפלאות, אך גם תלות; היו בה הליכה אחר ה', אך גם תלונות ומרידות.

חילופי ההנהגה קשים לעם, אך יחד עם זאת מאפשרים מבט חדש אל העתיד.

של מרים הוא שהביא אותם לתגובה לא מתאימה, ואולי האבלות האישית על מות אחותם לא אפשרה להם להיות פנויים וקשובים לצורכי העם בצורה מדויקת, כפי שהיו בדרך כלל.

יחד עם זאת, סביר להניח שמות שלושת המנהיגים רגע לפני הכניסה לארץ לא התגלגל במקרה, אלא הייתה לו סיבה מהותית. במדרש מתוארת התלות של ישראל במנהיגיהם אשר דאגו לקיומם הבסיסי ביותר, בצורה ניסית. כאשר המסע במדבר מגיע אל תומו, וישראל נכנסים אל הארץ, לא יהיו זקוקים עוד לניסים אלו. בארץ הגשם ירד מן השמיים והמים ינבעו במעיינות ויזרמו בנהרות. התבואה תצמח מן הארץ וממנה יכינו את מזונם. ישראל לא ינדדו עוד בדרכים קשות ומסוכנות. מעתה, עזרתו של הקב"ה תגיע אליהם בדרך הטבע, ולא בניסים גלויים.

המעבר מהנהגה ניסית להנהגה טבעית מתבטא במוותם של שלושת המנהיגים הדגולים, שהנהגתם מאופיינת בניסיות. מותם מהווה משבר עבור העם, שצריך ללמוד להסתדר בעצמו, ללא מנהיגיו הדגולים וללא ניסים. אך משבר זה הוא גם תחילתה של תקופה חדשה בה העם הופך להיות עצמאי.

בשנה האחרונה של ישראל במדבר, נפטר משה אהרן ומרים, מנהיגי העם הדגולים. המדרש מתאר כיצד מותם של המנהיגים גרם להפסקת המן (מזון), הבאר (שתייה) וענני הכבוד (צל), שהם שלושת 'אבות הקיום' החיוניים שאפשרו את קיומם של ישראל במדבר. היעלמות המים, ענני הכבוד והבאר, מבטאים את ה'שוקת השבורה' שעמדו ישראל בפניה עם הסתלקות מנהיגיהם, הן מבחינה פיזית והן מבחינה רוחנית. ההנהגה המשמעותית של עם ישראל נעלמת, ומשאירה אחריה חלל גדול, והחסר מורגש בעוצמה רבה.

פרק כ' פותח את תיאור השנה האחרונה. הפרק מתחיל במוות של מרים, ועובר אל חטא מי מריבה, בו נגזרה מיתה על משה ואהרן. הכתוב מקשר בין שני האירועים, כך שניתן להבין שחוסר המים קשור למות מרים (כפי שהסביר המדרש); חסרון המים גרר תלונה של העם; התלונה גררה תגובה לא נכונה של משה ואהרן; בעקבות זאת נגזרה מיתה על משה ואהרן.

אולם, נראה שאין זה רצף אירועים מקרי. ייתכן שגם תגובתם הקשה של משה ואהרן באירוע זה קשורה למותה של מרים: אולי חסרונה המנהיגותי

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The Little Puddle We Dare Not Cross



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

Here's a wise thought from Dr. Rakefet Ben-Yishai:

There is a story about a child who visited a circus and saw a large elephant tethered to a small stake. When the child asked why the elephant did not pull up the stake and run away, the circus people said: We tied him to the stake when he was small and weak and the stake was bigger and stronger than he was. In those days it was impossible for him to pull it up. Years passed, the elephant grew and got stronger but, in his eyes, pulling up the stake still seemed impossible. Even when it became clear to everyone that a little pull on the stake from the powerful elephant would set him free, his lack of awareness of his strength prevented him from trying to free himself.

In the course of describing several stages of our desert journey, the Torah portion of Chukat mentions Nahal Zered (the stream of Zered). For 38 years, our forefathers did not succeed in crossing this stream and advancing in their journey to the Land of Israel. We would have expected a stream of this kind to be more like a deep, raging, and dangerous river, yet our sages tell us that its width was merely that of a zeret (pinky finger). Amazing. The same people who crossed the Red Sea in the Exodus from Egypt were not able to cross a little puddle. Such a tiny obstacle separated them from the Promised Land.

It would seem that the problem was not in the stream but in the people. The Children of Israel disparaged the Land of Israel through the negative report of the spies and they had still not rectified this

sin. As long as they did not truly want to enter the Land, even the smallest stream seemed in their eyes like a mighty river that they dared not attempt to traverse. Only after 38 years of soul-searching and self-rectification were they able to appreciate their true strength, cross the stream, and finally reach their destination.

This is not just a story about an elephant and not just a quote from our sages about a stream in the desert. It is meant to make us consider the small stake to which we are tethered and the little stream that, seemingly, we cannot cross.



It's the end of the school year and, as we separate from those who guide and care for our children, it is appropriate that we read a Torah portion about separating from our nation's greatest caregiver, nanny, and female mentor, Miriam the prophetess. What can we learn from her?

Miriam risked her life in order to be a midwife to the Hebrew babies in Egypt. The Torah says that she possessed fear of G-d. Despite Pharaoh's order to kill the babies, she remained true to her values in the face of a threatening regime and did not comply with its decrees.

But side by side with her uncompromising strength, she could be soft and comforting. Rashi describes how, despite the hostile Egyptian environment, she would calm and soothe the babies and keep the children amused and happy, with special concern for the youngest among them.

Later, Miriam was the one who stood on the banks of the Nile and watched over little Moshe as he floated in his basket. In those historic moments, she showed that she was not just a babysitter, but someone who would take charge and make sure that the "Am Yisrael" ship sailed in the right direction.

In the Exodus from Egypt, while the "Song of the Sea" (Shirat HaYam) was sung, Miriam led the women in dance with the same drum that takes center stage today when kindergarteners in Israel dance in remembrance of what Miriam did when the sea split. Our commentators explain that this was Miriam's way of educating and mentoring throughout her life: to transmit her message through participatory experience, through song and dance. Ultimately, these are the educational experiences that are seared into the soul and last throughout the years.

Miriam also taught us about lashon hara (insulting speech) when she was stricken with tzara'at (a skin malady) after speaking negatively about Moshe Rabbeinu.

And in parashat Chukat, immediately after Miriam passes away, the Torah relates that the people are suddenly overcome by thirst. It's both a physical and a spiritual thirst – a thirst for Miriam's calming and comforting presence.

In memory of Miriam, praying that we will merit mentors like her, both for our children and for us.



Continued on next page

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd 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 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



The smallest emotional involvement can prevent us from seeing the truth for what it is.

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 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 Ramcha¹ writes (Messilat Yesharim, Chapter 3), only those who are in full control of their urges and desires can make such a calculation objectively.

Whilst in theory, this is a simple calculation to make, our urges and desires can distort our 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!

Continued from previous page

שקובעים משהו בפסקנות. מצד שני, גם אחרי שנלמד, תמיד יהיו דברים שלא נבין. וגם אם הם לא אופנתיים, גם אם לא נקלוט אותם לגמרי, צריך להיזהר מאוד מלזלזל בהם.

כשאתה צוחק על המורשת שלך, אתה בעצם צוחק על עצמך.

ועכשיו – אז זה בטח עניין לא רלבנטי, שיכול לספק חומר לאחלה בדיחות על המסורת שלנו.

הנה משפט אחד של הרמב"ם, מגדולי המחשבה היהודית בכל הדורות, בסוגיה העמוקה הזו: “ראוי לאדם להתבונן במשפטי התורה הקדושה, ולדעת סוף עניינם כפי כוחו, ודבר שלא ימצא בו טעם ולא יידע לו עילה – אל יהיה קל בעיניו”.

כלומר, מצד אחד צריך לנסות להבין, ללמוד, להתאמץ. יש ארון ספרים יהודי שמבוסס על אלפי שנות לימוד. ראוי לצלול פנימה, לעומק, לפני

פרשת “חוקת” נפתחת במילים: “זאת חקת התורה”, ואז מתארת נושא שנחשב לתעלומה עד היום – פרה אדומה. דורות של חכמים דנו במצווה הזו, שאין לה נימוק ברור: האם יש בכלל סיבה מובנת לכל מצווה? האם יש טעמים גלויים וטעמים נסתרים? האם אנחנו חייבים, או בכלל יכולים, להבין הכול? האם אנחנו מקיימים רק את מה שמובן, או שלפעמים אנחנו פשוט אומרים לעצמנו שזה החוק וזהו, “זאת חוקת התורה”?

הרי כיום, אם משהו נשמע עתיק ולא מעודכן, הכי קל ללעוג ולבטל. אם לא קלטנו הכול בשכלנו, כאן

Healing the Trauma of Loss



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

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

The Sages were critical of one who mourns too much too long.¹ They said that G-d Himself says of such a person, “Are you more compassionate than I am?” Maimonides rules:

“A person should not become excessively broken-hearted because of a person's death, as it says, ‘Do not weep for the dead nor bemoan him’ (Jer. 22:10). This means, ‘Do not weep excessively.’ For death is the way of the world, and one who grieves excessively at the way of the world is a fool.”²

With rare exceptions, the outer limit of grief in Jewish law is a year, not more.

Yet knowing these things did not help. We are not always masters of our emotions. Nor does comforting others prepare you for your own experience of loss. Jewish law regulates outward conduct not inward feeling, and when it speaks of feelings, like the commands to love and not to hate, *halachah* generally translates this into behavioural terms, assuming, in the language of the *Sefer haHinnuch*, that “the heart follows the deed.”³

I felt an existential black hole, an emptiness at the core of being. It deadened my sensations, leaving me unable to sleep or focus, as if life was happening at a

great distance and as if I were a spectator watching a film out of focus with the sound turned off. The mood eventually passed, but while it lasted I made some of the worst mistakes of my life.

I mention these things because they are the connecting thread of parshat Chukat. The most striking episode is the moment when the people complain about the lack of water. Moses does something wrong, and though G-d sends water from a rock, He also sentences Moses to an almost unbearable punishment: “Because you did not have sufficient faith in Me to sanctify Me before the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land I have given you” (Num. 20:12).

The commentators debate exactly what he did wrong. Was it that he lost his temper with the people (“Listen now, you rebels” [Num. 20:10]? That he hit the rock instead of speaking to it? That he made it seem as if it was not G-d but he and Aaron who were responsible for the water (“Shall we bring water out of this rock for you?” [Num. 20:10])?

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

was following precedent. And if G-d did not mean him to hit the rock, why did He command him to take his staff?

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

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

However it seems to me that the deeper connection lies not between the death of Miriam and the lack of water but between her death and Moses' loss of emotional equilibrium. Miriam was his elder sister. She had watched over his fate when, as a baby, he had been placed in a basket and floated down the Nile. She

had had the courage and enterprise to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and suggest that he be nursed by a Hebrew, thus reuniting Moses and his mother and ensuring that he grew up knowing who he was and to which people he belonged. He owed his sense of identity to her. Without Miriam, he could never have become the human face of G-d to the Israelites, lawgiver, liberator, and prophet. Losing her, he not only lost his sister. He lost the human foundation of his life.

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

Our parsha is about mortality. That is the point. G-d is eternal, we are ephemeral. As we say in the *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we are “a fragment of pottery, a blade of grass, a flower that fades, a shadow, a cloud, a breath of wind.” We are dust and to dust we return, but G-d is life forever.

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

Nonetheless it seems to me that – here as in so many other places in the Torah – there is a story beneath the story, and



We are dust and to dust we return, but G-d is life forever.

it is a different one altogether. Chukat is about death, loss, and bereavement. Miriam dies. Aaron and Moses are told they will not live to enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies, and the people mourn for him for thirty days. Together they constituted the greatest leadership team the Jewish people has ever known, Moses the supreme prophet, Aaron the first High Priest, and Miriam perhaps the greatest of them all.⁵ What the parsha is telling us is that for each of us there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter. “It is not for you to complete the task.” Even the greatest are mortal.

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

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

Life after death and the resurrection of the dead are fundamental, non-negotiable principles of Jewish faith, but Tanach is conspicuously quiet about them. It is focused on finding G-d in this life, on this planet, notwithstanding our mortality. “The dead do not praise G-d,” says the Psalm (115:17). G-d is to be found in life itself with all its hazards and dangers,

bereavements and grief. We may be no more than “dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27), as Abraham said, but life itself is a never-ending stream, “living water”, and it is this that the rite of the Red Heifer symbolises.

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

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

- Why do you think Moshe was so deeply affected by the death of Miriam?
- How does the law of the red heifer express the value of life in Judaism?
- How does the Torah help us to carry on despite the knowledge of our own mortality?

1. Moed Katan 27b.

2. Maimonides, Hilchot Avel 13:11.

3. Sefer ha-Hinnuch, command 16.

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

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

6. Song of Songs 8:6.

7. See Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4..

התקרבות למת או טומאת מת



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

This is the teaching regarding a man who dies in a tent: Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be *tamei* for seven days. (Bamidbar 19:14)

A *meis* is *metamei* through *magga* (contact), *massa* (carrying), and *ohel*. There are three types of *ohel* – when a person passes over a *meis*, when a *meis* is passed over a person, and when a person and a *meis* share a common roof, referred to as *ohel hamshachah*.

The Gemara in Yevamos cites the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai with regard to a non-Jewish corpse: The graves of non-Jews do not transmit *tum'ah* by way of a roof. For it is stated [in relation to the nation of Israel]: “Now, you My sheep, the sheep of My pasture – you are אדם!” (Yechezkel 34:31). You [Israel] are referred to as אדם, but non-Jews are not referred to as אדם. In our parsha, the Torah uses the term אדם to describe a *meis* that transmits *tum'as ohel*, indicating that these laws apply specifically to *meisei Yisrael*, who may be called אדם, and not to *meisei akum*. Nevertheless, both the Mechaber and the Rama write that the proper practice is for Kohanim to abstain from entering a non-Jewish cemetery.

One reason for the *chumrah* is that there may be a Jewish *meshumad* who is buried in the non-Jewish cemetery, and such a *meis* certainly does render a Kohen *tamei* through *tum'as ohel*. Furthermore, despite the fact that the majority opinion is in accordance with the view of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, we are stringent to adhere to the view of Tosfos, who paskens against Rabbi Shimon and rules that *meisei akum* are *metamei b'ohel*.

A third way to explain this *halachah* relates to the very definition of the *issur* of *tum'as Kohanim*. Instead of viewing the *issur* as an injunction to avoid becoming

tamei from a *meis*, we may suggest that the nature of the *issur* is to avoid התקרבות למת – coming in contact with a corpse. Therefore, even if non-Jewish *meisim* are not *metamei b'ohel*, it may still be forbidden for Kohanim to enter an *ohel* with a non-Jewish *meis*, since a Kohen is prohibited from nearing a *meis*, even if he will not thereby make himself *tamei*.

The idea that the *issur* entails coming in contact with a *meis*, and not necessarily becoming *tamei*, may explain a number of *halachos*.

The Shach cites a comment of the Rokei'ach regarding the entry of a Kohen's pregnant wife into a room in which a *meis* is present. If the fetus inside her is male, there should be an *issur* for an adult to actively cause this Kohen to become *tamei*. We derive this from the *passuk* at the beginning of Parshas Emor, “Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them, ‘To a [dead] person he shall not become impure among his people’” (Vayikra 21:1). The redundant use of the word “say” enjoins the adults with regard to the minors.

The Rokei'ach rules leniently in this case on the basis of it being considered a ספק ספיקא (double doubt). First, we are unsure whether the pregnancy will go to term with a live baby; the woman may miscarry. Second, even if a baby will be born, it may be a female. The Magen Avraham questions this statement of the Rokei'ach based on the Gemara in Chullin, which teaches that טהרה בלועה – a tahr object that is completely “swallowed up” – does not acquire *tum'ah* from other objects. Thus, even without the logic of the ספק ספיקא, there should be no *issur* in the case of a fetus, which is totally concealed within its mother!

Both Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky zt”l and Rav Elchonon Wasserman Hy”d,

who were brothers-in-law, offer the following resolution to the question of the Magen Avraham. Apparently, the Rokei'ach is of the opinion that the *issur* of *tum'as Kohanim* applies even if, due to a legal technicality, the Kohen does not actually contract any *tum'ah*. The nature of the *issur* is that the Kohen is prohibited from nearing a dead body, even if he does so in a way in which he will not become *tamei* at all.

The son-in-law of the Nesivos quotes his father-in-law as saying that although Kohanim are generally stringent with regard to *tum'as ohel* of a non-Jewish *meis*, the stringency is limited to avoiding passing over a *meis* or having a *meis* pass over them. However, they may be lenient in a situation of *ohel hamshachah*.

This distinction may be explained in the following way. Aside from the two approaches discussed above in defining the nature of the *issur* of *tum'as Kohanim*, there is a third possibility: that either of the two elements – התקרבות למת or טומאת מת – cause a violation of the *issur*. In other words, it is forbidden to come near a *meis* even if the Kohen does not become *tamei* as a result, and it is forbidden to become *tamei meis* even when it does not involve nearing a *meis*.

We may suggest that התקרבות למת occurs only in the more direct forms of *ohel*, when one passes over a *meis* or a *meis* passes over him; an *ohel hamshachah* is not considered התקרבות למת. The only reason that *ohel hamshachah* is forbidden with *meisei Yisrael* is that the *ohel* causes טומאת מת. However, since *meisei akum*, according to most Rishonim, do not transmit *tum'as ohel*, a case of *ohel hamshachah* with *meisei akum* is permitted, since it involves neither טומאת מת or התקרבות למת.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha II.

Even if We Deserve



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As we begin to discuss Parshat Chukat, we get to the story of *מי מריבה*, 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 *תפילה בשעת צרה*, when we are *davening* during a time of pain. Sometimes in *שמים* 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.

The Netziv continues and explains that we must understand that *Tefilah* ultimately causes things to happen. “אפילו בזמן שרוצה הקב”ה תפילה גורמת” at a time that Hashem wants to give, *Tefilah*



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.

is ultimately necessary to bring those blessings into fruition. We see this from the story of *אליהו 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, *אליהו* still needed to daven before the rain came. And we find this also in the story of *בראשית*. The *Pasuk* there says “וְכָל שֵׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה”, which simply refers to things that grow in the field. However, the Netziv points out that the *שיח* is related to *שיחה*, 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 *שיחה*, our *davening*. We know that *Tefilah* is referred to as “עבודה”, and we know that our *פרנסה* can only come through *עבודה*. 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 *מי מריבה*, we can now understand the mistake of Moshe much better. Up until this point, the Jewish people had been living totally *בדרך טובע*, through very open miracles. They were being sustained by the *מן*, and protected by the *ענני 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 transition to a world that was going to work *טבע*, 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 *טבע*, as we saw from the Netziv, we still need *Tefilah* to ultimately bring about the *פרנסה*. 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 *טבע*, we must understand that we still need *Tefilah* to be *פועל פרנסה*, to bring about *פרנסה*. 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 Zac Winkler.

How the Observance of “Illogical” Mitzvot Save Klal Yisrael



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The Parasha states, “...the following is declared to be the Torah’s decree as commanded by Hashem: Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and have them bring you *parah adumah* (a completely red cow), which has no blemish, and which has never had a yoke on it.” (Bamidbar 19:1-2).

They would slaughter and burn the cow. With the ash they were able to purify the impure from the impurity of contact with the dead. As a result, they were able to fulfill all of the Torah’s *mitzvot*, to enter the Beit HaMikdash, to offer sacrifices, to eat the Pesach sacrifice and many other *mitzvot* that we cannot fulfil today since we do not have the ash of the *parah adumah*.

All our *mitzvot* are divided into two categories. There are *mitzvot* that we “listen to” and “logical” *mitzvot*. *Mitzvot* that we “listen to” are *mitzvot* that unless the Torah had commanded them we wouldn’t have kept them, because we do not know their reason, rather they are a decree from Hashem. For example, the *mitzva* of *sha’atnez*, if there is wool and linen in a garment then it is forbidden to wear it! Yet silk and linen is permitted. Cotton and wool are likewise permitted. Only wool and linen are forbidden! Why? It is a decree, without reason. The *mitzvah* of *parah adumah* is in this category.

But there are also logical *mitzvot*, understood in our minds, like the *mitzvah* of honouring parents, as the *passuk* states: “Honour your father and mother” (Shemot 21:12:). This is a *mitzvah* that we can fathom since parents toiled for their

son and daughter! Even Gentiles fulfil this *mitzvah*, not just Jews.

The Gemara (Kiddushin 31a) says: They asked Rabbi Eliezer the Great, he is Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus, how far does the *mitzvah* of honouring parents extend? He replied to them, come and I will tell you. There was a Gentile who lived in Ashkelon, his name was Dama ben N’tina, he was a prominent army general. He had a hobby that he collected all types of pearls and precious stones, garnet, sapphire and diamond, all types of unique stones. Sometimes he would trade them for a profit.

In the Bet HaMikdash, the *kohen gadol* had precious stones in the *choshen* (breast plate) and one of them was “jasper” (*yashpeh* in Hebrew). It once happened that the jasper stone fell out of the *kohen gadol*’s *choshen*. According to the *halacha* the *kohen gadol* may not perform the Temple service without all his garments complete, even if one stone is missing everything is *pasul* (unfit). Therefore the *chachamim* sought out this stone.

They were informed that Dama ben N’tina has precious stones. They arrived at his home and asked him, “Do you have this precious stone, jasper?” He replied, “Yes yes sure, I have this stone!” They asked him, “How much do you want for it?” He replied, “100,000 dollars.” They said, “Fine, show us the stone!”

Dama entered his home and saw that his intoxicated father was asleep, with his feet on the table, and in the chest of the table were the pearls! Dama knew that should he take the precious stone, he will

awaken his father. So because he feared his father so much, he went out to tell the *chachmei yisrael* and told them, “I am sorry, I cannot give you the stone.”

The *chachmei yisrael* thought that surely Dama must want more money, so they said, “We will pay double! 200,000 dollars!” Dama replied to them, “I am sorry, I cannot do this now.” They increased the amount and said, “300,000 dollars!” But Dama stood his ground! And so the amount kept increasing until they offered Dama 1,000,000 dollars for the stone! But he continued to stand his ground, apologising again and again!

The *chachmei yisrael* left to find the stone elsewhere. After a few minutes, his intoxicated father woke up. Dama hurried taking the stone and he ran after the *chachmei yisrael*. He caught up with them and said, “Here’s the stone!” The *chachamim* examined it and agreed that indeed it is the jasper stone! They said to Dama, “Fine we will pay for it 1,000,000 dollars as we spoke.” He replied to them, “No! I will not sell my father’s honour for any amount of money in the world. I said 100,000 dollars, so just give me 100,000 dollars! They heard what he said, gave him the 100,000 dollars and went on their way.

The Gemara says, See! How this Gentile honoured his parents! All the more so should the Jewish People who has been commanded in the Torah to honour parents!

The following year, Hashem rewarded Dama ben N’tina with his reward in this

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Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick



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In Parshat Chukat we encounter the episode of Mei Meriva, where Moshe is punished for the way in which he dealt with the nation. The *mefarshim* argue as to what exactly was Moshe's transgression. Rashi suggests that Moshe **hit** the rock although he was instructed to **speak** to the rock. The Rambam zones in on Moshe's unjustified anger at the people. שמעו נא המרים. The Ramban notes Moshe's words נוציא לכם מים which may be understood to connote that Moshe and Aharon were performing magic to extract water from a stone. There are various other explanations as well (See Shalom Rav).

Let's focus on Rashi's interpretation, which seems to be based on the simple reading of the text. Moshe was instructed ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם – “*speak to the rock before their eyes*” (Bamidbar 20:8). The Menachem Tzion posits that the crucial lesson that Hashem desired to have Moshe transmit to the people was the **power of speech**. As the Kuzari cites, the difference between man and animal is the ability to speak. Man is a *medaber*. What got the people of this generation in trouble in the midbar was primarily their speech. They

complained endlessly about the lack of food and water, Korach's accusations, the spies' false testimony, to cite some examples. This was an opportunity to highlight to the nation that speech should not be taken lightly. Look what one can accomplish with proper speech. One can even obtain water from a rock.

Rav Chanan Porat in Me'at Min Haor adds an interesting insight. This is a new generation, as the individuals who left Egypt died in the desert. The previous generation that experienced slavery, grew up in an environment where through physical force one is able to accomplish an objective. The new generation that is about to enter the land of Israel (this is in the 39th year), needs to understand that through **speech** rather than force one can achieve desired results. This is an essential message to a group of individuals that are on the verge of founding a country and building its infrastructure and culture.

Perhaps that is why Moshe was asked to carry his stick (מטה) although he was not to use it. As Theodore Roosevelt said: “speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.” This was the message G-d desired

to be transmitted to the nation and it got convoluted. One can use physical might, but the preferred manner to accomplish a goal is through speech.

The message of the power of speech may not have successfully been conveyed to that generation, but it should resonate to our generation as well. We should be careful with our speech, realizing how we can hurt and offend someone with it. Today, included in the definition of speech is not just the oral word, but the written word as well, especially with the proliferation of social media platforms. Speech can also have a positive impact and we should use it more often to express gratitude, appreciation or even just a quick hello to a spouse, child or friend.

May we internalize this lesson from Mei Meriva and be careful with what “flows” from our mouths so that all of our communication is conducted in a positive and constructive manner.

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world. Dama had a herd of cows, and one of them bore a *parah adumah*. Dama knew that they Jewish People required a *parah adumah* so he looked after it.

The *chachmei yisrael* came to Dama ben N'tina and sought from him the *parah adumah*. They asked him, “How much do you want for it?” He replied to them, “What I lost on this stone, 900,000 dollars, this is all I ask.” They gave him the money and purchased the cow.

Why did Dama merit specifically to this reward? Why a *parah adumah*? The reason is that there was an element of *kitrug* – negativity generated against *Klal Yisrael* [*kitrug* in Hebrew meaning that the accuser had ammunition against *Klal Yisrael*], for the Gentile honoured his parents to such an extent, and who behaves in such a sterling way? Therefore Hashem gave him the *parah adumah*, so that the *chachmei yisrael* will come and pay an

exorbitant sum to display *Klal Yisrael's* commitment to even *mitzvot* that we must simply listen to, even though they may not be logical to us! So people will say look how *Bnei Yisrael* are meticulous about the *mitzvot*, that even a *mitzvah* that has no reason, they invest a colossal sum! Therefore, the matter transpired that they were able to purchase a *parah adumah*.

Our Mysterious Destiny and the Coming of Moshiach



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In *Parshas Chukas*, we learn of the laws of the *Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer, whose ashes purify one who has become *tamei meis* (ritually defiled by proximity/contact with a corpse). While its ashes, mixed with mayim chaim – ‘living water’ – purify one who is impure, at the same time, it causes the one who is pure to become impure! No human mind can make sense of such a law, and so, it is known as *zos chukas ha'Torah* – the classic ‘chok’ of Torah, the greatest mystery, the most unexplainable of laws of the Torah. As the very first Rashi of the *parsha* teaches us:

Because the Satan and the nations of the world aggrieve Israel (over this law) by saying: What is this commandment?! What reason is there to it? Therefore, the Torah calls it a ‘chok’ – a statute, which implies: It is a decree before Me, you do not have the right to question it (Rashi to Bamidbar 19:2).

From the topic of this great enigma, *parah adumah*, the *parsha* abruptly moves us *thirty-eight years forward* (!) to the deaths of Miriam and Aharon, and the punishment of Moshe (Num. 20), all of which occurred in *year forty*. We learn of the tragedy of our three great leaders who were condemned to die on the eastern side of the Jordan River, and would never enter into the Promised Land.

The deaths and burial of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam on *ever la'Yarden* are such an enigma, that commentators from across the spectrum – as well as across the ages – have offered their own interpretation of what their sins were. From the Medrash, to Rashi, to the Ibn Ezra, to the Ramban, Rambam, Abarbanel, Sforno and forward throughout the ages, each commentator offers his thoughts on their actions (and words) that caused

them to die, and lay eternally, on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

And yet, in grouping *Paraha Adumah*, the great mystery of Torah, in the same *parsha* as the end of Miriam, Aharon and Moshe; even more so, placing their narratives *immediately after* that of *Parah Adumah*, the Torah is teaching us a very great lesson indeed...*Parshas Chukas* begins with ‘chok’, and continues with ‘chok.’ The first *chok* is the law of the Red Heifer. The next *chok* is the *chok* of the mystery and inexplicability of human life, and human death. The *chok* of our three greatest leaders being banished forever from Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches, “King David could not build the Temple for the same reason that Moshe could not cross into the Land of Israel. Had Moshe crossed the border, the Land of Israel never could have been taken away from the Jewish people. And since Providence planned differently [namely, that it should, and would, be taken away from the nation], Moshe died on the far shore of the Jordan. Had David built a Temple, no power in the world could have destroyed it. But Providence has decreed differently for our people. A Sanctuary built by David would have had to usher in an era of peace and salvation for all, forever. In the time of King David, the world was not ready for the King Messiah.

“From the viewpoint of human reason, the redemption in Egypt should have been the only one in Jewish history. The messianic era should have commenced with the Exodus. G-d said, ‘I will take you to Me for a people... and I will bring you into the Land’ (Ex.6:7); why, then, did those who left Egypt die in the desert and nev-

er enter the Land of Israel? Why were the Jews exiled from their land the first time? Why the second time? Why all the suffering in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and particularly in our time – the Holocaust? Are not the words of *זאת חקת התורה* (this is the mystery and inexplicability of the Torah) applicable to our *total historical experience*? Our whole existence is a mystery, an enigma!

“The entire *Haggadah* is permeated with the question of why we are still slaves, not to Pharaoh, but now to others. It not the phrase ‘*hashata avdei* – *this year we are slaves*,’ self-contradictory? Declaring ourselves to be slaves contradicts the very sanctity of *Leil Shimurim*, the *Night of Watching*, the night of the Exodus and our celebration of freedom.

“Yet we believe that at some point in time all contradictions will be resolved and the Almighty will purge the historical order of contradictions and antithetic elements. At present the redemption from Egypt – whose end goal was never realized with that generation, as G-d originally foretold – is still classified under *זאת חקת התורה*, *zot hukkat ha'Torah*. It will be explained through the intervention of G-d, *the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean*’ (Bamidbar 19:19). [A reference and allusion to G-d, the Clean One (*kev-yachol*), who will sprinkle the cleansing waters upon us, the unclean ones, in the end of days.]

“The Exodus will finally be completely realized; the eschatological era [the era of Moshiach] will begin; only then will the redemption from Egypt be endowed with its final meaning” (Vision and Leadership, p.221-222).

There are so many difficult, painful and perplexing mysteries which we are con-

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Crime and Punishment



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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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Singing for the Torah



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We read in Parashat Hukat of the song which Beneh Yisrael sung for the miraculous well which G-d provided for them throughout the years in the desert so they would have fresh drinking water (21:17-20). Earlier, the Torah relates that after Miriam passed away, the nation suddenly found itself without water (20:1-2), and the Gemara (Ta'anit 9a) explains that the well had been provided in the merit of Miriam, such that after her passing, the people no longer had water. Nevertheless, in the merit of Moshe, it was restored.

The Or Ha'hayim Ha'kadosh (Rav Haim Ben-Attar, 1696-1743) raises the question of why Beneh Yisrael sang a special song for this miracle, but not for the other two miracles which were performed for them throughout their years in the desert – the manna, and the “clouds of glory.” They needed the manna for food, and they needed the clouds for protection from hostile enemies, wild animals, and the elements – just as they needed the well for water. Why, then, did they sing a special song for the well, but not for the manna or the clouds?

The Or Ha'hayim explains that in truth, this song is not about the well – but

rather about Torah, which is compared to water. Just as water is vital for physical subsistence, Torah is vital for spiritual subsistence. Beneh Yisrael failed to sing a song of joy and praise at the time of Matan Torah, but they did so now, forty years later.

The Or Ha'hayim does not explain why this song was sung specifically now. What caused Beneh Yisrael to suddenly erupt in joyous singing over the precious gift of the Torah?

Rav Haim Vital (1542-1620), the closest and most famous disciple of the Arizal (Rav Yishak Luria, 1534-1572), relates that the first day he spent learning from the Arizal, he was taught so much profound information that he could not retain it all. When they met the next day, he asked the Arizal if he could briefly review what they had learned the previous day, because he could not remember all the material. The Arizal brought his student into the Kinneret Lake, took some water, and gave it to Rav Haim Vital to drink. He explained that the Kinneret contains water from the “Be'erah Shel Miriam,” the special well which accompanied Beneh Yisrael in the desert in Miriam's merit. This water has special powers, enabling those who drink it to absorb and retain Torah knowledge.

In fact, this is how Beneh Yisrael were able to learn and commit to memory the entire Torah which they learned from Moshe in the wilderness – because the water they drank was from this miraculous well, which impacted their souls such that they could assimilate and remember Torah.

When Miriam died and the well was taken away, Beneh Yisrael lost this special power. They were no longer able to properly study Torah and retain Torah knowledge. Thus, when the well was restored in Moshe's merit, they had a renewed appreciation for Torah. The period when their special capabilities were taken away reminded them of how precious and valuable Torah knowledge is. They longed to once again have the ability to study, understand, and recall the sacred words of the Torah. And so when this ability was restored, they joyously sang and gave praise to Hashem for this special gift.

May we always live with an appreciation for the inestimable value of Torah, and cherish and seize every opportunity we have to learn and absorb its holy words.

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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.

Your Wellsprings Shall Spread Forth



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

The Jewish people experienced two miracles in the desert for which we sang a song to Hashem. The first and most famous was the song at the sea (Shmos 15:1-19). The second and much less well-known is the song at the well in this week's parsha (Bamidbar 21:17-20). The most striking difference between them is the fact that the song at the sea begins, "Then Moshe and the children of Israel sang...", whereas the song at the well begins, "Then the Jewish people sang this song..." with no mention of Moshe Rebbeinu. Why was he left out of this second song?

When the Jewish people sang the song at the sea, we were still in our infancy as a nation. "For Israel is a youth and I love him" (Hoshea 11:1). Moshe Rebbeinu led us in the song at the sea because we had not yet reached a state of maturity. We could not compose our own song. So he led us in the song word for word and we repeated after him. We did not even understand the full depth and importance of what we were experiencing, so Moshe taught us how to sing. He taught us the deeper meaning of what we went through. Moshe was the adult and we were the children. As the pasuk homiletically says, "Efraim is a son who is dear to me" (Yirmiyahu 31:19).

But forty years later, in our parsha, just before we were about to enter the land of Israel, our nation had matured. We were then able to compose a song to Hashem on our own. We no longer needed Moshe to do it for us. We were then able to compose our own song, "Then the Jewish people sang this song, 'Spring up O well, sing to it!'"

The Sfas Emes explains differently. According to him, Moshe and the Jewish people sang the song at the sea together because both were on the same level.

But at the end of the forty years in the desert, after we had done teshuva for the many mistakes we had made, we were on an even higher level than Moshe, as the Gemara (Brachos 34b) says, "Complete tzadikim cannot stand in the place where baalei teshuva stand." Because the Jewish people were on a higher level than Moshe at the end of our time in the desert, the pasuk says that we sang the song at the well without Moshe. We had surpassed him.

We can connect the understanding mentioned earlier, that the Jewish people praised Hashem on their own, without Moshe's guidance because we had matured to the point that we were able to compose our own song to G-d, to two beautiful psukim written by Shlomo Hamelch. In Mishlei (5:15-16), he compares four stages in a person's life to four sources of water: "Drink water out of your cistern and running water out of your well. And your spring will be dispersed outside and streams [rivers] of water will flow in the broad places." We see here four sources of water: a cistern, a well, a spring, and a river. Each of these four sources of water has different characteristics.

A cistern is not an independent source of water. It only has whatever water people put in it. We cannot take anything from it that we did not place into it. A well, on the other hand, is an independent source of water, but it is limited. The water does not rise above a certain point. And the only way to access it is for someone to lower a bucket into the well and draw the water out. A spring is qualitatively different. Not only is it an independent source of water, but the water must find a way to come out of the ground. It will search until it finds a way to emerge. And a river is even more powerful. It rushes across the ground in

huge streams and currents and will not be stopped.

These four sources of water also correspond to four stages in an individual's life. The cistern corresponds to one's childhood. Before a person begins to think independently, all he has are the thoughts, information, and good qualities imparted to him by his parents, rebbeim, and teachers. He has nothing other than what is put into him, just like a cistern only has whatever water was placed in it.

The next stage of life begins around the time of one's bar or bas mitzvah. It is no coincidence that this transition from childhood into adolescence is called "bar" mitzvah, which is related to the phrase "be'er [באר] mitzvah, the well of the mitzvah." At this stage, the child begins to think independently. He asks deeper questions and starts to draw his own conclusions. But like a well, his waters do not spring forth on their own. His parents, rebbeim, and teachers must lower a bucket down into him to draw out his own deeper thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The third stage of life is when things truly begin to get lively. At this stage, a young man or woman becomes like a spring. His or her waters, i.e., unique ideas and ideals begin to spring forth without any coaxing from parents, rebbeim, or teachers. This young person becomes, as the Mishna in Avos (2:8) says, a "מעין המתגבר", an ever-strengthening wellspring." It is also no coincidence that the word for "ever-strengthening" is מתגבר, which has the same letters as מתגבר, maturing. A young person who reaches this wellspring stage of life cannot contain the good, the idealism, the talent, the knowledge, and the creativity he or she has inside. It must find a means of expression. It must burst forth and it does so of its own power.

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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.

Gimmel Tamuz: Miracles



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

Reb Yanki Tauber related a *ma'aseh*, a story about the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

A group of highschool students once came to see the Rebbe. The students had each prepared a question, which they posed to the Rebbe in the course of their meeting together. The Rebbe fielded an array of questions on faith, philosophy and modern Jewish life. At the very end of the meeting, one student raised his hand and with innocent audacity asked, "People say that you have supernatural powers... Is this true? Do you have the ability to perform miracles?"

"The ability to work miracles is not confined to a select group of individuals," replied the Rebbe, "but is within reach of each and every one of us. We each possess a soul that is a spark of Godliness. So we each have the power to transcend the limitations imposed upon us by our physical natures, no matter how formidable they may seem. To demonstrate this to you, I will now perform a miracle." An audible gasp swept through the group.

The Rebbe then scanned the room, making eye contact for a brief moment with each of the young people gathered around his desk. With a smile and serious tone, he continued, "Each and every one of us in this room will now resolve to improve himself in one specific area. You will each choose an aspect of your personal life, character development, mitzvah observance or commitment to bettering the wellbeing of others. It will be some improvement that you recognize as necessary, but until now you have perceived it as being beyond your ability to accomplish.

"I bless you to succeed, and prove to yourselves that the *neshamah* indeed has the power to overcome the *guf* (body),

this natural physical 'reality' within which we are accustomed to living. That will certainly be a miracle of note."



This week will mark *Gimel Tammuz*, the *yahrtzeit* of Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, zy'a. An indefatigable leader overseeing a worldwide network of *shlichus*, the Rebbe was a *tzadik*, a *gadol baTorah*, a commander in chief, a *nasi*, a revolutionary, and a spiritual entrepreneur. Considering it his responsibility to nourish and lift up every Jewish soul in the world, he was the great *baal achrayus*, leader of his generation. From Chabad-Lubavitch World Headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, the Rebbe engaged in advancing the depths of Torah insight and scholarship (there are more than 400 volumes of the Rebbe's Torah in print), to sharing advice, insight and blessings with countless individuals across the world.

And there were open miracles. A powerful flow of *yeshuos* manifested and continues to manifest blessings of success, healing, fertility, *parnassah* and rescue from danger. Miracles were 'performed' at weekly distributions of tzedakah dollars, during '*kos shel bracha*' events following Yamim Tovim, through spoken blessings, prophetic advice, written responses to letters, and prayer-requests that he brought to 'the Ohel', the resting place of his father in law, the Previous Rebbe. Indeed, multiple volumes of indisputable, tangible miraculous wonders have been recorded.

The Rebbe's ability to see the big-picture, to peer into the future, and to understand the inner, hidden world, seemed to focus the power of his blessings and prayers into fulfillment of needs that the receivers had not even known about. He was an embodiment of the concept of

"צדיק גוזר והקב"ה מקיים" A *tzadik* makes a decree, and Hashem follows it."

All of this, however, misses the much more significant, and 'miraculous' aspect of the Rebbe's impact. As Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotzk said, "There are rebbes who are so great that they can revive the dead. But really, reviving the dead is G-d's business. The mark of a true Rebbe is one who is able to revive *the living*..." Over more than half a century of dedication to the men, women and children of Klal Yisrael, and all humanity, the Rebbe was *מחיה החיים* — he 'resurrected the living', often just through pointedly expressing his indefatigable optimism and faith in humanity, and his constant and persistent focus on the good.

The Rebbe embodied a superhuman, miraculous dedication to others, and continues today to urge and empower us to confidently awaken the Divine spark within and activate our G-dly souls.



After sharing Torah thoughts, a *maamar* discourse or a public address, the Rebbe encouraged all to put the ideas discussed into action. Holy inspiration and awakening must be drawn down into vessels. In Chabad, a *hachlata* is a resolution, a conscious decision, to outwardly manifest one's intentions for improvement and accomplishment.

This *Gimmel Tamuz*, in the spirit and merit of the Rebbe, let us make a *hachlata*; choose an aspect of our life, some necessary improvement, and even if it seems beyond our ability, may we do it and be successful. Let us live with the Rebbe's example of optimism, faith and courageous action, and may we see open miracles in our own lives and the lives of all Israel.

Fountain Farewell

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

In Parshat Chukat we have the third, and perhaps least known, of the ten songs of our holy Tradition. This is the Song of the Well that Bnei Yisroel sang at the end of their forty year journey to Eretz Yisroel.

Why did Bnei Yisroel sing this song now and why is there no mention of Moshe singing the song.

Rabbi Frand citing the Vilna Gaon explains that the Torah is often compared to a well from which anyone can draw. Some will drink its waters directly while others will be involved in maintaining the well's infrastructure, by supporting Torah study and Torah institutions. The Torah was a gift from the wilderness. The Tiv Hatorah teaches that Torah has the ability to lead you to great spiritual heights, but if it leads to arrogance, Hashem will put you in your place and send you down to the low places. To be successful in Torah one must be humble as a wilderness which is open to all and ownerless.

Rabbi Shmuel ben Betzalel remarks that Moshe does not sing here because he was the personification of Torah. Therefore, he was not moved to sing as was the rest of the nation who only now after forty years of Torah study were beginning to appreciate the beauty and depth of Torah. The Sefer Shemen Hatov notes that the Song of the Sea and the Song of the Well, represent transitional phases in our national history. Song of the Sea was the coda between our slavery in Egypt and our following Hashem into the wilderness totally dependent on Him. Song of the Well marked the transition from life

in the desert to a new generation entering the Promised Land.

Moshe and Aharon dug the original well, and taught the original song, but now the notes were passed to Yehoshua and the people, who needed to interpret the music on their own.

Song is a spontaneous expression for something above and beyond the natural, for extraordinary and unexpected gifts proffers the Shem Mishmuel. As Bnei Yisroel were about to enter the Land, the Amorites waited in ambush in caves between the mountain ranges. Hashem caused the two mountains to come together, crushing the Amorite soldiers. The water from the well then picked up the bones and blood from the caves and the mountains and brought them to where Bnei Yisroel would see them. In response to this miraculous salvation, Bnei Yisroel burst forth in song.

Rav Eliyahu Schlesinger points out that at the end of our sojourn in the desert, Hashem revealed to us the miracle of our salvation. He saves us from our enemies constantly, creating circumstances that force them to change their plans or make it impossible for them to carry out their plans to annihilate us. Therefore, although the full extent of Hashem's chesed toward us may only be known to the other nations, we must recognize Hashem's constant benevolence toward us and praise Him. How much more so must we thank Hashem when we are aware of the miracles He performs for us.

During our national infancy at the Reed Sea, Moshe led Bnei Yisroel in song. He taught them the proper reaction to

miracles. Now, after forty years under Moshe's tutelage, Bnei Yisroel learned the lesson, says, Rabbi Frand, and could sing independently and Moshe could "shep naches," (derive pleasure) for Moshe, who was barred from entering the land because of his sin at this very well, could not personally sing on this occasion.

This song was not only in appreciation of the well, but also in praise of Miriam in whose merit it gave water to Bnei Yisroel. Now, when they no longer had either, continues Rabbi Frand, Bnei Yisroel recognized their worth and sang their praises. How true this is of human nature, that we do not appreciate the value of something until we no longer have it. But Moshe appreciated Miriam's greatness and capacity for chesed all his life. He always sang her praises, albeit privately.

The word shir has a root whose derivation means circle. The Sefer Mimaamakim notes that certainly Bnei Yisroel were now completing their circle of travels in the wilderness as they were about to enter Eretz Canaan and as the Oznam LaTorah points out, the well itself had now completed its assigned mission. Therefore, it was now appropriate to sing its praises whereas praising the well earlier would have been premature.

The Bartenura, citing Pirkei Avot that the mouth of the well was one of the ten things created at the twilight of creation, posits that the well itself now opened its mouth in song and Bnei Yisroel responded. Just as the angel who fought with Yaakov needed to complete his mission before he could sing in the heavenly choir, so too did the well now complete its mission.

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fronted with in life – personally and nationally. From the laws of the Red Heifer, to the deaths of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, to our long national exile and suffering through the ages, to our own

individual trials and tribulations. The parsha of *Zot hukkat ha'Torah* is our story, our destiny, our journey and the enigma of *Klal Yisrael*.

Only in the end of days, will we be sprin-

kled with the purifying, cleansing, illuminating waters, when all the mysteries will be explained and our destiny will finally be realized. May it be immediate and in our days.

Manifestations of Hate



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

It is very difficult to observe manifestations of racism and hatred. The discovery itself is difficult: the fact of looking at someone's clothes, his "discovery", without his knowledge, the fact that everything is spread and published and revealed, the revelations after the discovery... revealed.

Our Sages tried to find in the manifestations of hatred a kind of initiation of revelation, an initiation of redemption.

"The first whose sin is exposed, their end (punishment) will be revealed. The second whose sin was not revealed, their end (punishment) will not be revealed." (Yoma 9b). The Gemara presents a very surprising angle: the destruction of the first *Beit haMikdash* happened because of very obvious sins: Idolatry, incest, and bloodshed, "but the First Temple, which had Torah, work, and charity, why was it destroyed? There was *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) in it," and the Sages explain, "that their hearts had an evil heart."

In the visible and terrible sins of the First Temple, evil was visible, but also the end of evil: Everyone knew that within 70 years a new temple would be built. But in the days of the Second Temple, when hatred was in the heart, redemption also remained an unfulfilled desire...

Is this not a dangerous idea? Does not it encourage expressions of hatred?

Obviously, the Sages are describing a certain situation. When someone is excluded from public life just because we do not like him, it is obviously a manifestation of hatred. The terrible injustice and they feel righteous! Such injustice is irreparable. "Their sin will not be exposed, their end will not be revealed." The injustice was not revealed to them themselves and therefore they feel righteous.

Jerusalem was destroyed for the sake of hatred. Because everyone thought it was a story "about Kamtza and Bar Kamtza", an innocent mistake in identification.

As long as we do not come back and keep discovering the word "free" for us: simply, out of racism, out of a false external judgment, without reason, our Temple, G-d forbid, will never be able to be rebuilt.

The reason is not the confusion of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Fake news. Let us reveal this secret already, for all to see, but most importantly for ourselves: all this is for nothing. So much energy is consumed by hatred and for nothing. With the same energy we could invest in love. It seems to me that this is the great news of this time: the open manifestations of hatred are a heart that is gradually being purified. It looks horrible, it is abhorrent like incest, it is supported by the worship of an ideology, almost like the worship of someone else's work, it is offensive in public, like bloodshed.

It has finally been revealed. The time of redemption has come.

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Parents, rebbeim, or teachers need not coax out the waters of this person's inner greatness.

The final stage is the raging river. A person who reaches this stage in life has ideas, knowledge and ideals which he must spread as widely as possible. Someone like

this is compelled to teach others, to lead, to write, and to bring major projects to fruition. His waters spread forth and cover all of the expanses of the earth.

The miracle of the well was how Hashem turned a dry rock into a flowing well of water. This is similar to the wellspring

of creativity, talent, idealism, knowledge, and generosity hidden within the Jewish people. At the beginning, our parents and teachers - Moshe Rebbeinu and Aharon Hakohein - had to draw our waters, our song, out from us word by word. But over the forty years in the desert, we grew up and matured.

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Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah
Young Israel of Brookline

MICHIGAN

Young Israel of Oak Park
Young Israel of Southfield
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe

MINNESOTA

Congregation Darchei Noam

MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach
Hari B'nai Zion Congregation
Young Israel of St. Louis

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County
Congregation AABJ&D
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC
National Council of Young Israel
Congregation Ahavat Achim
Congregation Ahavath Torah
Congregation Brothers of Israel
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston
Congregation Israel of Springfield
Congregation Ohr Torah
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill
Kehilat Keshet
Ma Tov Day Camp
Ohav Emeth
Pal Foundation
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center
Yavneh Academy
National Council of Young Israel
Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Beis Community
Congregation Anshei Shalom
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere
Congregation Beth Sholom
Ramaz
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
MTA – Yeshiva University High School for Boys
Young Israel of Merrick
Congregation Beth Torah
Congregation Etz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
Congregation Ohav Zedek
Great Neck Synagogue
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth Hadassah Synagogue
Irving Place Minyan

Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach

Kehilath Jershurun
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park
North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Jewish Center
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side Institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale
Young Israel of Woodmere

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

URUGUAY

Comunidad Yavne Uruguay

VENEZUELA

CARACAS
Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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