

Chukas - Rabbi Lerner - June 24, 2012

Moshe and the Rock

20:1-2: *The entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael come to Midbar Tzin in the first month and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried there. There is no water for the congregation and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon.* What is the connection between the death of Miriam and the water for the nation? **Rashi**: During the entire 40 years in the desert, the water was provided for the people in the zchus of Miriam, the manna in the zchus of Moshe, and the protective clouds for Aharon. Once Miriam was gone, the water stopped coming.

20:3-5: *They quarreled with Moshe and said 'If we had only perished with our brothers before God. Why did you bring the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die here, we and our animals? Why did you take us out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of seed or fig or grape or pomegranate; and there is no water to drink.'* **Chazal**: Part of the miracle of the well was that they were able to plant and cultivate crops in any place where they stayed a little longer, and they actually had these things - gefen, rimon, etc - in the desert.

20:6: *Moshe and Aharon went from the congregation to the Ohel Moed and they fell on their faces; and the shechina appears to them.*

Ibn Ezra and **Kli Yakar**: they gathered against Moshe and Aharon who felt that their very lives were at stake - they fled to save their lives and sought refuge in the Ohel Moed.

20:8: *You should take the staff, and you and Aharon should gather the congregation; you should speak to the rock before their eyes so that it should give forth its waters. You shall bring forth for them water from the rock and give drink to the assembly and their animals.* Why is the water supposed to come from a rock? Ultimately, after Moshe's prayers, the well will return to bring them water - then why speak to a rock, why not be told to return the well by speaking to it? **Chizkuni**: the rock is in fact the well of Miriam, and water flows from the rock; it used to roll through the desert following the path of the Jews; this is the rock that he hit now because it became stubborn and wouldn't yield its water - after the death of Miriam, it refused to yield the water. How do we know this, that the well was in fact a rock? The source from this is a Gemorrah - there is a braisa in **Pesachim** that lists the 10 things Hashem created at the end of creation at the end of the sixth day - things like the Luchos, the rainbow, etc; one of these is the Be'eyr, the well. **Rashi**: this is the Be'eyr of Miriam - it was a rock, the same from which water came by Moshe's action; it was a round boulder that rolled with the nation wherever they traveled. It was not a stream following them. The miracle was camouflaged until Moshe was needed to turn on the faucet again. Hashem told Moshe at the time of this crisis that he should talk to the rock and it will resume its miracle. This is not the first time Moshe had to approach the rock to bring water - the first time was in Beshalach where he had to hit the rock (this might be what led him to hit the rock now as well, even though he was told to speak to it); the rock was clearly the source of the water in the past, and it is clear from here as well. **Chizkuni**: some (**Daas Zekanim Meba'aley Tosefos**) say that this incident here is the same one as in Beshalach, that Moshe only hit a rock once (which would have presented a number of problems in understanding the two stories), but this is not true - it happened in two different places and two different times, once at the beginning of the journey in the desert, once at the end.

Netziv: Hashem told Moshe to speak to the rock - he wasn't actually to speak words to the rock to convince it to then respond with water - it has no ears to hear. What it really means is that this miracle had become a natural occurrence for the Jewish people. Although created at the

end of the sixth day of creation as a special miracle, it followed them and became natural to them after awhile, not a miraculous event - it was just doing a regular job for 40 years; it became similar to clouds giving rain - this rock can give water - it was viewed as a normal, natural thing. After Miriam died, it stopped giving water. We know that in times of drought we have extra prayers and fasting to beg for forgiveness (drought is viewed as a sign of God's anger, as we read in Shema) - even in times when there is no Bais Hamikdash, the nation is to gather together; the leader would speak words of rebuke to get the congregation to repent; they would then pray fervently together. This was the point of this incident - Hashem wanted the nation to learn from Moshe and Aharon that in times of crisis you engage in davening; it doesn't mean to actually talk to the rock - this rock was the symbol of the crisis because it formerly gave water; Hashem wanted all of the people to gather together and pray to Hashem, as they would do in the future in times of need. But Moshe and Aharon did not speak to the rock - instead Moshe hit it. It was supposed to first be Tochachah, rebuke, to correct a deficiency in the people, then they were to face the rock and pray together so that it would yield water. The old waters were clogged up because of Hashem's anger, and Moshe was to demonstrate the power of prayer. By not doing that, they did not teach the lesson, they missed this tremendous opportunity to show that even normal generations can invoke God's intervention, and they were punished. This is why Hashem says in 20:12 that they failed to sanctify His name with their actions - they were supposed to demonstrate God's transcendent powers, that He can pull off any miracle, if only the nation would recognize God as the creator and ultimate power - Moshe and Aharon failed to transmit the power of Tefilla Betzibur, and that is why they were punished.

Rav Baruch Simon quoting **Rav Yosef Albo** in Sefer Ikarim: we know that although God normally operates in this world in a hidden way, He clearly shows that we can occasionally connect to Him in a miraculous manner. As it says in Tehillim (91): *He who dwells in the shelter of the Supreme One, in the shade (under the protection) of Shakai he will abide...For his angels He will command on your behalf, to guard you in all your ways...Because he clings to me with desire, I will save him; I will strengthen him for he knows My name. When he calls upon Me I will answer him; I am with him in distress.* If we approach Him in the right way, He will always be there for us; if we cleave to Him and He will rescue us. We have to know His name; we should visualize the name of Hashem when we daven. Hashem saves us because we know His name - we will call out to Hashem, He respond. There is tremendous power in connecting to Hashem, who can trample the normal rules of nature at will; He performs miracles for us, sometimes open, sometimes hidden. When Bnei Yisrael were struck with this crisis, what Moshe and Aharon should have done was like Rav Chanina in the Gemorrah who would demonstrate how God could change nature if one has betachon, as he would stick his bare foot on the hole of the home of a poisonous snake which would bite him and it would die instead of he; this would show that it is sin that causes death; a great person can connect to God with prayer. Just as the same God who said oil should be used for lighting neros for shabbos, but He can make vinegar do the same if He desires it. The fact that Moshe and Aharon fled to the Ohel in this crisis was a lost opportunity - they could have shown with their power of prayer that crises can be resolved with prayer. Righteous people can defy the normal rules of nature and they should have taken advantage of the opportunity.

Abarbanel: quotes many of the reasons given for the punishment of Moshe and Aharon, and rejects virtually all of them because of their flaws. **Rashi**: Moshe should have spoken to the rock instead of hitting it; then why was he supposed to bring the stick? What can be answered in response is that sometimes carrying the stick endow one with power to perform miracles. But

bringing forth water by hitting the rock was essentially as great a miracle as speaking to it. Rambam: they spoke about Bnai Yisrael in a disrespectful manner - they called them rebels, and spoke about them in a derogatory manner, and they should never do that; but on occasions, Hashem has also called them Morim, rebels. Another opinion - Moshe responded with anger - a leader should never lose his temper, as he will make errors in judgment; he should have dealt with the crisis without anger. **Ramban** and **Rabbeinu Chananya**: Moshe and Aharon said 'From this rock shall we bring forth water? They should have said can He give water; it was as if they were providing the miraculous power to bring forth water, and not attributing it appropriately to Hashem. But this is not a statement - it is asked in a wondrous manner, saying 'can we humans give water in a miraculous manner? Another possibility: Sometimes dibbur can mean using force - when He said *Vedabartem*, Moshe and Aharon understood it to mean to subdue the rock - but hitting it once would have been enough - he didn't have to beat the rock into submission by hitting it more than once. Another opinion: they should have immediately led the people in Shira to commemorate the miracle. **Ibn Ezra**: the people said that Moshe should bring forth water from a different rock; in Pasuk 20:10 he asks if we should bring forth water *Miselah hazeh*, from this rock - it was a particular rock. Moshe was ready to use the rock that used to give water; the people were testing him by demanding he do the miracle from a different rock - they doubted his power, and demanded he show them he could do it from another one, and he refused. Another opinion: because of his anger, he lost his devaikus to Hashem; the anger led to alienation from Hashem. Another: they fled to the Ohel Moed instead of just speaking to the rock first. Another: actually, there was no sin; he was punished because of the people - as Moshe said in Devarim 1:37, that Hashem was angry at him to them because of all of the people. A problem with most of these opinions is why was Aharon punished as well - where was his sin? Moshe is the one who did everything here? So, another opinion is that it wasn't that they did anything wrong at all here; God was angry at Bnei Yisrael, they were to be punished, and the captains go down with the ship.

Abarbanel: they did do something wrong, but not here; what they did wrong had nothing to do with this incident; Aharon played a role in the sin of the Egel; he was very involved with the sin and making the calf. Similarly, Moshe thought it was a good idea to send the spies, and but he mistakenly requested more from them, to check out more details for a military campaign, and this contributed to their bad report. The real reason they are punished was because the two major sins of the generation were the Egel and Meraglim, and they were part of the cause. Because the people were punished for these two sins, the leaders who were partially at fault cannot escape the punishment. Hashem wanted to spare them the embarrassment of being pinned with the label of being responsible for those major sins. **Abarbanel** lists numerous reasons that opinion had to be correct: 1) There had to be a serious sin to punish these two major, righteous leaders who have so much of their lives to leading the nation - something minimal like this incident is not enough to punish them; it had to be something major. 2) Why did Aharon die first? Because he was the first to commit a sin, with the Egel. The order of the punishment follows the order of the crime. 3) It is Midah Kaneged Midah - because of their failures, the nation died in the desert - they needed to die there too. 4) If Moshe is doing all of the actions, why should Aharon be brought in as part of this punishment? He wasn't needed - it was to be the camouflage for the sin of both. 5) You don't find Moshe and Aharon praying for forgiveness for this sin, because it was not the major issue that caused them to be punished. 6) It was really the people's sin, and they were swept up in the punishment as their leaders. 7) In his review of all the sins of the people later in Devarim, Moshe doesn't even list this one. 8) In Devarim, Moshe

reviews the history of the people in the desert- in 1:37 he says that *Hashem was angry at me because of the people and I was also not allowed to enter the land* - what immediately preceded this statement was the retelling of the whole story of the Meraglim; there is a lot of detail reviewing the chet of the meraglim, and then the Torah says that he will not enter the land because of them. This would suggest the true reason for his punishment was the sin of the Meraglim. Similarly, in Devarim 10:6 it tells of the death of Aharon, with Elazar taking over as kohein gadol; this immediately followed the review of the chet Ha'Egel. So this would prove that the death of both of them are really linked to the two major sins of the people - they were at least partially responsible for the two major catastrophes - they were complicit and they had to sink with the people as well.