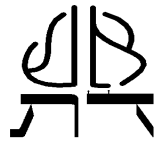


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion Moshe (Moses) is told that he would not enter Israel because he hit the rock, instead of speaking to it. Immediately afterwards, Moshe sends a delegation to Edom asking that the Jewish people be allowed to go through his territory on their way to Israel. (Numbers 20:14)

Commenting on this juxtaposition the Midrash states: In the usual way, when a man is slighted by his business partner he wishes to have nothing to do with him; whereas Moses though he was punished on account of Israel did not rid himself of their burden, but sent messengers. (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:7)

Nechama Leibowitz reinforces this idea by noting that the text states that Moshe sent the delegation to Edom from Kadesh. This fact is unnecessary. In the words of Leibowitz: Wherever no change of locale is recorded in the text it is presumed that the event described took place at the last mentioned place. Obviously, Nechama concludes, Kadesh is mentioned again to emphasize Moshe's adherence to his mission of bringing the people to the land, even after his rebuff, in spite of the fact that he had been explicitly excluded from it.

An important lesson may be learned here. Leaders must be careful to subdue their ego. The cause is larger than the personal concerns of any one person. Although Moshe is condemned to die in the desert he continues to help the Jews enter Israel by sending messengers to Edom.

Compare this to the haftara, the prophetic portion read this week. Yiftah promises God that if he is victorious in war, whatever he sees first upon his return will be offered to God. Alas, he returns victorious and sees his daughter.

Here the Midrash notes that Yiftah could have gone to Pinchas the High Priest to annul the vow. But Yiftah said, Should I, the head of tribes of Israel stoop to go to that civilian? Pinchas also did not go out of his way to go to Yiftah, proclaiming, Should I a High Priest

**This issue of Toras Aish sponsored by
Yitz & Ruthie Weiss
in honor of the Bar Mitzva of their nephew
Dovie Klugerman
We love you and we're very proud of you!**

lower myself and go to that boor. (Tanchuma)

Unlike Moshe who was without ego, Yiftah and Pinchas were filled with it and it cost the life of that child.

A story is told of a Hasidic rabbi who carried two notes in his pocket. One stated "The world was created for me." The second declared "I am like the dust of the earth." The first statement does not resonate unless balanced by the latter. Indeed, if ego is not kept tightly in check, it can overwhelm or subtly subvert the endeavor to which one is dedicated. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, Finchley Synagogue

In today's Sidra, we are informed of the deaths of two key figures of the people, Aaron and Miriam.

The reaction of the people to the passing of Aaron was overwhelming: 'and the entire House of Israel wept for him' (Bamidbar 20:29). Later on, when Moses died, we are told merely: 'and the Children of Israel wept for him' (Devarim 30:8).

The Sifra explains why Aaron was mourned more than Moses. Aaron was greatly loved because he never said harshly to any man or woman 'You have sinned'.

With regard to Moses, part of his duty was to do just that. (Sifra, Shemini 1) Avot D'Rabbi Natan explains further: What is the verse 'He turned many back from transgression' (Malachi 2:6) referring to? This was Aaron, for when he was walking on his way and he came across a person doing something wrong, he went out of his way to greet him. The next day when the transgressor was tempted to sin yet again, he thought to himself: 'Aaron cares about me. Woe unto me if I let him down, for, if I sin, how could I ever look him in the eye again?' (Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12:3)

Aaron's most outstanding character trait was indeed love for and tolerance towards one and all. This inspired Hillel to teach: 'Be of the disciples of Aaron; love peace and pursue it, love all people and bring them close to Torah' (Avot 1:12). Hillel sees genuine consideration and affection as a prerequisite for bringing others closer to a life of dedication to Torah principles and values.

With the passing of Miriam, as well, the people were filled with a profound sense of loss. The Midrash explains that this arose from their deep gratitude

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER
DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB.
SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MORE
INFORMATION
EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG
COPIES OF TORAS AISH ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE
FOLLOWING ADDRESS ON THE WEB (WWW) :
HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is solely the work of the AishDas Society, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

towards her. When Pharaoh issued his evil decree to destroy all sons born of Israelite parents, Amram and Jochebed decided to separate.

They felt it would be irresponsible for them to bring another child into the world when there was a possibility that he could perish. Miriam, who was only a young girl at the time, pleaded with her parents to reunite:

'While there is, indeed, a possibility for tragedy, with the help of G-d we will surely be able to overcome it.'

Miriam was in effect telling her parents that it was worthwhile for them to take a calculated risk for the sake of guaranteeing Jewish continuity. Her parents heeded her call and the result of their reunion was the birth of Moses.

While Aaron serves as our timeless role model encouraging tolerance and compassion, from his sister Miriam, we derive inspiration, not only for the building of Jewish families but also for the building of Jewish communities. If not for the taking of calculated risks, no Synagogues would be built, no schools would be established, and no projects of value would ever get off the ground. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

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

This verse describes a great tragedy—Moshe and Aharon, who have been the leaders of Am Yisrael

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

Rashi maintains that God had commanded them to speak to the rock (verse 8) and they sinned by striking it (verse 11). This, then, represented a deviation from the command that they were given, and Rashi explains that their action also diminished the scale of the kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Divine Name):

"For had you spoken to the rock and then it gave water, I would have been sanctified in the eyes of the nation. They would have said, 'This rock— which does not speak, nor does it hear, nor has it any need of sustenance— obeys the command of the Holy One; how much more so should we.'" (Rashi on verse 12) Briefly, the crux of the sin according to this view lies in the deviation from God's command.

The Rambam, in his Eight Chapters (chapter 4), explains that Moshe and Aharon's sin was that they became angry and said, "Hear now, rebels..." (verse 10). Although the Rambam teaches that in every trait man should adopt the "golden mean," there are nevertheless a few traits concerning which a person must adopt the one extreme and distance himself from the other. One such trait is anger (Hilkhos De'ot 2:3). The Rashbam, too, suggests that Moshe struck the rock "out of a sort of anger and rage." It appears that this anger itself had a negative result: the nation then thought that God was angry with them, while this was not the case.

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

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

"This may be compared to a creditor who came to claim the threshing floor of the debtor, as well as that of his neighbor. The debtor asked, 'I may be guilty, but what has my neighbor done?' Similarly, Moshe here says, 'I may have been too strict, but what is Aharon's sin?' Therefore the Torah praises him: 'And to [the tribe of] Levi he said: Your tumim and urim be to Your

righteous one whom You tested at Masa and with whom You strove at the waters of Meriva' (Devarim 33:8)."

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

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

It is certainly difficult to accept the line of thinking proposed by the Midrash, especially in light of the fact that Moshe pleads at length for God to cancel this tragic decree, to the point where God is forced to say, "Enough—do not speak to Me any longer concerning this matter" (Devarim 3:26). Why does Aharon not offer his own plea, especially since his claim is much stronger?

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

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

This failure is not only severely punished but is also referred to with great severity. Later on in the parasha God says, "Aharon will be gathered to his

people... because you REBELLED AGAINST MY WORD... at the waters of Meriva." (20:24)

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

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

The very fact that God punishes them although they did not actually sin but rather missed an opportunity for something greater, holds a lesson for us. God relates to each individual according to the relationship between what he does and what he could have done. A person can learn Torah and fulfill the mitzvot but nevertheless be punished because there was more that he could have done, but he did not. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99a) teaches that anyone who could study Torah but does not do so is included in the verse, "For he has spurned the word of God." The Gemara (Berakhot 12b) teaches that someone who could have pleaded for mercy on behalf of his fellow but does not do so is called a sinner. Nowhere is it written that a person is commanded to pray for his fellow, but nevertheless a person who fails to do so is called a sinner since he could have helped his fellow but did not.

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

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

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

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah invests a great deal of worth into the power of speech. Though we read in Pirkei Avot that "words spoken are not as important as deeds performed," the Torah nevertheless constantly emphasizes the importance of the spoken word. Improper speech, slander and obscenity are terrible abuses of the gift of speech. The Torah rates speech as the one quality that truly separates humans from the animal kingdom. Speech can console, comfort, advise, persuade and inform. It is the primary method for educating and communicating with others. Speech can be holy and it can lead to reconciliation, compromise and understanding between humans, even amongst former enemies. On the other hand, force, even when justified and necessary, rarely settles matters or increases understanding and wisdom. Force is to be employed only if speech fails. The Torah tells us that even in war, the Jewish army entering the Land of Israel was "to call out for peace with its enemies" before embarking on military action. Of course, speech is not a surefire winner all of the time and without some use of force or threat of force, security and progress cannot occur in a complex and dangerous world such as ours. But Churchill's line about the UN - "It is better to jaw, jaw, jaw than to war, war, war" - certainly retains its place in the truisms of history.

Moshe admits at the beginning of his mission of leading the people of Israel that temperamentally and physically he is not a person of words and speech. Yet his greatest successes and achievements occur when he follows the Lord's command and speaks to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh. Moshe is not only the giver of the written Torah to Israel but he is the master teacher of the Oral Law - he spends the last forty years of his life speaking, teaching, explaining, and guiding. For this reason, it is clearer to us why he was punished for striking the rock in anger to bring forth its waters rather than adhering to God's instructions to speak to the rock. By striking the rock and not attempting first to speak to it, Moshe unwittingly enshrines force over speech, power over persuasion in the minds of his followers. Striking the rock is the antithesis of everything that Moshe taught and did until now. Certainly striking the rock achieves an immediate success - water flows from it. But the Lord tells Moshe that striking the rock

does not sanctify the people of Israel or its God. It may appear to be a quick fix to the problem but it certainly is not a long lasting lesson of morality and holy behavior. Striking the rock and not speaking to it is what brings Moshe's hopes of leading Israel to the Promised Land crashing down in failure. The ability to speak wisely at the proper moment is still one of the great talents of human beings. All of us should attempt to cultivate and use it regularly in our personal, family and communal lives. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Throughout the journey in the desert, the Torah describes numerous issues that arose, with a similar formula: the nation (or part of it) complains about something, Moshe rebukes them for complaining, prays to G-d on their behalf, and the needs are addressed. For example, shortly after they crossed the Red Sea they complained about having no water to drink (Shemos 15:22-25), so Moshe cried out to G-d who showed him how to sweeten the bitter waters of Marah.

Some of those complaints included wishing they were back in Egypt, and/or blaming Moshe for taking them out in the first place. In those instances Moshe rebuked the nation, and often times those that complained (or instigated the complaint) were punished. Upon reaching the Desert of Sinn they complained that they were hungry (16:2-3) and yearned for their old Egyptian diets. They were then given the mun (manna) that would fall daily (except on Shabbos), but, while being informed of their new food supply, were criticized by Moshe and Aharon (16:6-9). When they traveled to Refidim, they again complained about being thirsty (17:2-7), asking why Moshe brought them out of Egypt. The well of water that followed them throughout the desert was G-d's answer to Moshe's prayer, but Amalek attacked them as a punishment for doubting G-d (see Rashi on 17:8).

Bamidbar has its share of comparable cases, from the desiring of meat (11:4-5) that ended with many dying while the meat was still in their mouths (11:33), to the wishing that they had died in Egypt rather than trying to conquer the Land of Israel (14:1-4) that resulted in the entire generation having to perish in the desert including two apparently similar cases in our Parsha. In the second one, they complain about their lack of sustenance, asking why they were brought out of Egypt (21:5). G-d immediately sends a punishment (the poisonous snakes), whereby the people come to Moshe having repented, asking him to pray for them. But the first situation in our Parsha doesn't follow the format. Yes, the people complain, and Moshe rebukes them

and prays for them, but this time instead of the people being punished for complaining, Moshe is criticized (and according to some punished) for rebuking them.

After Miriam dies and the well (temporarily) stops giving its water, they argue with Moshe and Aharon, wishing they had already died and asking why they were brought out of Egypt (20:2-5). Moshe rebukes them (calling them "rebels") after he and Aharon ask G-d for help and are given instructions as to how to restart the well. Yet, in this instance, the people are not held accountable for quarreling with Moshe and Aharon. As the Chizkuni puts it (20:2), "they were not punished now the way they were punished by the other complaints, for they were right- since they didn't have water." And Moshe is taken to task for rebuking them (which is how some understand his mistake). But was this situation really that different that Moshe should not have rebuked them? The rebuke when they first asked for food (and got the manna) seems to have been proper. In Refidim they also didn't have water, but had to deal with Amalek's first attack. Why was this circumstance different?

In one sense, this complaint should have been considered even worse. Rashi (20:1) tells us that before Miriam died, all those included in the punishment of the "scouts" (who could therefore not enter the land) had already died. Anyone that was still alive was not included in that punishment/decreed, as this was the next generation. Nevertheless, they still hearkened back to the "good old days" in Egypt. If those that had spent their lives in Egypt were held accountable for indicating a preference for life there, shouldn't this next generation have been held even more accountable for doing so?

In the beginning of Devarim, Moshe rebukes the nation for all of the sins done in the desert- including those done in the first year. The Or Hachayim (Devarim 1:1), explaining why Moshe's rebuke was directed at what seems like the wrong generation, says that it was being said to those who were between 13 and 20 years old during those incidents. Only those at least 20 had died in the desert, as the heavenly court does not exact punishment from anyone younger than that. Those who were 13 were held accountable in human court, and were therefore deserving of rebuke. So although they were eligible to enter the land, the new "elders" of the generation were (at least) "bar-mitzvahed" in Egypt. Now in their 50s, their referring back to Egypt was not as far fetched as had they not grown up there. And while the difference may be subtle, rather than longing for the life they had back in Egypt, they merely mentioned that it would have been preferable to live in Egypt- under almost any conditions- than to die of thirst in the desert.

After decades of incident-less travels in the desert, this was the first time that they had been without water. They had had a reliable source- the well- that seemed to have dried up, and they were thirsty. Their asking for water was understandable; even if it wasn't

requested in the most appropriate manner, it should have been accepted for what it was. When the same people inappropriately complained (later in our Parsha) about the food and water they had, they were punished for it. But when their first complaint was legitimate, treating it as if it weren't could only make matters worse, not better.

In the first year, the first time the nation had asked for water (in Marah) they were neither rebuked nor punished. Moshe asked G-d for help, and G-d showed him how to make the bitter waters drinkable. However, once they had seen that G-d would provide for them, and (in Refidim) questioned whether He really would, they were punished. Even though the circumstances may seem to have been similar to the request for water in our Parsha, the context makes all the difference.

When the new generation took over, it could have been a new beginning, but after being treated the same way the previous generation had been, it became a continuation (somewhat) instead. Perhaps this is why our Parsha makes the transition from the first year (when the laws of Parah Adumah- the red heifer- were taught) to the 40th year (when Miriam died) without taking note (explicitly) of the passage of time (and generation).

May G-d give us the wisdom to understand the complaints of our children, and the patience to properly deal with them. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the most profound mysteries of the Torah is the law of the red heifer, a ritual by which an individual who has become ritually defiled by contact with a corpse is purified by a Kohen—priest, who sprinkles him with a mixture of burnt ashes of a completely red heifer with water, into which must be thrust a piece of cedar wood, branches of hyssop and a scarlet thread of wool. (Numbers 19:1-6).

Not only are the various ingredients of this ritual difficult to fathom, appearing to be some kind of voodoo applied by Indian medicine men (G-d forbid!); the strangest aspect of all is the fact that while the impure person upon whom the ashes mixture is sprinkled emerges purified, those Kohen-priests involved in the carrying, the burning and the thrusting all become defiled. How can the very same object be a purifying agent and a defiling instrument at one and the same time? It is no wonder that our Talmudic Sages applied the words of King Solomon, wisest of all mortals, "I attempted to be wise, but it only moved further away from my understanding" (Kohelet 7:23), to the mystery of the red heifer.

Further, why does the Torah record this particular ritual here, at the conclusion of the desert sojourn of the Israelites? Rav Abraham Ibn Ezra

explains that these laws were also given at Sinai, but were included in this context because the ritual must be prepared and performed by the Kohen-priests. But the rules of the Kohen-priests belong much more to the books of Exodus (the sanctuary portions of Terumah, Tetzaveh, Vayakhel and Pikudei) and Leviticus (the Holy Temple sacrificial cult) than to these stories of desert dissatisfaction, rebellion and intrigues in the book of Numbers. Why is the ritual of the red heifer sandwiched between the sins of the scouts and of Korah in the two previous portions and the transgression of Moses in the segment immediately following?

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik masterfully answered a significant part of our first query. To what may the ritual of the red heifer be compared? To a hapless individual who finds himself drowning in a quick-sand of mud. Certainly he must be rescued but the rescuer who must lift the victim up from the quagmire, will of necessity become soiled in the process. Hence, those who prepare the mixture of purification are themselves defiled by it!

My revered teacher went one step further. Is it then fair, he asked, that those who attempt to purify become themselves impure in this fashion? And he explained that if we understand that it is the religious leadership which has the responsibility of purifying society, that had the priest-kohanim uplifted humanity to higher spiritual and ethical attainments, people would not have become contaminated by impurity in the first place, then it is only right that this same religious leadership take the risk of becoming defiled; when the nation as a whole is alienated from Torah and sanctity. The leaders must leave the ivory tower of the Bet-Midrash (Study Hall) and reach out to the masses of Jews wherever and in whatever state they may be. As G-d tells Moses, spiritually ensconced in the ethereal realms of the heavens receiving the Oral Law, "Go down, descend from your supernal heights, because your nation is acting perversely with the golden calf; if your nation is sinning, what do I need you for?!" (B.T. Berakhot 32a).

Indeed, religious leadership must assume responsibility for the defection of the masses of Jews, for the sorry state of Jewish morality and sanctity. The heifer or cow, usually a symbol of maternal concern, commitment and nourishment, is changed from the purity of white to the sinfulness of blood red in the detail of this ritual. Death, from the pristine and primordial period of the Garden of Eden, is the result of transgression, a punishment for straying beyond the proper boundaries of conduct set by G-d. The materialistic and hedonistic worship of the golden calf, the lazy and apathetic sin of the scouts in the desert, are all acts of impurity which lead—at the very least—to spiritual death. And this is the destiny of the desert generation.

Why did these freed and empowered slaves who refused to conquer the Promised Land, opt to remain in the desert? First and foremost, because they did not wish to assume responsibility. Indeed, their lives in the desert were virtually free of responsibility; food in the form of manna descended from heaven, divine rays of splendor provided them with shelter, and a "cloud by day, pillar of fire by night" told them when to journey and where to settle. They lived in a perennial "Kollel", free of worries and obligations.

Conquering Israel meant growing up, taking risks, suffering the dangers of welfare, assuming responsibility for their national destiny and mission to the world. Some thought they were on too high a spiritual level to get their feet dirty in the trenches (symbolized by the too proud cedar tree); others thought they were incapable of acting with such courage and strength in the face of the unknown (symbolized by the too-humble hyssop). Both groups are guilty of sin symbolized by the scarlet wool: the sin of the scouts and the sin of the silenced leadership of a frustrated and beaten—down Moses who failed to bring his people even to the portals of the Promised Land; the sin of too much pride and of too little courage! Moses who had courageously struck a threatening Egyptian task-master at the beginning of his career is now reduced to striking an inanimate rock in displaced anger against his complaining and rebelling nation. Comes the timeless message of the red-heifer to every Jewish leader in every generation: you must learn to assume the risks of responsibility!

The third day of Tammuz (this past Tuesday), mark the 10th anniversary of the passing of the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l. In my eyes as well as in the eyes of countless others—many who like myself never became real Lubavitcher hassidim—he was truly the leader of this past generation. From the time that I made the decision to become the rabbi of Lincoln Square Synagogue at age 24 until and including my aliyah to Efrat and the establishment of the Ohr Torah Stone Institutions, I never made a significant move without seeking his sage advice. The one word which most characterizes his phenomenal style of leadership was his assumption of responsibility: he took responsibility for Jews all over the world, from Melbourne, Australia to Johannesburg, South Africa to Auckland, New Zealand to Kiryat Malachi, Israel. He inspired hundreds if not thousands of his disciples to become his emissaries in communities throughout the world, each one assuming a small share of the enormously heavy burden carried with such grace and faith by their revered Rebbe.

The Rebbe provided a magnificent addendum to the interpretation Rav Soloveitchik gave to the ritual of the Red Heifer. Yes, those who prepare the mixture of purification—the one who burns the heifer to make the ashes, the one who thrusts into the mixture the cedar wood, the hyssop and the scarlet thread, the one

who gathers up the various ingredients together and the one who carries them—all of these become defiled in their pursuit of purifying those who are impure. However, the one who actually sprinkles the mixture upon the individual defiled and thereby effectuates the actual purification, he himself remains pure. Hence the Rebbe made a promise to each of his shlichim (emissaries) all over the world—to those individuals who did the actual purifying themselves, the junior partners of the Rebbe who took responsibility to perform G-d's work of purification—these were guaranteed, they and their families, to remain pure, no matter how isolated they may be. It is through these emissaries that the Rebbe's legacy lives on. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by *Rabbi Amnon Bazak*

The opening verse of the Song of the Well in this week's Torah portion is, "Then Yisrael would sing this song" [Bamidbar 21:17]. This, of course, is similar to the beginning of the epic poem at the Red Sea, "Then, Moshe and Bnei Yisrael would sing this song" [Shemot 15:1]. This implies a link between the two epic songs, which we will attempt to clarify.

First, it is noteworthy that both poems were said after Bnei Yisrael went through a process of repentance. The poem at the Red Sea was the end of a series of events which began with a complaint by the people, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?" [Shemot 14:11]. Before the Song of the Well, there is a very similar complaint:

"Why did you take us out of Egypt, in order to die in the desert?" [Bamidbar 21:5]. In both cases, the complaint is followed by an unnatural occurrence. In Shemot, this is the splitting of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians, and in this week's portion it is the infestation of serpents and the miraculous cure by the copper serpent. In both cases, the unusual events lead to greater faith in G-d.

After the splitting of the sea, "The nation feared G-d, and they believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe" [Shemot 14:31]. After the serpents struck, Bnei Yisrael acknowledged for the first time in the history of the complaints in the desert that they had sinned. "We have sinned, by talking against G-d and against you." [Bamidbar 21:7]. After this historic reversal, Bnei Yisrael made no more complaints. Thus, both epic poems are an expression of faith in G-d and acknowledging His charity and mercy.

On the other hand, these similarities put into sharp focus the main difference between the two poems. The song at the Red sea was recited by Moshe himself, and it does not give any special status to Bnei Yisrael. The Red Sea was split by the Almighty, and

Bnei Yisrael did not play any active role, as is written in the beginning of the passage: "G-d will fight for you, and you shall remain silent" [Shemot 14:14]. Therefore, the only image in the poem is that of the Almighty, as He fought in Egypt. "G-d is a man of war... He shot into the sea... Your right hand, G-d, is glorified with strength... Destroy your enemies, send them your anger... You blew your wind... Who is like you among the deities, G-d?... You stretched out your hand... You guided... You led... You will bring them and plant them... G-d will rule forever..." This type of leadership is most appropriate for the era of the desert, when the Almighty goes before the people, and they are not required to be creative or to take any responsibility.

On the other hand, the second generation, the people who are about to enter Eretz Yisrael, must be more involved and more active, in preparation for their life in the land under natural circumstances. Therefore, the Song of the Well is said together, by "Moshe and Bnei Yisrael." Even though it is also meant as praise for the Almighty for giving them water (without any preceding complaint this time!), it emphasizes the role of Bnei Yisrael. "A well that was dug by rulers, excavated by the leaders of the nation, by the one who gave the laws..." [Bamidbar 21:18]. From this point on, Bnei Yisrael play a larger and larger role, as is seen in the next Torah portion. Now, they initiate the actions: "And Yisrael sent messengers to Sichon, King of the Emorites" [21:21]. This is the opposite of what happened earlier, when "Moshe sent messengers from Kadesh to the King of Edom" [20:14].

The Trait of Anger

by *Rabbi Noach Landsberg, Rabbi of the Moshav Tzparia and the Religious Council, Emek Lod*

The Talmud presents two approaches to the trait of anger. According to Rabba Bar Rav Huna, "Anybody who becomes angry will ignore the Shechina," while Rabbi Yirmiya from Difti says, "Anybody who becomes angry will forget his studies." [Nedarim 22b]. Indeed, every time Moshe became angry he was punished in one of these two ways. Before the manna was given, during the ceremony of the dedication of the Tabernacle, and in the war against Midyan, he could not remember the halacha. In this week's portion, with respect to the water of controversy, when he became angry he was punished by not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael (the desire of the Shechina was set aside). This was also written by the Rambam in his introduction to the commentary on Avot. "You know that when the first and principle master, Moshe... became angry and said, 'listen you rebels' [Bamidbar 20:10], G-d scrutinized him carefully, in wonder that a man such as he showed unjustified anger towards the community of Yisrael."

Rablag also discusses the importance of patience: "A man should reply gently if he encounters anger and fury from another person." If he replies in

anger, the one who is angry with him will become angrier and will use his statement as a justification for harming him. The tongues of the sages should convince the listeners to agree with them, for in this way they will spread their opinions." [Commentary on Mishlei 15:1-2].

Why is anger such a negative thing? The Rashbatz explains this in his commentary on Avot. "Anger is very bad... Even in cases where anger is justified, a man must make sure that the words are accepted calmly, and a person should not be quick to anger. Anger is like the venom of a serpent, which is ready in the mouth and does not have to be brought up from within its body. Similarly, the anger of a fool waits all the time in his bosom, ready to appear. One who becomes angry easily will make light of the honor of his friend." In general, it can be said, "every man who becomes angry will then make a mistake," as was written by Rabbi Y. Elashkar in his commentary on Avot, "Mirkevet Hamishna." This is explained in the book *Orchot Chaim*. A person who becomes angry and maintains his anger does not pay attention to his own actions, and such a person often does things that he would not do if he were not angry. Anger removes a person's intelligence from him, lowers him to the level of controversy and argument, and does not permit him to rise up from the depths of sin.

These days, the nation of Yisrael is in the midst of a severe controversy, suffering from a strong polarity that is a result of distancing ourselves from our basic roots. At a time like this, we must be careful to adhere to the principle, "The words of wise men are heard in a pleasant way," and explain calmly that all the paths of Torah lead to peace. There is no doubt that we must not let our emotions destroy our calm attitude and lead us into anger, as is written by the Ramban. "Listen, my son, to the ethics of your father [Mishlei 1:8] -- Always maintain the habit of speaking pleasantly to every person, at all times." By speaking to our colleagues in the appropriate way, we will strengthen our links to G-d, to the nation, and to the land.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

This is the Torah (Teaching) of a man who would die in a tent: Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated for seven days. (Bamidbar 19:14)

Reish Lakish says, "From where do we know that the Torah is only maintained by someone who kills himself over it? As it says: This is the Torah of the man who would die in a tent..." (Brochos 43B)

Every man of Israel is obligated in learning Torah whether he is poor or rich whether he is physically wholesome or languishing whether he is a youngster or an elder whose energies have waned, even if he is a poor person that must be provided for from charity and he needs to go door to door and even

a man with a wife and children is obligated to fix for himself time to learn. (Rambam:

Laws of Talmud Torah 1:8)

If the Torah is "a tree of life" then why is one expected to kill himself over it? What does that mean? It seems too extreme.

It is well known that R. Ephraim Margulies, the author of the *Mateh Ephraim* was not only a great scholar but a wealthy businessman. Many hours in the day he would cloister himself in his study and would remain removed from all his worldly concerns while he became immersed in Torah study. Even the most important business matters would not distract him from his learning. How did he do it? He posed the following hypothetical to his family and associates, "Imagine for your selves what you would do if I was dead, no longer in this world and you had no other address for your urgent questions. During these times I am to be considered as though I am no longer here." So he explained the verse, "This is the Torah regarding the man who would die in the tent..." A local businessman and close friend was determined to carry on his regular learning schedule on the day he was to move. His wife was none too pleased, at first, but he decided in principle that he wasn't going to miss out on his daily diet of learning no matter what.

Later in the morning he drove out of town to rent the truck he would need for the move. The truck rental place asked him for a \$500.00 deposit. He didn't have anything like that kind of money on him and it meant that he would have to double back and delay the move until he could go home and get the money and return again. Now he was really going to be late and he was fearful he would be testing overmuch his wife's nerves.

When he stepped outside the rental office in some industrial section of this town he noticed a fellow Jew passing by. He told him about the dilemma and the man pulled out \$500.00 cash without hesitation and handed it to him as a loan for the deposit. My friend was amazed. What was this fellow doing there at that time? How likely is it to find someone with \$500.00 cash on hand? Who says that even after all that that this fellow would be so agreeable to hand him the money? He felt that because he had kept his sacred learning appointment HASHEM had given him a little extra help and wink about which he was very grateful.

Nowadays the test and the need is greater than ever to gain even a few uninterrupted moments of concentration without intrusions from the ubiquitous cell phone. We might ask ourselves, "What if our phone battery was dead and we would be for a period of time unreachable?" If one would take Torah-Learning so seriously that he turns off his cell phone on his own, it would be no small thing and who knows what other signals he might be open to receive. © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org