

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

It is a scene that still has the power to shock and disturb. The people complain. There is no water. It is an old complaint and a predictable one. That's what happens in a desert. Moses should have been able to handle it in his stride. He has been through far tougher challenges in his time. Yet suddenly he explodes into vituperative anger: "Listen now, you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. (Num. 20:10-11)

It was such egregious behaviour, so much of an over-reaction, that the commentators had difficulty in deciding which aspect was worst. Some said, it was hitting the rock instead of speaking to it as G-d had instructed. Some said, it was the use of the word "we." Moses knew that G-d would send water: it had nothing to do with Aaron or himself. Others, most famously Maimonides, said that it was the anger evident in the words "Listen now, you rebels."

The question I want to raise is simply: what made this trial different? Why did Moses momentarily lose control? Why then? Why there? This question is entirely separate from that of why Moses was not allowed to enter the land. Although the Torah associates the two, I argue elsewhere that this was not a punishment at all. Moses did not lead the people across the Jordan and into the land because that task, involving a new generation and an entirely new set of challenges, demanded a new leader. Even the greatest figures in history belong to a specific time and place. Dor dor u-parnasav. "Each generation has its own leaders" (Avodah Zarah 5a). Leadership is time-bound, not timeless.

Behind Moses' loss of emotional control is a different story, told with utmost brevity in the text: "In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. Now there was no water for the community..." Moses lost control because his sister

Miriam had just died. He was in mourning for his eldest sibling. It is hard to lose a parent, but in some ways it is even harder to lose a brother or sister. They are your generation. You feel the angel of death come suddenly close. You face your own mortality.

But Miriam was more than a sister to Moses. She was the one, while still a six-year-old child, to follow the course of the wicker basket holding her baby brother as it drifted down the Nile. She had the courage and ingenuity to approach Pharaoh's daughter and suggest that she employ a Hebrew nurse for the child, thus ensuring that Moses would grow up knowing his family, his people and his identity.

Small wonder that the sages said that Miriam persuaded her father Amram, the gadol hador (leading scholar of his generation) to annul his decree that Hebrew husbands should divorce their wives and have no more children since there was a fifty per cent chance that any child born would be killed. "Your decree," said Miriam, "is worse than Pharaoh's. He only decreed against the males, yours applies to females also. He intends to rob children of life in this world: you would deny them even life in the world to come" (Midrash Lekach Tov to Ex. 2:1). Amram admitted her superior logic. Husbands and wives were reunited. Yocheved became pregnant and Moses was born. Note simply that this midrash, told by the sages, unambiguously implies that a six year old girl had more faith and wisdom than the leading rabbi of the generation!

Moses surely knew what he owed his elder sister. She had accompanied him throughout his mission. She led the women in song at the Red Sea. The one episode that seems to cast her in a negative light-when she "spoke against Moses because of his Cushite wife," for which she was punished with leprosy-was interpreted more positively by the sages. They said she was critical of Moses for breaking off marital relations with his wife Zipporah. He had done so because he needed to be in a state of readiness for Divine communication at any time. Miriam felt Zipporah's plight and sense of abandonment. Besides which, she and Aaron had also received Divine communication but they had not been commanded to be celibate. She may have been wrong, suggested the sages, but not maliciously so. She spoke not out of jealousy of her brother but out of sympathy for her sister-in-law.

Likewise the sages understood the two events that preceded Moses' crisis-Miriam's death and the

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absence of water for the community-as connected. It was in Miriam's merit, they said, that the Israelites had water during the desert years. A well (Miriam's well) accompanied them on their travels, and when Miriam died, the water ceased.

So it was not simply the Israelites' demand for water that led Moses to lose control of his emotions, but rather his own deep grief. The Israelites may have lost their water, but Moses had lost his sister, who had watched over him as a child, guided his development, supported him throughout the years, and helped him carry the burden of leadership by her role as leader of the women.

It is a moment that reminds us of words from the Book of Judges said by Israel's chief of staff, Barak, to its judge-and-leader Deborah: "If you go with me, I will go; but if you do not go with me, I cannot go" (Judges 4). The relationship between Barak and Deborah was much less close than that between Moses and Miriam, yet Barak acknowledged his dependence on a wise and courageous woman. Can Moses have felt less?

Bereavement leaves us deeply vulnerable. In the midst of loss we can find it hard to control our emotions. We make mistakes. We act rashly. We suffer from a momentary lack of judgment. These are common symptoms even for ordinary humans like us. In Moses' case however, there was an additional factor. He was a prophet, and grief can occlude or eclipse the prophetic spirit. Maimonides answers the well known question as to why Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive, with the simplest possible answer: grief banishes prophecy. For twenty-two years, mourning his missing son, Jacob could not receive the Divine word. Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, remained in touch with G-d. It was G-d, after all, who told him to "speak to the rock." But somehow the message did not penetrate his consciousness fully. That was the effect of grief.

So the details are, in truth, secondary to the human drama played out that day. Yes, Moses struck the rock, said "we" instead of "G-d," and lost his temper with the people. The real story, though, is about Moses the man in an onslaught of grief, vulnerable, exposed, caught in a vortex of emotions, suddenly bereft of the sisterly presence that had been the most important bass-note of his life, Miriam, the precociously wise and

plucky child who had taken control of the situation when the life of her three-month old brother lay in the balance, undaunted by either an Egyptian princess or a rabbi-father, Miriam who led the women in song, sympathized with her sister-in-law when she saw the price she paid for being the wife of a leader, Miriam in whose merit the people had water in a parched land, the quiet heroine without whom Moses was temporarily lost and alone.

The story of Moses and the rock is ultimately less about Moses and a rock than about a great Jewish woman, Miriam, appreciated fully only when she was no longer there. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and *torah.org*

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he series of disasters that befell the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, as recorded for us in the previous parshiot of the book of Bamidbar, reaches its climax in this week's parsha. Heaven decrees that neither Moshe nor Aharon or Miriam-the entire leadership team of the Jewish people- will be allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

The treatment of Moshe individually seems rather harsh to our limited human understanding of these matters, in light of his seemingly minor transgression of smiting the rock instead of speaking to it. Because of this problem, some of the commentators and scholars-Rambam and Abarbanel for example-claim that the punishment was for an accumulation of previous minor transgressions that culminated with Moshe's striking the rock-a straw that broke the camel's back type of scenario.

Most commentators however concentrate on attempting to explain the matter in light of the statement in the Torah itself, that Moshe's punishment was due to the sole incident of his striking the rock instead of following G-d's instruction to speak to it.

Be this matter as it is in all of its wondrous complexity and difficulty, the bottom line is that the Jewish people will not enjoy Moshe's presence and leadership when they embark on their task of nation building upon entering the Land of Israel. All of Jewish history, in fact all of world history, would have been different had Moshe led Israel into its promised land. But it was not to be.

I think that among the many lessons and nuances present in this Torah lesson there is one that bears great relevance to understanding the pattern of Jewish history itself. And that lesson is that a leader, no matter how great he is individually-even if he is Moshe who is able, so to speak, to relate to G-d directly and at will-is still only a product of his time and circumstances.

If Moshe's generation, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai to receive the Torah is not going to enter the Land of Israel, then Moshe himself will also not enter it. The leader is bound to the fate and

occurrences of his generation and times. A great leader of one time is not necessarily the great leader of another period.

The Talmud points this out in many different ways: "Yiftach is the great leader for his generation just as Shmuel was the great leader for his time." Individually speaking, the two may not be on the same plane and level of spiritual greatness, but Shmuel is not the suited for leadership of Yiftach's generation just as Yiftach is not the right person to lead the generation of Shmuel.

Moshe is inextricably bound to his generation and cannot enter the Land of Israel. The rabbis also taught us: "The rule over the people of one time cannot impinge for even a hair's breadth over the rule over the people of the next generation." These ideas and axioms bound Moshe as well and they precluded him from entering the Land of Israel no matter his spiritual greatness and quality. © 2012 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd the pure person shall gather the ashes of the cow and shall place them outside the encampment in a pure place; this shall be a keepsake for the witness- community of the Israelites, to be used as purifying water; it is a sin-offering"(Numbers 19:9)

One of the unfathomable mysteries of the Bible is this passage about the red heifer, a law which appears to lack any rational explanation, and about which the wisest of mortals, King Solomon, declared, "I thought I could fathom it with my wisdom, but it remains far away from me and elusive" (Ecclesiastes 7:23).

We shall attempt to unlock the symbolism behind this very strange procedure, and in so doing hopefully understand the identity of the "pure person" as well as the reference to the red heifer as a "sin offering."

The Israelites were to bring a red heifer without blemish and on which no yoke had been laid. This heifer was to be taken outside the holy encampment and slaughtered before the eyes of the High Priest, in sight of the Holy of Holies but far from it, where the Mount of Olives cemetery is now located. The cow was then completely burned - its hide, flesh, blood and even dung - with the kohen (priest) casting cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet thread into the flames (Numbers 19:1-6).

I suggest that the cow represents the Jewish nation, the "mother" of all nations, which nourishes the world with the milk of human kindness, compassionate righteousness and moral justice, the open-house hospitality taught by Abraham and Sarah. The cow is

red because red is the color of blood, and blood is the life/soul of humanity. Without the moral teachings of Israel, without the seven Noahide Laws and the Ten Commandments, the free world would cease to exist, and humanity would dissolve in a blast of nuclear explosions.

"Israel" was to be taken outside - beyond the encampment of moral, human beings - to the bestial world of Auschwitz and Treblinka, where six million innocent men and women, totally pure children and babies, people who had not known any enslavement before, would be slaughtered by fire; human lives and human dreams were charred black in a hell devised by human demons, human remains going up in the smokestacks of Satan's funeral pyre.

There were no exceptions, no reprieves for those doomed to die only because they were Jews: The Jews' proud, straight and tall cedar trees - communal leaders such as rabbis, judges and philanthropists - were taken along with the lowly, poverty-stricken Jews, akin to the hyssop plant. And yes, within this fiery mix was also the scarlet color of sin, for there were sinning Jews as well.

What heinous crime had been committed by the "cow" to make it deserving of such a fate? Perhaps it was no sin at all, perhaps it was merely the price exacted from the messengers of the good, the teachers of compassionate righteousness and social justice, the upholders of individual human dignity and freedom by the evil powers of fascism, fanatic jihad and totalitarian enslavement. Do not our sages teach that from Sinai itself descended the sin'a - hatred against the people of the ethical way? But then our biblical text does call this "red cow" a "sin offering," albeit for an inadvertent transgression. After all, were we not intended to be "a blessing to the families of the earth," to teach future generations compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to be a light unto the nations? Is it not biblically sound to suggest that we are the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, bearing the sins of the world because we did not fulfill our mission as a "sacred nation and a kingdom of priests/teachers"? And a sin offering brings atonement and forgiveness.

Hence the pure person - and only G-d is a truly pure "person" - will gather the ashes of the cow, mix them with the living waters which symbolize our sacred Torah and, by means of His agent the kohen, sprinkle the mixture on the hapless individual who has become impure by contact with death.

Only G-d can save a mortal from death. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**P**arashas Chukas includes the death of Miriam (Bamidbar 20:1), the decree that Moshe and Aharon wouldn't lead the nation into the Promised

Land (20:12), and Aharon's death (20:28). Although we are given the reason why Moshe and Aharon won't make it to the Promised Land (20:24 and 27:14), no reason is given why Miriam was not able to. Even more puzzling, the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 31:4, quoted by Yalkut Shimoni 810) equates the three, comparing G-d's mentioning of Mei M'rivah three (extra) times to a king whose son had a severe accident while traveling; just as the king laments what happened to his son whenever he passes that location again, so too does G-d lament "here is where I killed Moshe, here is where I killed Aharon, here is where I killed Miriam." How could the Midrash imply that Miriam was also killed based on what happened at Mei M'rivah if that incident didn't occur until after Miriam had died?

It could be suggested that the Midrash is not referring to the incident that occurred at Mei M'rivah, but to the place where the incident occurred. Even though only Moshe and Aharon's death could be attributed to what happened at Mei M'rivah, since Miriam died there, G-d lamented her loss as well. (Rashash, in a comment that appears in the manuscript but was only included in some recent editions, makes this suggestion.) However, the Midrash continues by saying that this was the intent of the verse in T'hilim (141:6) which states: "their judges (i.e. leaders) were removed through a rock" without clarifying that the "rock" (referring to the rock that gave water after Moshe hit it) only caused two of the three leaders to die. Additionally, the word for "I killed" is used for all three; according to this approach, it would mean one thing for Moshe and Aharon (that G-d killed them because of what happened there, even though they died elsewhere) and another for Miriam (that He actually killed her there). The context therefore strongly implies that all three died before being able to enter the Promised Land because of the incident with the rock at Mei M'rivah, not just Moshe and Aharon. How could this have been the cause of Miriam's death if she died before it even happened?

Anaf Yosef references the Talmud, (Ta'anis 9a) which describes the three wonderful gifts that the Children of Israel had in the desert thanks to their three righteous leaders; the miraculous well that accompanied them in the desert in Miriam's merit, the Clouds of Glory/Honor that protected them in Aharon's merit, and the manna that fell daily in Moshe's merit. After Miriam died, the well dried up until it was restored after Moshe hit it; it started flowing again in Moshe and Aharon's merit, and didn't stop until Moshe died. Therefore, with their water source restored, the full effect of Miriam's death wasn't felt until after Moshe died, which was well after the incident at Mei M'rivah. I am not completely comfortable with this approach, mostly because it positions G-d's lamentation as being more about the loss of the well than about Miriam's actual death, and/or makes it seem as if the essence of her existence was the well.

After listing and rejecting ten explanations put forth by various commentators regarding Moshe and Aharon's sin, Abarbanel suggests that although hitting the rock instead of talking to it was wrong, it was not a grave enough sin to warrant such a severe punishment. Rather, he suggests, Moshe was punished for being an indirect, unintended cause of the sin of the spies/scouts (by telling them what to report back about), while Aharon was punished for being the cause of the sin of the golden calf-even if he had the right intentions. Since those who sinned as a result of Moshe and Aharon's mistakes had to die in the desert, Moshe and Aharon had to suffer the same consequences. However, since their sin was not the same as the others, they weren't included in their decree, and their punishments were not described as being because of the spies/scouts or because of the golden calf. Not only that (Abarbanel continues), but the Torah presents things as if the reason they couldn't enter the Promised Land was the incident at Mei M'rivah, thereby avoiding leaving the impression that they were included in either decree. Abarbanel's approach doesn't touch on Miriam's death, nor would there seem to be a reason for anyone to think she was included in either of those decrees (the spies or the golden calf). Nevertheless, there may be a connection to one of them.

In the back of each volume of the set of "Chasam Sofer al HaTorah" (not to be confused with "Toras Moshe," another set of Chasam Sofer's insights on Chumash), additional thoughts, recorded by one of Chasam Sofer's students (Rabbi Modechai Efrayim Fishel Sofer) are presented, based on what he heard from his Rebbe. Discussing Miriam's death, Chasam Sofer is quoted as saying that even though Miriam was fully righteous, since there was a hint of the sin of lashon hara (when she spoke about Moshe separating from his wife), she died in order to partially atone for the sin of the generation who accepted the lashon hara of the spies/scouts. Therefore, even though there were still more than 15,000 people that should have died in the 40th year, their sin was forgiven, and they survived (see <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/pinchas.pdf> ). This, he explains, is why Rashi told us (20:22) that when the nation reached Hor Hahor they were "complete, without anyone upon whom there was a decree to die in the desert" even though Rashi had already told us, when they got to Kadesh (20:1), that anyone who was going to die in the desert had already passed away. Although it was true that no one else would die because of that decree, they would have died, if not for Miriam's death atoning for them; it was only after her death that there was no longer any decree.

Rashi had told us (13:2) that the narrative of the spies/scouts follows the narrative of Miriam's speaking about her brother in order to teach us that they should have learned from her mistake. She was punished (with tzora'as) for speaking about her brother, but they still spoke inappropriately about the Promised Land. There

are two possible reactions to seeing someone else, especially someone of stature, make a mistake and suffer the consequences for it. We can either learn from the mistake, which the spies apparently did not, or be negatively affected by it, allowing it to be used as a rationalization for not doing the right thing. Was the result of Miriam's sin to be extra careful about speaking-or accepting-loshon hara, or was it to become more susceptible to it, since even Miriam succumbed to it? Although it should have been the former, it might have been, for some at least, the latter. Did Miriam speaking loshon hara about Moshe play any part in the loshon hara spoken about the Promised Land? If it did, it would be similar to Moshe's role-impacting it without directly causing it. Therefore, just as Moshe having to die in the desert for his role in spy-gate is presented as if it were because of the sin of hitting the rock, when the Midrash describes G-d lamenting having to kill the three leaders of the generation, it presents all three deaths-including Miriam's-as being at Mei M'riva. Even though she had died before that incident happened, "Mei M'rivah" became code words for the cover sin used to disguise the real reason for not being able to enter the Promised Land, and this applied not only to Moshe and Aharon, but to Miriam as well. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**I**n this week's portion Moses is told that he would not enter Israel because he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Immediately afterwards, Moses 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)

Nehama Leibowitz reinforces this idea by noting that the text states that Moses 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, Nehama concludes, Kadesh is mentioned again to emphasize Moses' 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 Moses is condemned to die in the desert he continues to help the Jews enter Israel by sending messengers to Edom.

Compare this to the haftorah, the prophetic portion read this week. Yiftah promises G-d that if he is victorious in war whatever he sees first upon his return will be offered to G-d. 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 lower myself and go to that boor. (Tanhuma)

Unlike Moses 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 Hassidic 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. © 2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

**RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN**

## Davar B'Ito

**T**ake the staff and gather the assembly, you and Aharon your brother. Speak to the rock before their eyes that it should give its waters. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give drink to the assembly and to their animals.

Rocks do not hear. Speaking to them seems pointless.

Targum Yonoson clearly had this in mind when it paraphrases our pasuk as, "Both of you adjure the rock through the Great and Explicit Name." In other words, the rock did not have to "listen." The active agent was the power in uttering the Name of Hashem.

Medrash Yelamdenu, however, sees our pasuk differently. "'Speak'-a dvar halacha or a perek." (Our text of the Medrash, in both Yalkut Shimoni and in Yelamdenu, does not have the words "dvar halacha.") Moshe and Aharon were instructed to speak words of Torah in proximity to the rock.

Here is the explanation. For close to forty years, Miriam's well supplied the Bnei Yisrael with their water. It had ceased being miraculous, and become part of the natural order of things. (The well was one of that small group of things that Hashem created in the final moments of the six days of Creation (Pesachim 54a), making it part of the natural world. This should not be surprising. The One who ordered clouds to drop their rain, and the Nile to overflow and irrigate the land, can just as easily order a rock to become a travelling well!)

When the well ceased to provide their needs, the people assumed that the change was part of the change in their life style necessitated by their imminent

entry into the land of Israel. They knew that HKBH was gradually weaning them away from the miraculous order He had accustomed them to during their sojourn in the wilderness. Now, it was time to slowly transition them to the order that would prevail when they entered the Land-an order we regard today as natural and expected. They concluded that the failure of Miriam's well was part of the change-over.

That conclusion was mistaken. Water was withheld from them in much the same way that droughts would occasionally plague the Jewish community in the future- as a consequence of its sins. Jews react to such a Divine edict with a set of predictable and determined behaviors. They gather together in a given place- even a nondescript place, devoid of the presence of the Shechinah that graced the beis hamikdosh. A leader delivers a message intended to bend the spirit of the people to the Will of the Creator. They conclude with a joint communal prayer session. All of this is outlined in the second perek of Taanis.

As part of their preparation for life in Israel, Hashem wanted that the Bnei Yisrael come into the Land already familiar with the spiritual protocol to follow in times of distress. They would need it in their arsenal. He wanted them to understand its potency, so that they would realize that this program would be effective even without the merit of Moshe and Aharon in their midst.

Moshe and Aharon's job at the rock was to demonstrate the efficacy of tefillah to the people. They were to do this by establishing the prototype response to an unfavorable Divine edict. According to the plan, Moshe and Aharon would speak word of mussar and of Torah learning at the rock. (A sugya in learning, even though not related to words of inspiration or exhortation, is also an effective preliminary to a group davening session!) Immediately after, the people would join in a communal tefillah. Hashem would respond by refreshing the well. It would give "its waters," meaning the waters that had become part of the nature of that rock until recently, and would now return in all their strength.

The pasuk continues. "You shall bring forth water for them." Note that here it does not speak of "its waters," but of generic, undefined waters. Here Hashem offers them Plan B. Should the merit of their Torah and davening not suffice, He would still not abandon them to die of thirst. He would still intervene and miraculously bail them out. For this, however, Moshe would need the staff that he had used so often before to bring about miracles. Should the preferred plan fail, should the learning and davening not bring them to the spiritual level at which Miriam's well would be restored, Moshe's mateh would be pressed into service. Water would flow, but only enough to sustain them. It would not be terribly attractive, and it would not be available in abundance.

In fact, this is precisely what happened. Moshe hit the rock, and it provided water miraculously, although not very much. This explains why soon after

this episode, the people once again complain, "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in this wilderness, for there is no food and no water." (Bamidbar 21:5)

The people survived, but an enormously important teaching moment had been lost. Klal Yisrael had followed the procedure that they would implement at all times in the future, but it had failed. Miriam's well was not restored to its previous function. Had it succeeded, the people would have directly experienced the power of Torah learning. Away from the mishkan, they would have seen a session of Torah learning bring the Shechinah to their midst. Chazal tell us that when a person succeeds in presenting a topic in halachah as accurately as it was given at Sinai, then the Shechinah is drawn to that place as surely as it was at Sinai. Just as the Shechinah rested upon the mountain, so does it rest in the four amos of halachah, when halachah is accurately conveyed. Moshe became angry, however. His anger precluded his understanding of the sugya completely and accurately. The Shechinah did not come to rest among them, and the subsequent davening was therefore not as effective as it could and should have been.

The Bnei Yisrael saw Hashem miraculously save them-but they did not see from up close the efficacy of the combination of limud Torah, gilui Shechinah, and davening. This was a terrible handicap for the future. (Based on Ha'amek Davar, Bamidbar 20:8) © 2012 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**N**ature dictates that children look somewhat like their parents, fruits look like other similar fruits, and animals act in predictable ways.

But if that were always true, then how do the laws of the Red cow, brought in Parshat Chukat, make sense? How could the impure be purified, while the pure become impure? How do these things make sense, if there is to be order in nature and creation?

The Mofet Hador explains that we too were all given opposing forces.

We were given the Torah, which tells us of these and other 'contradictions', and we were given the brain that wonders about all of it. The Parsha starts by helping us deal with these, and other issues. 'This is the law of the Torah' ...our laws make sense, even if we don't understand them. We're limited in our wisdom. In fact, King Solomon, who was given all the knowledge, couldn't understand the laws of the Red Cow, and said, "It is far from me". The logic is there, but none can discern it, and that too is part of nature. So when we come to a fork in our lives, and we're deciding whether to do what we know we should or what we think we could, we should remember this lesson:

Our minds might be limited in understanding, but the Torah's wisdom is eternal. © 2012 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

### RABBI YISROEL CINER

## Parsha Insights

**T**his weeks parsha, Chukas, begins with the laws of Parah Adumah, the red heifer. This is the purification process that one must go through after having come in contact with a dead body.

"Zos chukas haTorah-this is the 'chok' of the Torah (19:2)." A 'chok' is a mitzva whose meaning has not been revealed to us. Why is this referred to as the 'chok' of the Torah, as opposed to referring to it as a 'chok' of either impurity or purity laws?

There is another seeming contradiction that we find. As a 'chok', the true meaning of this mitzva is inaccessible to us. Yet, Rashi (19:22) quotes from the medrash that the parah adumah atones for the 'chet ha'egel', the sin of the golden calf. "It can be compared to a child of a maidservant who dirtied the palace of the king. The mother is commanded to come and clean the dirt of the child. So too, let the parah (the mother) clean the dirt of the egel (the child)." Rashi then, with painstaking detail, shows how every aspect of the parah adumah process is connected to the 'chet ha'egel'.

How can it be the 'chok' and then be explained in greater detail than most mitzvos?!

The Beis HaLevi explains that it is called the 'chok' of the Torah because it sheds light and perspective on the whole Torah. We often think that we have a good understanding of certain mitzvos. This, dangerously, leads us to decisions of when and to what degree must we observe certain mitzvos in certain situations. "The 'distancing' laws of niddah are necessary for people who don't have so much self control, whereas my wife and I...", and other such gibberish.

"Zos chukas haTorah!", the Torah shouts out! Do you have an understanding of parah adumah? Was even King Solomon, the wisest of all men, able to fathom how its contact purifies those who are impure, at the same time that it defiles those who are pure!?!? All of the mitzvos are interconnected. Without a clear grasp of them all, one cannot have a clear grasp on even one of them. "Zos chukas haTorah!" Yes, of the whole Torah! Because this reveals and demonstrates to us that the whole Torah must be adhered to as we would adhere to a 'chok'.

With this, the Beis HaLevi explains how this 'chok' atones for the 'chet ha'egel'. We've discussed back in Shmos that the root cause of the 'chet ha'egel' was an unbridled, free-lance quest for spirituality. I'll draw close to Hashem my way.

They wanted to construct a dwelling where the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, would rest in this world. This was a truly noble desire, as was validated by

the subsequent command to build the Mishkan. However, with the giving of the Torah, Hashem instructed us how to enhance spirituality. Any other means ends up being counterproductive.

This realization drawn from parah adumah, that full understanding of the entire Torah is beyond our grasp, serves to correct, and thereby atone for, the sin prompted by our mistakenly applying our limited understanding of the Torah. In that way, the epitome of the 'chok' clearly connects to and atones for the specific act of the 'chet ha'egel'.

Our parsha also contains the sin of Moshe and Aharon which provoked the decree of their not entering Eretz Yisroel. "Kach es hamateh", (take the staff)... and speak to the stone... "v'nasan maymav", (and it will give its water) and you will bring out for them water from the stone. And Moshe took "hamateh" (the staff) from before Hashem, as he was commanded. And Moshe and Aharon gathered the congregation before the stone. "Vayarem Moshe es yado", (and Moshe lifted his hand) and hit the stone twice "b'matehu" (with his staff), and brought out much water (20:8-10).

Rashi explains that the sin was hitting the stone as opposed to speaking to it. There are many varying explanations offered (the Ohr HaChaim brings 10 and then his own!) but most begin with the same questions: 1) Why was Moshe commanded to take the staff if he was supposed to speak to, and not hit, the stone? 2) Why is there the seeming redundancy of "v'nasan maymav" (and it will give its water) and then "you will bring out water from the stone"? 3) Why was Aharon punished for Moshe's error of hitting the stone?

The Kli Yakar offers a beautiful explanation. He begins by quoting the Chizkuny that Moshe was commanded to take, not his own staff but rather, the staff of Aharon. That staff which had been placed before Hashem along with the staffs of the other tribes. Only Aharon's staff had blossomed, flowered and grew almonds. After Moshe had shown this to all of the tribes, clearly showing that Aharon's tribe was 'chosen', his staff was returned to the Ohel Moed where it stood as a lasting testimony.

The fact that the pasukim refer to this as the staff, not your staff, and that it was "before Hashem" indicate that Moshe was, in fact, commanded to take this staff of Aharon and not his own.

This was a dry piece of wood without any moisture, yet, miraculously, things began to grow from it. Hashem's decree brought water from a parched, arid piece of wood. Moshe was commanded to take this staff to show that, in the same way, Hashem could decree that the rock should stream forth water.

This is what the pasuk meant by "speak to the stone vi??asan maymav". Moshe and Aharon were commanded to speak to the stone and tell it the words "vi??asan maymav"! "And it gave its water!" Hey stone... do the same thing as the staff! Upon saying that, Moshe would be drawing water forth from the

stone. The staff was brought to demonstrate what had previously happened, not for any hitting to be done! This is alluded to by the fact that "selah", stone, and "etz", stick, have the same numerical value!

Moshe erred and hit the stone with "matehu", with his staff. Why was this such a tremendous sin?

By krias Yam Suf, the splitting of the sea, Hashem told Moshe "hareim es matecha, un'tay es yadecha". This is usually explained as lift your staff and extend your hand. However, the Kli Yakar explains 'hareim' to mean, not lift but rather, remove the staff. Bnei Yisroel entertained thoughts that it was this 'magical' staff that had brought the plagues onto Egypt. In order to dispel any such doubts, Moshe was told to remove the stick, drop it! and split the sea by extending just your arm.

Now, many years after krias Yam Suf, the new generation was having the same doubts. Here was Moshe's chance to show them that Hashem's powers aren't bound by any staff. However, here he did the opposite of what he had done by krias Yam Suf! "Vayarem Moshe es yado vayach es hasela!" Moshe removed (didn't use) his hand and instead hit the stone with his alleged magical staff! A double error was committed. Had they spoken to the stone, its adherence to their words would have caused a tremendous kiddush Hashem. Bnei Yisroel would have understood that if this stone that doesn't speak, doesn't hear and doesn't need sustenance, fulfills the words of its Creator, certainly we must. Not only didn't they speak and thereby strengthen Bnei Yisroel's faith, Moshe hit it with his staff, weakening the faith in Hashem and substantiating their theory of a magical staff.

There are many who say that in Neveh Zion we have a magical staff (sorry). However, the truth is that there are vibrant wellsprings of Torah within seemingly dry individuals. May we merit to find, channel and enhance these fountains of potential and growth. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**K**ing Shlomo writes in Mishlei (18:4-6), "The words of a man's mouth are deep waters; the source of wisdom is like a flowing stream." Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) explains: This verse teaches us that when a person is sitting among a group of people who are conversing, if they are speaking



about mundane matters or are exchanging idle words, he should consider their words like a deep well, whose waters are useless to a thirsty person because they are too far away to be reached without a rope and bucket. On the other hand, if they are speaking

words of wisdom or mussar / character improvement, he should drink up their words like a thirsty man at a flowing stream.

Alternatively, R'Yonah writes, the first part of this verse can be interpreted in connection with our parashah [which opens with the law of the parah adumah, a decree whose logic we cannot understand]. "The words of a Man's mouth are deep waters." "Man" refers to Hashem, as in the verse (Shmot 15:3), "Hashem is the Man of War." Hashem's words-His mitzvot-that are so deep we cannot grasp their reasons.

In fact, R' Yonah notes, mitzvot can be divided into three groups. One group consists of mitzvot that we would have observed even without a Divine command, for example, honoring parents and not murdering. A second group consists of mitzvot that we would not have thought of ourselves, but which we readily accept as G-d's Will. These include eating kosher, not shaving certain parts of the head, and others. Finally, there are mitzvot that the yetzer hara argues will subject us to ridicule, for example, the parah adumah, hanging strings from our clothes (tzitzit), and not wearing mixtures of wool and linen (sha'atnez). We must remember that these too are G-d's will. Moreover, one who becomes wise can discover some of the reasons for these mitzvot. (Derushei U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah Al Ha'Torah)

"Miriam died there and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon." (Bemidbar 20:1-2)

R' Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz z"l (rabbi of Prague; died 1619) writes in his commentary Kli Yakar that the lack of water was a punishment for Bnei Yisrael's failure to mourn Miriam adequately. In contrast to Moshe and Aharon's deaths, the verse does not say that Bnei Yisrael cried over her death. Rather, the verse implies, she was "buried there" and forgotten. Accordingly, Bnei Yisrael had to be shown that the spring that had traveled through the desert with them had been in Miriam's merit.

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (the Biala Rebbe in Yerushalayim) teaches that we must learn a practical lesson from the Kli Yakar's comment: When one receives a gift in the merit of a second person, then the recipient is obligated to show gratitude to the person in whose merit the gift was given.

He observes further: We have a tendency to not show proper gratitude to our mothers and wives. King David extols the tzniut / discrete nature of Jewish woman in the verse (Tehilim 45:14), "All of the honor of the king's daughter is inward"-the consequence, however, is that the low-key, behind the scenes contributions of mothers and wives go unnoticed. When this happens, the "spring runs dry," as in our verses. (Mevaser Tov: B'zchut Nashim Tzidkaniyot p.292)