

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**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 is what happens in a desert. Moses should have been able to handle it with ease. He has been through far tougher challenges in his time. Yet suddenly at Mei Meriva (“the waters of contention”), he exploded into vituperative anger: “Listen, you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?” Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff” (Num. 20:10–11).

In past essays I have argued that Moses did not sin. It was simply that he was the right leader for the generation that left Egypt but not the right leader for their children who would cross the Jordan and engage in conquering a land and building a society. The fact that he was not permitted to lead the next generation was not a failure but an inevitability. As a group of slaves facing freedom, a new relationship with God, and a difficult journey, both physically and spiritually, the Children of Israel needed a strong leader capable of contending with them and with God. But as builders of a new society, they needed a leader who would not do the work for them but who would instead inspire them to do it for themselves.

The face of Moses was like the sun, the face of Joshua was like the moon (Bava Batra 75a). The difference is that sunlight is so strong it leaves no work for a candle to do, whereas a candle can illuminate when the only other source of light is the moon. Joshua empowered his generation more than a figure as strong as Moses would have done.

But there is another question altogether about the episode we read of this week. What made this trial different? Why did Moses momentarily lose control? Why then? Why there? He had faced just this challenge before.

The Torah mentions two previous episodes. One took place at Mara, almost immediately after the division of the Red Sea. The people found water but it was bitter. Moses prayed to God, God told him how to sweeten the water, and the episode passed. The second episode occurred at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1–7). This time there was no water at all. Moses rebuked the people: “Why are you quarrelling with me? Are you trying to test God?” He then turned to God and said,

“What am I to do with this people? Before long they will stone me!” God told him to go to a rock at Horeb, take his staff, and hit the rock. Moses did so, and water came out. There was drama, tension, but nothing like the emotional distress evident in this week’s parsha of Chukat. Surely Moses, by now almost forty years older, with a generation of experience behind him, should have coped with this challenge without drama. He had been there before.

The text gives us a clue, but in so understated a way that we can easily miss it. The chapter begins thus: “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...” (Num. 20:1–2). Many commentators see the connection between this and what follows in terms of the sudden loss of water after the death of Miriam. Tradition tells of a miraculous well that accompanied the Israelites during Miriam’s lifetime in her merit.<sup>1</sup> When she died, the water ceased.

There is, though, another way of reading the connection. 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.

Miriam was more than a sister to Moses. She was the one, while still a 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.

In a truly remarkable passage, the Sages said that Miriam persuaded her father Amram, the leading scholar of his generation, to annul his decree that Hebrew husbands should divorce their wives and have no more children because there was a 50 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.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rashi, Commentary to Num. 20:2; Ta’anit 9a; Song of Songs Rabbah 4:14, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Midrash Lekach Tov to Ex. 2:1.

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Amram admitted her superior logic. Husbands and wives were reunited. Yocheved became pregnant and Moses was born. Note 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. According to the Midrash, without her he would not have been born. According to the plain sense of the text, he would not have grown up knowing who his true parents were and to which people he belonged. Though they had been separated during his years of exile in Midian, once he returned, Miriam had accompanied him throughout his mission. She had led the women in song at the Red Sea. The one episode that seems to cast her in a negative light – when she “began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife” (Num. 12:1), 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 Tziporah. He had done so because he needed to be in a state of readiness for Divine communication at any time. Miriam felt Tziporah’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.

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 in 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 4:8). 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 judgement. 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.<sup>3</sup> Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, remained in touch with God. It was God, 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 did things he might not have done, should not have done. He struck the rock, said “we” instead of “God,” and lost his temper with the people. The real story, though, is about Moses the human being 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 had been 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. She had led the Israelite women in song, and sympathized with her sister-in-law when she saw the price she paid for being the wife of a leader. The Midrash speaks of her as the woman in whose merit the people had water in a parched land. In Moses’ anguish at the rock, we sense the loss of the elder sister without whom he felt bereft and alone.

The story of the moment Moses lost his confidence and calm is ultimately less about leadership and crisis, or about a staff and a rock, than about a great Jewish woman, Miriam, appreciated fully only when she was no longer there. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"A**nd he [Moses] said to them: “Listen now rebels”...and he struck the rock twice.” (Numbers 20:10) Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav tells a tale of a king who was beside himself because his only son was behaving like a rooster: he divested

<sup>3</sup> Maimonides, Shemoneh Perakim, ch. 7.

himself of all of his clothes, romped about under the table, ate corn and fodder, and would only emit sounds of “cock-a-doodle-doo.” When all of his trusted doctors failed to find a cure, he sought in desperation the advice of a rabbi. The first thing the rabbi did was disrobe, get under the table, and introduce himself to the hapless prince as a fellow rooster. After several days of cock-a-doodle-dooing together, the rabbi began to eat real food. “You can be a rooster and still enjoy a scrambled egg and vegetables,” said the sage – and the prince joined him in the meal. And so, stage by stage, the rabbi brought the prince out from under the table and into the world of human discourse and relationships. But in order to effectuate the cure, the rabbi himself had to enter the quasi-animal world of the diseased prince.

But then why leave the hallowed halls of the beit midrash in the first place? In the laws of the red heifer, we saw how the kohen himself risks impurity by purifying the individual who became impure.

Why attempt to purify those who are defiled if you run the risk of becoming defiled yourself? Why does the Rabbi in the Rabbi Nachman story allow himself to become “roosterized” by consorting with the Prince-Rooster. Is he not worried that he will find acting like an animal to be more pleasant and certainly with fewer responsibilities than living the burdened life of a Prince?

The answer is indubitably clear: that’s what love of Israel is all about! The kohen, the Jewish leader, must love his people to such an extent that he is willing to sacrifice a portion of his own spirituality in order to bring those who have wandered far away closer to their religious roots. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter so defined *mesirat nefesh*, the commitment of one’s soul for Torah: it cannot mean giving up material opportunities for the sake of Torah, for that would be *mesirat haguf* (the commitment of one’s body); it must mean giving up a little bit of my portion in the World to Come so that my fellow Jew can have a portion as well.

And perhaps that is the responsibility of leadership as well. After all, it can be justifiably argued that if the religious leader had done a proper job, no Jew would ever become defiled!

What has this to do with the punishment of Moses for his having struck the rock twice, thereby demonstrating displaced anger against the nation which he in truth wanted to strike! God told him to speak to the rock but he struck the rock; he was expressing displaced anger at a thirsty and complaining Jewish people. He even lashed out at them, referring to them as “rebels,” criticizing not only their negative actions by ungratefully and unfaithfully kvetching for water but also denigrating their very personalities by classifying them as “rebels.” He had lost the ability to empathize with them, to “get under the table with them” and feel their discomfort – as he had done so effectively when they

were slaves in Egypt and first began their desert experience. Perhaps we cannot blame him for having lost patience – considering all the ingratitude and rebellions he had suffered. But nevertheless he was sinning! In striking the rock (i.e. the Jewish people who were stiff-necked as a rock) he demonstrated that he no longer had the requisite love for his people which is after all the primary requirement for Jewish leadership.

The kohen, on the other hand, scion of Aaron who “loves all creatures and brings them close to Torah,” takes the life-giving water of eternal Torah and transforms the dead ashes of the red heifer into the life-giving purity of the religious ritual; the kohen, representative of God, affirms the eternity of Israel and the ability of every Jew to be purified from death to eternal life within the continuity of the traditions of his people. And his love for Israel is so great that he is willing to defile himself in order to bring redeeming purity to his fellow Jews who have become impure. And similarly the Rabbi in Rabbi Nachman’s story understood that only by empathizing and loving the Rooster-Prince would he have the possibility of weaning him away from his roosterism and restoring him to the world of humanity. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he climax of the tragedies that have been recorded for us in the previous readings of the Torah appears in this week’s reading. Driven to anger and exasperation, Moshe disobeys the order of God to speak to the rock and extract water from it and instead he raises his staff and smites it a number of times. This act does produce water, but it leads to the confirmation of the fact that neither Moshe nor Aharon will lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel.

The prophecy of Eldad and Meidad, that Moshe will die in the desert and that Joshua will lead the Jewish people into the land of Israel is now proven to be bitterly accurate. There is much discussion amongst the commentators as to why Moshe is so severely punished. In the review of the story of the Jewish people while in the desert of Sinai that appears in the book of Dvarim, Moshe himself seems to indicate that it was somehow for the benefit of the Jewish people itself.

He apparently could no longer be the leader of the people when they entered the land of Israel and found themselves in completely different circumstances than those that pertained while living in the desert of Sinai. There is no doubt that all later Jewish history would have taken a different course had Moshe lived and led the Jewish people into the land of Israel. But the will of heaven always pertains and creates the circumstances and narrative in which we ordinary mortals must function and somehow succeed.

Maimonides saw in this narrative of the Torah the effects of cumulative behavior. By this he meant that Moshe was not judged and punished for the sin of striking the rock but rather this act was the final misdeed of his career. Because of his greatness and position of leadership, he was held to an exacting, exalted criteria of behavior. This judgment and the punishment that befell him was an accumulation of all the minor mistakes he had made.

If we will attempt to understand what the transgression was and if the punishment fit the crime, we will always come up short of explanations that truly satisfy our human sense of logic and rectitude. The ultimate lesson of the narrative of this incident is that the judgment of Heaven always remains beyond our scrutiny and understanding.

Moshe was warned early on that in spite of his greatness and holiness and though there would never be another human as close to Heaven and possessing his powers of prophecy, he still would not be able to truly fathom and understand the ultimate judgment, so to speak, of Heaven. Eventually Moshe comes to terms with this reality and understands that the dividing line between the Creator and the created can never be crossed. This is one of the most important messages that this week's reading can teach us. ©2019 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 AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**here are differing opinions concerning the meaning of "hok" (commonly translated as statute), the type of law discussed at the beginning of this week's portion. (Numbers 19) Some maintain that "hok" is a law that although not understood today, one day in the future will be understood.

The most mainstream approach to the meaning of "hok," is that it is a law that does not and will not ever have a reason besides the fact that it is a decree from God. For this reason alone, it must be kept. In the words of the Talmud "It is an enactment from Me, and you are not permitted to criticize it." (Yoma 67b)

The idea that a law must be observed even if it has no rationale runs contrary to the modern, critical approach to law -- that everything must have a reasonable explanation. However, this mainstream approach to hok is at the very core of the Jewish legal process.

That process is based on a belief in Torah mi-Sinai, the law given by God at Sinai to which the Jewish people committed itself. Torah mi-Sinai is a form of heteronomous law, a structure of law that operates independent of any individual or group.

Torah mi-Sinai reflects a system of ethics that

comes from God. Halakha (from the root halakh, "to go,") is not random; it rather guides us, and is the mechanism through which individuals and society can reach an ideal ethical plateau. In the words of King Solomon: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." (Proverbs 3:17) One of the challenges of halakha is to understand how this law contributes to the repairing of the world (tikkun olam).

This system of God ethics differs from ethical humanism. Ethical humanism is solely based on what human beings consider to be proper conduct. Yet, this can be a dangerous approach to deciding law. Human thinking can be relative. What is unethical to one person is ethical to another. Freud is purported to have said, "When it comes to self deception, human beings are geniuses."

If however, the law at its foundation comes from God, it becomes inviolate. No human being can declare it null and void. Heteronomous law assures that one does not succumb to one's subjective notions or tastes when the law does not suit her or him. Therefore the law ought to be kept even when its ethical underpinnings are not understood.

And this in no small measure is why the idea of "hok" is so central. It reminds us of the limits of the human mind. As Rabbi Elie Munk points out: "An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to understand truth does not make it untrue." ©2019 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

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

### **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 Beitza

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.  
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### RABBI DAVID LEVINE

## An Incomprehensible Law

**O**ur parasha begins with an introduction to the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer. The Gemara indicates to us that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah was given at Mara before the Jews arrived at Mt. Sinai but is detailed here for the first time. According to HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, Hashem wished to give the B'nei Yisrael a test to determine if they were ready to receive His laws. Hashem therefore presented them with the three basic types of laws as a test: (1) mitzvot hamuskalot (Dinim, laws that could easily be understood using our own reasoning powers), (2) ham'kubalot (Mishpatim, laws which Man would not have understood on his own but of which one could understand the importance once he heard them), and (3) the Chukim (laws which do not appear to follow logic and which have no meaning available to Man). The laws which were given at Mara were from the category hamuskalot. Shabbat and Honoring one's Parents were from the category of ham'kubalot. Parah Adumah was chosen for the category of chukim because of its inherent contradictions. The Parah Adumah made pure those who were impure and made impure the pure person who sprinkled its ashes on those who needed to become pure. This contradiction placed it in the category of chukim.

But this contradiction was not the only idiosyncrasy that was part of the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah. The Parah Adumah is called a sin offering but it is not treated like any other sin offering. The normal communal sin offering was a male goat. The individual sin offering which was brought when one was guilty of an unintentional sin was most often a male or female goat or a female lamb. For a variable offering when there was a question of whether a sin had been committed, a male bull could also be brought. There was no requirement that the slaughtering had to be performed by a Kohen but every step in the process after that was done by the Kohen. The blood was received by a Kohen and then taken by a Kohen and sprinkled on the four corners of the Altar with the remaining blood poured out on the Southern base. The meat was eaten by male Kohanim within the curtains of the Courtyard. The Parah Adumah, even though it was classified as a communal sin offering followed none of these rules.

The Parah Adumah was the only communal sacrifice that was not slaughtered on the Temple Mount. It was taken by a Kohen to the Mount of Olives and was slaughtered there only by a Kohen. The Kohen had to be dressed in the special clothes of the Kohanim. The Parah was a red female cow in its third year or older after it had reached the age of bearing a calf. When the Torah tells us that it was without blemish, the Rabbis learn that this applied to its redness also. Even two black or white hairs would make it unacceptable. The Parah Adumah could not have had a yoke placed on its back. No other animal would accompany the Parah Adumah for slaughter, even a second Parah Adumah. If another animal was slaughtered along with the Parah Adumah, the Parah Adumah was unfit. The Kohen had to concentrate on the Parah Adumah while he performed each step from the slaughter to the gathering of the ashes. If his mind wandered, the animal was disqualified. The Kohen did not gather the blood of the sacrifice in a k'li, a holy vessel assigned to this purpose. Instead he gathered some of the blood directly in his hand and sprinkled some with his finger in the direction of the Altar. The rest of the blood was not poured out on the Altar, but instead was burned with the rest of the Parah.

As one studies the other sacrifices, the uniqueness of the Parah Adumah becomes even clearer. It is no wonder then that Hashem would use this mitzvah as the test mitzvah in the category of chukat that was given to the Jews at Mara. As we said earlier, this mitzvah was a sample mitzvah that was given at Mara to test the B'nei Yisrael's preparedness to receive the types of laws that were to be given on Har Sinai. The concept of the Parah Adumah was given at that time but the details of the law were not made clear until this parasha which occurred much later. The Rabbis tell us that the Parah Adumah was first brought at the dedication of the Temple in the desert. But that also occurred prior to the timing of this parasha. What then is the significance of placing this section of the Parah Adumah in its location in the Torah?

To comprehend this placement, we must first understand the significance of a chok. Dinim are easily understandable. One does not need to be a scholar to understand that one should not kill or steal. Ham'kubalot can also be understood even though we might not initiate them had they not been given. We might not have created the laws of Shabbat but we can understand the physical and spiritual benefits that we receive with these laws. A chok is incomprehensible by its very nature. King Solomon said that he sought wisdom until he came to the law of the Parah Adumah with its myriad of contradictions and realized that he would never gain full wisdom. A chok is the true test of obedience. One observes these laws because Hashem gave the law, He wants us to observe it, and

we follow His laws without question.

Last week we read of the rebellion of Korach and his followers. Korach couched all of his arguments in logical terms. It was not logical that a tallit which was made of t'cheilet thread should need to have tzitzit with t'cheilet to make it kosher. His rebellion against Moshe was really a rebellion against Hashem. All of our laws would require a logical litmus test to determine if we should observe them. Loyalty to a leader or to a Being could only follow logic. Korach rejected the entire set of laws that were chukim. Korach's rhetoric had an effect on the people and was a danger to them. It was time to remind them of that third category of laws, the only laws which were designed to demonstrate true loyalty to Hashem.

Hashem understood that it can be dangerous for Man to try to comprehend everything. We can never understand why a baby dies or why righteous people suffer. Hashem's plan for the world was once described as a complex piece of tapestry. Unfortunately, we see the back of the tapestry with yarns tied in what appears as random groupings with no significance. When we turn the tapestry around, however, we are struck by its eternal beauty. It should be enough for us to know that Hashem is the artist and the work is one of beauty if every thread is in its place. Were we to change any one thread the tapestry would no longer be perfect. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

**M**y oldest daughter was reluctant to move past diapers, as she appreciated not having to stop whatever she was doing (as her pretend play was very important) to go to the bathroom. (Thankfully, she eventually made the transition.) We take into account allowing time during the day for our bodies to get rid of whatever it thinks it can't use, even excusing ourselves from meetings (including our thrice-daily meetings with G-d), and the like. Imagine, though, finding a food that contained only what the body needed, and nothing more. Well, this was the food that G-d provided during the 40 years in the desert, the "mun."

However, instead of being thankful for the lack of interruptions, and not having to find an appropriate place for such interruptions, the nation complained about the "light bread" that they were forced to eat (Bamidbar 21:5). Rashi tells us they complained that "the mun will eventually explode in our innards; is there anyone born that takes in [food] but does not get rid of [the waste]?" Because of their lack of appreciation (and having insulted G-d's special food), they were punished by having the snakes and vipers attack them (21:6).

This complaint would never have been appropriate, but at least it would have made sense when they first started eating the mun and realized that

they no longer had to make any pit stops. However, our verse is from the 40th year, shortly after Aharon had died. They had already been eating this mun for 39 years, with no ill effects. How could they claim that it would harm them?

The B'er Basadeh brings Rabbi Akiva's opinion, cited in numerous midrashim (e.g. Bamidbar Rabbah 19:21), that traveling merchants tried to sell various fruits to the nation. When they got close to the Land of Israel, the older generation couldn't eat its fruits (died from them), as G-d had sworn that they couldn't see any benefit from the land they had initially refused to enter. Based on this, the B'er Basadeh explains that they didn't realize what the real cause of death was, and thought it was because the mun had stopped up their systems. Rashi, however, follows the opinion that all those who were not going to enter the land had already died (20:1), so there would have been no problem with anyone still alive buying Israeli produce.

The Netziv (Sifray on Bamidbar 11:6) suggests that they knew the mun was special, thinking that it miraculously stayed in the body without having to come out. However, they thought that this was not because there was no waste, but because the mun became attached to their life-force (nourishing it). Once the life-force would be gone (i.e. at death) they would lose this "miracle." This was when they feared their innards would explode, causing a very painful ending. The Sha'aray Aharon adds that after seeing their miraculous source of water dry up after Miriam's death, and the protective "clouds of glory" leave upon Aharon's death, they may have been concerned that the miracle of the mun would come to an end as well (which it would after Moshe's death), and the 40 years worth still inside them would cause their stomachs to explode.

This is also difficult to accept, as they had seen their parents' entire generation die out after having consumed the mun for decades, and no one had exploded. It should have been obvious that their assumption (if they had one) that the mun would cause a severe and painful death was unfounded. Which still leaves us with the question of how they thought the mun would cause their insides to blow up if they had been eating it for years without a problem, and had seen 600,000 adult males die peacefully when they climbed into their graves on Tisha b'Av.

Aside from this issue, there's a logistical problem with some of the midrashim regarding this complaint. In Midrash Tehillim (78:4) Raish Lakish mentions this grievance, based on the verse in our Parsha, and says that G-d's response is "how long will they anger Me, despite all of the miracles I did within them" (Bamidbar 14:11), referring to miracles literally "within them" (inside them) of the mun not having any waste. But this verse was said after the sin of the scouts, in the 2nd year, while the complaint was made in the 40th year! How could G-d be having a discussion

with Moshe in the 2nd year and be responding to a complaint that won't be made for another 38 years? Similarly, when G-d informs Moshe that this generation, which "tested Me ten times" (14:22), won't enter the land, various midrashim enumerate what the 10 tests were. In Avos d'Rav Nasan (N"A 38), one of the 10 tests listed is the insult of the mun from our Parsha. How could an insult said in the year 2487 be one of the 10 things that G-d says was already done in 2449?

There is a discussion in the Talmud (Yuma 4a-b) as to why the "cloud" covered Mt. Sinai for 6 days before G-d called Moshe to ascend. Rav Nasan says that these 6 days were necessary to remove all the food from inside Moshe, so that he could be like the angels (with no internal waste) when he joined them in heaven. Although it is unclear whether it was the period of time (the 6 days) that allowed all of the waste to either be removed or disappear, or if the cloud had an integral part in this cleansing, it would seem that there would be no need for it to have descended for the 6 days if it played no part in it. Either way, it is possible that the nation thought that the cloud had cleansed Moshe.

When they started eating the mun exclusively (which might have been after they were surrounded by the protective clouds that prevented any traveling merchants from getting close enough to try to sell them real food) and saw that they no longer created any waste, they were concerned that their stomachs would eventually explode. After time had passed and they were still fine, they didn't attribute it to the mun being so perfect, but to the clouds cleansing them as it had Moshe.

Now move forward to the 40th year. Aharon dies, and the protective clouds (temporarily) leave. Uh oh- if the clouds had been cleansing them all along, and there's still no waste from the mun, what's going to happen? Instead of realizing that it was the mun all along that created no waste, they complained that without the clouds this "light bread" is going to do them in. The lack of appreciation of the mun's perfection was there since the very beginning, but their fear came to the forefront now, when the clouds were no longer there.

It may have been the initial complaint that the mun would cause their stomachs to explode (before attributing it to the clouds) that was referred to as one of the 10 tests in the 2nd year; Our verse is quoted because it was after the clouds no longer provided a cover for the mun's perfection that they expressed this complaint so explicitly. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Crime and Punishment

**C**rime and Punishment. In a corporeal world, the correlation of a jail sentence to a crime does not symbolize a cogent philosophical message. Of

course, it may tell us that crime does not pay. Unfortunately, that comprehensive message does not differentiate between one who steals to sustain his family, and the greedy scam-artist who bilks widows out of their life's savings. The two felons may sit only a few cells apart from each other, with an arsonist or barroom brawler separating them, but the crimes that sent them to their dismal abodes are so very different in intent.

Divine justice does better. Every aveirah generates a punishment specifically designed to send a distinct Heavenly message to the afflicted. Of course, it may take an otherwise perspicacious mind to correlate what life is handing to him and how it relates to his mortal misdeeds. We do not always relate events that occur to the acts we have perpetrated. Sometimes it is too much for us to bear, and sometimes our ideas may lead us to wrongful conclusions, harming both our psyche and morale.

But when the Torah teaches us about crime and punishment we are more fortunate. The lessons of our past are now devoid of the guilt-ridden, depressive response we may have currently; rather they are moral springboard from which to bound to greater heights. And thus, when the Torah tells us of a clear crime and an immediate response, we have to transpose the relationship between the two to attain another moral lesson.

The people spoke against G-d and Moshe -- "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in this wilderness, for there is no food and no water, and our soul is disgusted with the insubstantial food [Manna]?" G-d sent the fiery serpents against the people and they bit the people. A large multitude of Israel died. The people came to Moshe and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against Hashem and against you! Pray to Hashem that He remove from us the serpent" (Numbers,21:5-7). The people complained about their fare, and were punished with snakes. If Divine retribution is corollary to the crime, how do snakes correspond to kvetching?

Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma. "Hashem said as it were -- let the serpent which was punished for slanderous statements come and exact punishment from those who utter slander; Let the serpent to which all kinds of food have one taste [that of earth; cf (Gen:3:14) and (Yoma: 75a)] come and exact punishment from these ingrates to whom one thing (the manna) had the taste of many different dainties.

What was the slander of the snake? Didn't he just convince Chava to take a bite of the fruit? What connection is there with the Manna? The old Jewish yarn has a Bubby (grandmother) taking her grandchild, little Irving, to the beach toward the end of spring. There is hardly anyone around as the child, dressed in a spring suit, plays innocently on the shore. Suddenly a wave breaks and sweeps him into the vast ocean. The grandmother, who cannot swim, yells toward the

deserted beach, "Someone! Please save my Irving! Please! Anybody!"

Out of nowhere, a man charges forward, dives into the ocean and swims valiantly toward the helpless child. Moments later he is holding the gasping child aloft, while his weeping grandmother dashes toward them. She whisks the child from the man, and looks over the child making sure he is still in one piece.

Then she turns to the man, nods her head slightly and parts her otherwise pursed lips. "He was wearing a hat."

In Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden, life was blissful. Adam and Chava had all they could have wanted, except for one type of fruit -- The Eitz Hada'as, The Fruit of Knowledge. It was the snake that taught his human cohort, the concept of total self-indulgence, rendering them powerless to say, "No!"

The desert dwellers did not fare much differently. Their celestial fare adapted to almost any flavor in the world. Water flowed freely from the rock. But they were not content. They wanted more. The unfulfilled flavors that the Manna refused to replicate were on their minds. They felt that Manna was only a mere simulacrum of the luscious cuisine that they desired. Their craving for everything, manifested itself in punishment through the animal that has his most favored fare, anytime anywhere -- the snake. To a snake, all dust is desirous!

When the Jewish nation were both led and fed, through a hostile environment, yet complained that their miraculous bread is insubstantial, then the only correlation, powerful enough to make them mend their thoughtless ways was the bite of the very being who gains no enjoyment from what he bites, while having all he desires.

Our goal in life is to revel in the blessing, rejoice in all the good that we have, despite the shortcomings of a limited world, and the trivial amenities we may lack. One must learn to appreciate his head, even if he is missing his hat. ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

**RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

## Blessing of the Mon

**T**he 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'lahlah -- 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".

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