

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

The rabbis were critical of one who mourns too much too long. (Moed Katan 27b) They said that G-d himself says of such a person, "Are you more compassionate than I am?" Maimonides rules, "A person should not become excessively broken-hearted because of a person's death, as it says, 'Do not weep for the dead nor bemoan him' (Jer. 22:10). This means, 'Do not weep excessively.' For death is the way of the world, and one who grieves excessively at the way of the world is a fool." (Hilkhos Avel 13:11) With rare exceptions, the outer limit of grief in Jewish law is a year, not more.

Yet knowing these things did not help. We are not always masters of our emotions. Nor does comforting others prepare you for your own experience of loss. Jewish law regulates outward conduct not inward feeling, and when it speaks of feelings, like the commands to love and not to hate, halakhah generally translates this into behavioural terms, assuming, in the language of the Sefer ha-Hinnukh, that "the heart follows the deed." (Command 16)

I felt an existential black hole, an emptiness at the core of being. It deadened my sensations, leaving me unable to sleep or focus, as if life was happening at a great distance and as if I were a spectator watching a film out of focus with the sound turned off. The mood eventually passed but while it lasted I made some of the worst mistakes of my life.

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

I have given you."

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

What is more puzzling still is why he lost control at that moment. He had faced the same problem before, but he had never lost his temper before. In Exodus 15 the Israelites at Marah complained that the water was undrinkable because it was bitter. In Exodus 17 at Massa-and-Meriva they complained that there was no water. G-d then told Moses to take his staff and hit the rock, and water flowed from it. So when in our parsha G-d tells Moses, "Take the staff... and speak to the rock," it was surely a forgivable mistake to assume that G-d meant him also to hit it. That is what he had said last time. Moses was following precedent. And if G-d did not mean him to hit the rock, why did he command him to take his staff?

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

Only after I lost my father did I understand the passage. What had happened immediately before? The first verse of the chapter states: "The people stopped at Kadesh. There, Miriam died and was buried." Only then does it state that the people had no water. An ancient



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tradition explains that the people had hitherto been blessed by a miraculous source of water in the merit of Miriam. When she died, the water ceased.

However it seems to me that the deeper connection lies not between the death of Miriam and the lack of water but between her death and Moses' loss of emotional equilibrium. Miriam was his elder sister. She had watched over his fate when, as a baby, he had been placed in a basket and floated down the Nile. She had had the courage and enterprise to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and suggest that he be nursed by a Hebrew, thus reuniting Moses and his mother and ensuring that he grew up knowing who he was and to which people he belonged. He owed his sense of identity to her. Without Miriam, he could never have become the human face of G-d to the Israelites, law-giver, liberator and prophet. Losing her, he not only lost his sister. He lost the human foundation of his life.

Bereaved, you lose control of your emotions. You find yourself angry when the situation calls for calm. You hit when you should speak, and you speak when you should be silent. Even when G-d has told you what to do, you are only half-listening. You hear the words but they do not fully enter your mind. Maimonides asks the question, how was it that Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive. He answers, because he was in a state of grief, and the Shekhinah does not enter us when we are in a state of grief. (Eight Chapters, ch. 7, based on Pesachim 117a) Moses at the rock was not so much a prophet as a man who had just lost his sister. He was inconsolable and not in control. He was the greatest of the prophets. But he was also human, rarely more so than here.

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

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

the ball-park, the territory to which the story belongs.

Nonetheless it seems to me that -- here as in so many other places in the Torah -- there is a story beneath the story, and it is a different one altogether. Chukkat is about death, loss and bereavement. Miriam dies. Aaron and Moses are told they will not live to enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies, and the people mourn for him for thirty days. Together they constituted the greatest leadership team the Jewish people has ever known, Moses the supreme prophet, Aaron the first High Priest, and Miriam perhaps the greatest of them all. (There are many midrashim on this theme about Miriam's faith, courage and foresight.) What the parsha is telling us is that for each of us there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter. "It is not for you to complete the task." Even the greatest are mortal.

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

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

Life after death and the resurrection of the dead are fundamental, non-negotiable principles of Jewish faith, but Tanakh is conspicuously quiet about them. It is focused on finding G-d in this life, on this planet, notwithstanding our mortality. "The dead do not praise G-d," says the Psalm. G-d is to be found in life itself with all its hazards and dangers, bereavements and grief. We may be no more than "dust and ashes", as Abraham said, but life itself is a never-ending stream, "living water", and it is this that the rite of the Red Heifer symbolises.

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

Those we loved and lost live on in us, as we will live on in those we love. For love is as strong as

death, (Shir ha-Shirim 8:6) and the good we do never dies. (see Mishlei 10:2, 11:4) ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"G-d spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'This is the ordinance (chukat) of the Torah which G-d has commanded, saying, 'Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring a completely red heifer, which has no blemish, and which has never had a yoke on it' " (Numbers 19:1-2).

Is it more important to devote oneself to personal, spiritual development or to work for the good of the nation? I believe that a good argument can be made that commitment to the nation takes priority over commitment to one's own spiritual needs. And one such source is a Midrash (Shmot Rabah, Chap. 2:80), which links two kinds of animal slaughterings (not by blood, but by a common word—chukat). The Midrash has in mind the paschal lamb sacrifice of Exodus and the paradoxical ritual of the red heifer, (purifying the defiled, but defiling all those involved in its preparation), discussed in this week's portion, Chukat, and quoted above.

In regard to the paschal sacrifice, the same word, chukat, appears. "This is the ordinance (chukat) of the pesach, no stranger shall eat of it" (Exodus 12:43).

Any law in the Torah called 'chok' has no rational explanation. Essentially a 'chok' is different from those commandments which are universally understood as 'rational natural laws,' like prohibitions against stealing, killing, etc. Rational laws are the key to a society's survival, but a 'chok' is geared to the Jewish nation, religious ritual and is often mysterious, and beyond reason.

When it comes to the 'chukim' of the paschal lamb and the red heifer, their interpretation by the Midrash, focuses on two distinct approaches to Jewish life and practice.

Interpreting the verse, "May my heart be wholehearted with your statutes (Chukim) in order that I not be ashamed," (Psalms 119:80), the Midrash explains that this refers to the ordinance ('chok') of the paschal sacrifice and the ordinance ('chok') of the red heifer. Concerning the first we read, 'zot chukat hapasach,' (Ex. 12:43), and concerning the second we read 'zot chukat haTorah' (Num. 19:2). Once on a track of linking the two statutes (choks), the Midrash ponders which of the two is the greater and more important ordinance?

The analysis takes on the form of an analogy. If two identical women go out walking, how do we know which of the two is greater? Explains the Midrash that if one of the women is accompanying the other, is following behind the other, the one who is in front is the

greater figure. Paralleling the case of the identical women, the Midrash guides us back to the case of the identical 'chukim' and the original question. Which is greater, the paschal sacrifice or the red heifer? Obviously, it is the one which is accompanied by the other, the one which is leading the other; and although they appear to be similar in stature, the red heifer always accompanies the paschal lamb, following behind. Before we can eat from the paschal sacrifice we must first be purified, and it's the red heifer which provides the means of ritual purity, which must be activated before we are enabled to participate in the paschal sacrifice.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik, of blessed memory, my rebbe and mentor, takes this Midrashic conception a step further. The red heifer enables a person to participate in ritual ceremony—those commandments which link the individual with G-d. Thus the red heifer represents individual, spiritual purity.

On the other hand, the paschal sacrifice represents the national commitment of the Jewish people. The commandment to bring the 'pesach' was given just when we emerged as a nation, struggling to escape the claw of slavery. When the Torah commands the Jewish people to bring the paschal sacrifice, it tells us, in the very same verse, that a non-Jew is forbidden to eat of it. Any male who does not carry the indelible mark of being a Jew, circumcision, cannot join in. The entire character of the paschal sacrifice demonstrates how it's not for individuals, how it may not be eaten by an individual, but must rather be eaten within a familial and national context. And since every single Jew in the community of Israel was commanded to take part, this ritual united every Jew to his fellow Jew.

If the red heifer is about individual ritual and religious purity, and the paschal sacrifice is about national commitment, it becomes indubitably clear that when one's own spiritual development comes into conflict with a national issue, then our national commitment must come first; the national commitment is the purpose for the spiritual cleansing.

The paschal sacrifice is the goal, the red heifer is the means. Indeed there is even a halacha which states that if the whole community is ritually impure, and if a red heifer can't be found, the people are permitted nevertheless to participate in the paschal sacrifice, symbolizing to the nation that our national unity and wellbeing transcends individual purity.

Consequently we see how one's own spiritual development is only a means to the communal experience of the nation. Klal Yisrael comes first.

If we look at prayer, we see how its observance in Jewish practice teaches us something unique about our priorities. More often than not, prayer is an occasion when an individual trembles before G-d, an individual beseeches, an individual hopes. But for Jews, prayer is closely linked to a public moment.

Individual prayer is consigned to a lower spiritual potential than when a group of at least ten, a minyan, pray together and that minyan is representative and symbolic of the Jewish nation. And, indeed, even when we pray alone, our prayer is always in plural, for the entire nation: "heal us, O G-d, so that we may be healed; see our affliction; restore Jerusalem to us...."

Alone, many of the most important prayers cannot be said. This doesn't mean that in Judaism an individual's self-realization is always sacrificed for the greater good of the whole. Rather, a dialectic and a tension exists between being a we-oriented people or an I-oriented people. At times, one must zealously, and even selfishly, prepare oneself for ultimate greater service to the Jewish community by shutting out the needs of the world, but the overriding goal of the individual must be to contribute to the needs of the nation so that we may indeed be a kingdom of priest-teachers to perfect the world. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The entire book of Bamidbar is a litany of bad behavior, poor choices and a lack of faith that dooms that generation – a great generation that left Egypt triumphantly and miraculously – to death in the desert of Sinai. But perhaps the most tragic event on a human and personal level is contained in this week's Torah reading when the fate of Moshe is sealed.

He will not be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. The Torah itself ascribes this punishment to the fact that Moshe smote the rock to bring forth water for the people instead of speaking to the rock. Though this reason is emphasized a number of times in the Torah, the great thinkers and commentators of the Jewish people over the ages have searched for a deeper understanding of the cause that led to Moshe's ultimate fate.

Maimonides saw it in terms of a cumulative effect of incidents – albeit individually, perhaps not of major consequence – where Moshe was guilty of anger and of not fulfilling G-d's will in exactitude. Other thinkers and commentators placed blame not so much on Moshe himself but rather on the circumstances of his leadership and relationship to that generation of Jews, those that now would have to enter the Land of Israel, conquer and settle it.

For various reasons, among them the awe and reverence that this new generation would grant to Moshe would border on the cult of personality, if not even idolatry. He would no longer be treated as a human being, but would be elevated to the status of a deity. If nothing else Judaism is certainly an iconoclastic faith where human beings, no matter how great and holy they may be, remain human beings.

However we view what the ultimate cause of

Moshe's fate was – some even attributing it to his being prone to anger – the pathos of the situation is inescapable, even to us removed from the event by many millennia. Reaching and living in the Promised Land was the goal that he had striven for his entire lifetime. That it was denied to him on the threshold of the entry of the Jewish people into their promised homeland, makes the event doubly sad and emotionally disturbing.

We all sympathize with our great leader and teacher but there is a great lesson of faith taught to us by the narrative of this incident. Human beings always attempt to ascribe simple and uncomplicated motives to human behavior, and even have the arrogance to do so regarding G-d as well. Upon reflection we can all recognize that there are many different factors and motives, causes and effects, which influence our choices in life and our behavior.

But we are always hard-pressed to pull all the strings together and truly analyze our motives. It is only our Creator, Who, so to speak, sees the whole picture, knows all of the inner workings of the human psyche and soul and is able to judge correctly all of the issues involved in human behavior. This may be the ultimate reason why we are commanded to accept G-d's judgment in all matters, even when it is beyond our rational understanding. ©2016 *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*

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Sprinkling the Ashes

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

A person who came in contact with a dead person must be sprinkled with the Ash of the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah) on the third and the seventh day. Additionally one cannot be sprinkled on the Shabbat. According to one view one cannot be sprinkled on a Tuesday since the seventh day after the original sprinkling would fall on a Shabbat and sprinkling of the Parah Adumah on the Shabbat is prohibited. Why is one forbidden to sprinkle on the Shabbat?

Two reasons are given.

1. Based on the section of the Talmud Pesachim 69a, this law was enacted by our Rabbis (Gezeirat Chachamim) similar to the law that one is forbidden to sound the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah, or to make the blessing on the Lulav and Etrog on Succot that falls on the Shabbat for fear that one may carry them in a public domain on the Shabbat. Similarly, the ash of the Parah Adumah could not be sprinkled on the Shabbat for fear that one would carry it on the Shabbat.

2. Based on the section in Talmud Beitzah

17b, the same reason one is forbidden to immerse utensils in a Mikvah on Shabbat, (for to do so would fix (Mitakein) the utensil for use), so too this rule would apply to forbidding the sprinkling of the ash of the Parah Adumah on a person who is Tamei (defiled) if Pesach eve falls on Shabbat, for to do so would allow the person to eat from the Pascal lamb. This association is cited by Rashi in Tractate Pesachim 65b. © 2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In 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. © 2016 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And the Cana'ani, the King of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel came the way of the spies, and he waged war with Israel" (Bamidbar 21:1). I translated the words "derech ha'asarim" as "the way of the spies," which is how it is understood by Targum Unkoles, Targum Yonasan/Y'rushalmi, Rashi (in his first approach), Rashbam, and Rabbeinu Bachye, with the linguistic connection being the role of the spies, to "scout" ("sur") the land (see 13:2, 13:17, 13:21, 13:25). But what conceptual connection is there between the "scouts," and specifically "the way" they traveled, and this king attacking Israel?

Many commentators (usually in passing, while explaining something else) understand the connection being that this king lived "in the south" and the scouts entered the land from the south (see 13:17, 13:22), so if the nation was now coming the same way that the scouts had, they would have also been "in the south," near this king, which brought them to his attention. If we are to be consistent with what Rashi said right before this (and with Rosh Hashanah 3a), this "attention" included noticing that the "clouds of glory," which left (temporarily) after Aharon died, were no longer protecting them, making them vulnerable to attack. However, the point being made is that the nation was near this king, for which it would be enough to just say that the nation was also "in the south." Why mention the scouts, which requires us to put 2+2 together and figure out that this means the nation was now in the south, rather than just telling us explicitly that the nation was there? Besides, the "south" that the scouts operated in was the southern part of the Promised Land, and the nation didn't enter the Promised Land then, but went south from Kadesh, so it can't be referring to the actual path the scouts took. Why refer to "the way of the scouts" if the nation didn't really go where they traveled?

Ramban, who praises the Targum's explanation of "asarim," as well as Rabbeinu Bachye, say that when the scouts returned from their mission, those who dwelled in the southern part of the land followed them back to where the nation was camped. But how does this help explain our verse, as the scouting mission occurred almost 40 years earlier, and

the nation was no longer where they were when the scouts returned (and had traveled significantly since then). Perhaps they mean that they had followed the scouts back decades earlier, and saw that they were being hidden by the “clouds of glory” and were therefore able to contrast it with the clouds being gone. (As opposed to had they not followed the spies back to their camp, in which case they wouldn't know things had now changed.) However, Rashi says that it was Amalek who attacked, and Amalek had already seen the nation being hidden by the “clouds of glory” during an earlier attack (Sh'mos 17:8), when the only ones they could harm were those unprotected by the clouds because they were outside of them (see Rashi on D'varim 25:18).

Malbim and Vilna Gaon suggest that Arad saw that Israel was back where they had been when they sent the scouts, so must be ready to use the data gathered by them to start conquering the land, prompting the attack. Perhaps this is what Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachye mean as well, with the knowledge that the nation was back where they were when they sent the scouts coming from having followed the scouts back. However, when Arad attacked, Israel had already left Kadeish and travelled south, to Hor Hahor, which is not what they would have done had they been on the verge of going north to conquer the Promised Land. Besides, it was Israel who was said to have “come the way of the spies,” not Amalek or Cana'an. According to this approach, the point is where Israel was, not how they got there.

Targum Yonatan (Bamidbar 21:1) is of the opinion that Kadeish Barneya, from where the scouts were sent (D'varim 1:19) is the same Kadeish where Miriam died (Bamidbar 20:1 and 20:22; see 13:26), from where the nation traveled to Hor Hahor, where Aharon died. This Targum then compares the trip the nation took after the scouts returned from their mission, from Kadeish to Mosairos, with the trip they took back in the 40th year, from Mosairos to Kadeish, calling it “the way of the scouts.” Even if Kadeish and Kadeish Barnaya are two separate locations (and Bamidbar 34:4 makes it seem that way), the trip from Mosairos up to either of them pretty much follows the coastline of the Gulf of Aqaba (parallel to it), with the only question being whether to then go north and a little west (to Kadeish Barneya), or north and a little east to Kadeish. The term “the way of the scouts” is therefore referring to the fact that both trips (from the spot where the scouts went on their mission and to the spot from where they left for Hor Hahor) was essentially the same route. The question is why this is significant.

Another point to keep in mind is Rashi's wording, “the way of the south, which the scouts traveled.” Since it can't mean the route the scouts took when they actually scouted the land (as the rest of the nation hadn't taken that route because they never

entered the land), it must refer to how the nation got to Kadeish Barneya. Rather than being the way OF the south, Rashi's words would mean the way TO the south, i.e. to the southern part of the land from where the scouts began their mission. [By adding the word “the way of,” rather than just saying “the south,” Rashi is telling us that he is not referring to the scouts' travels in the southern part of the land.] Rashi's explanation of what “the way of the scouts” means would therefore be read as: “the way they got to the south, which (referring to the south, as in the southern part of the Promised Land) is where the scouts went.” Unlike Targum Yonatan, where the routes being compared are how the nation went from Kadeish [Barneya] to Mosairos after the scouts' mission and how they got to Kadeish years later, Rashi is comparing how they got to Kadeish Barneya with how they got to Kadeish, coming from the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula to the southern border of the Promised Land. Like Targum Yonatan, though, the question is how the two routes being the same (or similar) impacted Arad's decision to attack Israel.

Another issue the commentators discuss (see Tosfos on Rosh Hashana 3a) is how Rashi (and, by extension, the Talmud) can say that Arad attacked because Aharon died and the “clouds of glory” left, if the verse itself says it was because “Israel came the way the way of the scouts.” However, the two are not mutually exclusive, and both could have contributed to the decision to attack. Until now, he was afraid to, because the nation was being protected by the “clouds of glory.” But these clouds leaving didn't necessarily mean that the nation was now an easy target. Maybe the clouds left because protection was no longer needed, and if he attacked, he would be soundly defeated. This is where the way the nation “came,” and it being similar to the way they came last time, comes in.

Almost 40 years earlier, when the nation was on the brink of entering the Promised Land, even sending scouts to determine how to begin the conquest, instead of attacking, they did an about face and headed back south (to Mosairos). This time, after basically retracing their steps back north to the southern border, instead of continuing into the Promised Land to conquer it, they again headed back south, this time stopping (at least for now) at Hor Hahor. If the “clouds of glory” had left because they were no longer needed, as even without them the nation wasn't vulnerable to attack, why would they head back south the way they did after the scouts? It seemed obvious that the nation must still not be ready to conquer the land (obvious enough even to Israel that after Arad attacked they “retreated” further, all the way back to Mosairos, see Rashi on Bamidbar 21:4 and D'varim 10:6). This convinced Arad that the “clouds of glory” leaving was an indication of vulnerability rather

than of strength.

"And the Cana'ani, the King of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel came" to Kadeish "the way of the spies," i.e. the way they had come to Kadeish [Barneya] years earlier when they sent spies, and/or the way they had retreated from Kadeish [Barneya] after they had sent spies, "and," realizing that they must be retreating again, "he waged war with Israel." ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

Blessing of the Mon

The Torah states (Breishis 2:3) regarding Shabbos, "Va'yevorech Elokim es yom ha'shvi'i -- Hashem blessed the seventh day", which Chazal (Breishis Rabba 11:2) interpret as referring to the miracle of the mon which fell as a double portion on Friday. When the Jewish People first ate the mon, Moshe was inspired to compose the text of the first bracha of Birchas Hamazon. Notwithstanding the potential of mon to be a source of bracha, in Parshas Chukas the mon is described using derogatory terms by those same people who had experienced the effects of its blessing.

The mon is scorned as something worthless, "Lechem hak'lokeil -- the insignificant bread" (21:5.) Rashi (Parshas Ki Teitzi) comments that the word k'lalahlah -- curse is related to the word kal -- light and meaningless. To curse something, or someone, is to treat it as something that is devoid of any significance. A blessing is the opposite of a curse; it is an expression of one's appreciation of the importance of that which is being blessed. How could the Jewish People see in the mon something that deserved to be scorned as lechem hak'lokeil? What was the nature of the true blessing of the mon that was not appreciated properly?

Man's toil for bread is the result of the curse inflicted on man and on the ground from which bread comes. After sinning by eating from the etz hada'as all of man's food would have to come through great effort. There was one exception to this need for effort: the bread that fell from heaven was a pure blessing and was not subject to the curse of the ground. The nature of the mon was fundamentally different than bread from the ground; Whereas bread produced in this world is subject to the laws of the physical, natural world, the mon which emanates from the spiritual realm of heaven has no such bounds. Chazal teach us that the mon wasn't digested in a physical manner and as such there were no waste products associated with eating it.

This blessed food could only be appreciated by those who view the world around them as a place of spiritual opportunities. It is truly a pure gift from Heaven untainted by the effects of the sin of eating from the etz hada'as. To refer to the blessed food in a derogatory way, as something deserving to be cursed, reflects a lack of appreciation of the spiritual world and a total focus on the physical one.

How can we relate to the mon which hasn't fallen for over three thousand years? Every Shabbos we relive the miracle of the mon. When we recite our bracha on our two challahs and eat our Shabbos meal, we are not partaking of merely physical food, but rather we are receiving spiritual sustenance. Chazal teach us that we have an additional soul on Shabbos. Rashi explains that it is this soul that enables us to eat larger portions on Shabbos than we are accustomed to during the week. How does this spiritual addition impact on our physical meal? It is only because on Shabbos our meal is not merely partaking of physical delights, but rather experiencing how Hashem blessed the seventh day. Our food is from Heaven and as such is not subject to physical limitations, similar to the mon. We reenact the miracle of the mon at our Shabbos table.

May we learn the lessons of the mon and enable the bracha the mon represented to enter our homes every Shabbos. We can correct the mistake of calling the mon "lechem hak'lokeil" by celebrating Shabbos in a way that is befits of a day about which the Torah says, "Hashem blessed the seventh day". ©2016 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky and TorahWeb.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Rocky Road

"Much water came forth, and the assembly and their animals drank." Meshech Chochmah: The episode of drawing water from a rock does not redound to the credit of the Jewish people, and cost Moshe and Aharon their entry ticket into Israel. It seems ironic that the Torah would stress that the less-than stellar performance all around resulted in a great abundance of water. Were they rewarded for getting it wrong? Should not Hashem have made a point of providing them with their needs -- as they asked! -- and nothing more?

We are distracted from the truth by a common misconception, which looks at "more" as "better." In fact, Divine blessing shows itself in quality, not in quantity. When Hashem tells of a blessing of prosperity, He says, "You will eat your bread to satiety," (Vayikra 26:5) which Rashi tells us means eating only a small amount, which nonetheless is blessed with providing complete satisfaction to the body. The mohn, coming as it were directly from the Hand of Hashem, did more than that. It was a spiritual food that gladdened the spirit as well as the body. (Chazal offer splendid detail of its spiritual nature, showing how it was responsive to the spiritual accomplishment of each individual, both in the ease or difficulty of its collection and of its preparation.)

Had Moshe and Aharon not departed from their Divine instructions, the people would have received miraculous water that behaved like the mohn, where quantity simply didn't matter. Gathering extra mohn got a person nowhere. Each person received precisely

what sufficed for his needs. The water they asked for in our parshah would have come to them in the same way. Quantity would have been irrelevant; an uncharacteristically small amount would have sufficed to satisfy all their desire for water.

This blessing, however, would only have been available for people. Animals would have required large amounts, appropriate to satisfying their physiological needs. Thus, the original plan was to supply them with "water from the rock, and give drink to the assembly and to their animals." (Bamidbar 20:8) They are not promised "much" water, because the people would have been blessed with extraordinary satisfaction from an insignificant amount of water. (Not so, the animals. This is why the word "v'ess" intervenes between "assembly" and "animals," as if to suggest -- as is usually the case with two subjects separated by the word "ess" (See Bava Kamma 65B) -- that the two would be very different. Animals would be fed an abundance of water; people would enjoy the superior blessing of satisfaction through just a little.)

Alas, this did not happen. Moshe and Aharon departed ever-so-slightly from the script; the people did not have a chance to observe a kiddush Hashem of the highest order. The water-miracle was therefore downgraded. It was "much water" that came forth. To the observers who did not even realize that they had passed up something much better, quantity did mean a great deal. Furthermore, "the assembly and their animals drank," both together, both responding to the physical properties of the water, while missing the boost that at least the people could have received from the water's spirituality.

Just what was the kiddush Hashem that would have resulted in a higher-order miracle? R. Yosef Albo (Sefer ha-Ikarim, chap. 22 (ma'amar 4)) argues that it would have been accomplished had Moshe taken the initiative on his own, and pledged to produce water from a rock. People would then not only have witnessed Hashem caring for them miraculously, they would have seen Hashem comply with the wishes of His faithful servants.

This leads us to a mystifying observation. Several prophets did act on their own, performing miracles by calling for -- and getting -- Divine assistance. Eliyahu did this at Har Carmel, bringing fire down from heaven to consume his offering; (1 Melachim chap. 18:37) Shmuel did it years before, in bringing a thunderstorm in the middle of a usually rain-free summer. (1 Shmuel 12:17) Now, Moshe was arguably at the pinnacle of prophetic power. Why did he almost never -- with the exception of the earth's swallowing up Korach's rebels -- order the miraculous on his own?

An answer can be found in the unique place of Moshe's prophecy. It was entirely clear to all observers that other prophets were human beings, endowed with

a prophetic spirit. Moshe, however, was in a class of his own. He prophesied while fully conscious; he seemed to be a demi-god, independently possessed of godly powers.

To make it quite clear that Moshe was not an independent agent -- that he acted only when empowered by HKBH, and succeeded only through His power -- Moshe did not perform miracles on his own. He demonstrated that he acted only as an extension of Hashem's Will.

The Korach rebellion offered the only exception to this practice. Korach's minions gathered around Moshe, and challenged him. "Everyone in this nation is holy. We are not in need of your services. You have nothing to offer that we don't already possess." They undervalued Moshe, not overvalued him. There was no danger of their believing him to be Divine. This was the one occasion where Moshe could safely call for a miracle on his own, without fear of untoward consequences. (Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bamidbar 20:11) ©2016 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When the Israelites wanted to pass through the land of the Amorites, they sought permission.

The Torah states: "And Israel sent messengers to Sichon, King of the Amorites, saying..." (Numbers 21:21).

The Midrash says that there are many commandments that the Torah requires us to fulfill when the opportunity arises, but the Torah does not require us to actively pursue the particular situation. However, you are obligated to pursue peace as it is written, "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalms 34). Therefore, Israel sent messengers to Sichon to seek peace (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:16). Hillel said, "Be a disciple of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace, love people and draw them near to the Torah (Pirke Avos 1:12).

All the more so in a marriage. Dr. David Lieberman writes, "Giving in' is not about being selfless, but about being sensible. You can be right or you can be happy. You can't always be both." A man once shared with me that

he stopped trying to win every discussion with his wife when he realized that if he won that meant that his wife lost -- and he didn't want to be married to a loser! Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

