

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

There are some, say the Talmud, who acquire their world in an hour and others who lose it in an hour.

No example of the latter is more arresting and bewildering than the famous episode in this week's parsha. The people have asked for water. G-d tells Moses to take a staff and speak to the rock and water will appear. This then follows: He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, 'Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?' Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in Me enough to honour Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.'

"Is this the Torah and this its reward?" we are tempted to say. What was Moses' sin that it merited such punishment? In previous years I have expressed my view that Moses did not sin, nor was he punished. It was simply that each generation needs its own leaders. Moses was the right, indeed the only, leader capable of taking the Israelites out of Egypt. It needed another kind of leader and a different style of leadership, to take the next generation into the Promised Land.

This year, though, looking at the ethics of the Bible, it seems more appropriate to look at a different explanation, the one given by Maimonides in *Shemoneh Perakim*, the "Eight Chapters" that form the preface to his commentary to the Mishnah, tractate *Avot*, the Ethics of the Fathers.

In the course of these chapters Maimonides sets out a surprisingly contemporary account of Judaism as a training in "emotional intelligence."¹ Healthy emotions are essential to a good and happy life, but temperament is not something we choose. Some people just happen to be more patient or calm or generous-spirited or optimistic than others. Emotions were at one stage called the "passions," a word that comes from the same root as "passive," implying that they are feelings that happen to us rather reactions we chose to have. Despite this, Maimonides believed that

with sufficient training, we could overcome our destructive emotions and reconfigure our affective life.

In general, Maimonides, like Aristotle, believed that emotional intelligence consists in striking a balance between excess and deficiency, too much and too little. Too much fear makes me a coward, too little makes me rash and foolhardy, taking unnecessary risks. The middle way is courage. There are, however, two exceptions, says Maimonides: pride and anger. Even a little pride (some sages suggested "an eighth or an eighth") is too much. Likewise even a little anger is wrong.

That, says Maimonides, is why Moses was punished: because he lost his temper with the people when he said, "Listen, you rebels." To be sure, there were other occasions on which he lost his temper – or at least looked as if he had. His reaction to the sin of the Golden Calf, which included smashing the tablets, was hardly eirenic or relaxed. But that case was different. The Israelites had committed a sin. G-d himself was threatening to destroy the people. Moses had to act decisively and with sufficient force to restore order to a people wildly out of control.

Here, though, the people had not sinned. They were thirsty. They needed water. G-d was not angry with them. Moses' intemperate reaction was therefore wrong, says Maimonides. To be sure, anger is something to which we are all prone. But Moses was a leader, and a leader must be a role model. That is why Moses was punished so heavily for a failure that might have been more lightly punished in someone less exalted.

In addition, says Maimonides, by losing his temper Moses failed to respect the people and might have demoralized them. Knowing that Moses was G-d's emissary, the people might have concluded that if Moses was angry with them, so too was G-d. Yet they had done no more than ask for water. Giving the people the impression that G-d was angry with them was a failure to sanctify G-d's name. Thus one moment's anger was sufficient to deprive Moses of the reward surely most precious to him, of seeing the culmination of his work by leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land.

The sages were outspoken in their critique of anger. They would thoroughly have approved of the modern concept of anger management. They did not like anger at all, and reserved some of their sharpest

¹ The term was introduced by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, subsequently popularized by Daniel Goleman.

language to describe it.

"The life of those who can't control their anger is not a life," they said (Pesahim 113b). Resh Lakish said, "When a person becomes angry, if he is a sage his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet his prophecy departs from him" (Pesahim 66b). Maimonides said that when someone becomes angry it is as if he has become an idolater (Hilkhot Deot 2: 3).

What is dangerous about anger is that it causes us to lose control. It activates the most primitive part of the human brain that bypasses the neural circuitry we use when we reflect and choose on rational grounds. While in its grip we lose the ability to step back and judge the possible consequences of our actions. The result is that in a moment of irascibility we can do or say things we may regret for the rest of our lives.

For that reason, rules Maimonides (Hilkhot Deot 2: 3), there is no "middle way" when it comes to anger. Instead we must avoid it under any circumstance. We must go to the opposite extreme. Even when anger is justified, we must avoid it. There may be times when it is necessary to look as if we are angry. That is what Moses did when he saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, and broke the tablets of stone. Yet even then, says Maimonides, inwardly you should be calm.

The Orchot Tzadikim (15th century) notes that anger destroys personal relationships. Short-tempered people scare others, who therefore avoid coming close to them. Anger drives out the positive emotions – forgiveness, compassion, empathy and sensitivity. The result is that irascible people end up lonely, shunned and disappointed. Bad tempered people achieve nothing but their bad temper (Kiddushin 40b). They lose all else.

The classic role model of patience in the face of provocation was Hillel. The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) says that two people once made a wager with each other, saying, "He who makes Hillel angry shall receive four hundred zuz." One said, "I will go and provoke him." It was Erev Shabbat and Hillel was washing his hair. The man stood by the door of his house and called, "Is Hillel here, is Hillel here?" Hillel robed himself and came out, saying, "My son, what do you seek?" "I have a question to ask," he said. "Ask, my son," replied Hillel. He said, "Why are the heads of the Babylonians round?" "My son, you ask a good question," said Hillel. "The reason is that they have no skilled midwives."

The man left, paused, then returned, crying out, "Is Hillel here? Is Hillel here?" Again, Hillel robed and came out, saying, "My son, what do you seek?" "I have another question." "Ask, my son." "Why are the eyes of the Palmyreans bleared?" Hillel replied, "My son, you ask a good question. The reason is that they live in sandy places."

He left, waited, then came back a third time, calling, "Is Hillel here? Is Hillel here?" Again, Hillel

robed and came out, saying, "My son, what do you seek?" "I have another question." "Ask, my son." "Why are the feet of Africans wide?" "My son, you ask a good question. The reason is that they live in watery marshes."

"I have many questions to ask," said the man, "but I am worried that you might become angry." Hillel then robed himself and sat and said, "Ask all the questions you have to ask." "Are you the Hillel who is called the nasi [leader, prince] of Israel?" "Yes," said Hillel. "In that case, said the man, may there not be many like you in Israel." "Why so, my son?" he asked. "Because I have just lost four hundred zuz because of you!" "Be careful of your moods," said Hillel. "You may lose four hundred zuz and yet another four hundred zuz through Hillel, yet Hillel will not lose his temper."

It was this quality of patience under provocation that was one of the factors, according to the Talmud (Eruvin 13b), that led the sages to rule according to the school of Hillel rather than that of Shammai.

The best way of defeating anger is to pause, stop, reflect, refrain, count to ten, and breathe deeply. If necessary, leave the room, go for a walk, meditate, or vent your toxic feelings alone. It is said that about one of the Rebbes of Lubavitch that whenever he felt angry, he would take down the Shulchan Arukh to see whether anger was permitted under the circumstances. By the time he had finished studying, his anger had disappeared.

The verdict of Judaism is simple: Either we defeat anger or anger will defeat us. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Moses and Aaron assembled the assemblage [kehal] before the rock; and said to them, "Listen now, rebels, from this rock shall we extract water for you?" And Moses lifted his hand, struck the rock twice with his staff, and abundant water emerged to give drink to the community [eidah]." (Numbers 20:10–11) Moses entered the stage of Jewish history by heroically striking an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an Israelite slave (Exodus 2:11-12). In contrast, his unfortunate striking of a rock in this week's Biblical portion of Chukat precipitated his exit from the stage of Jewish history. His first act of striking was done out of love for his people and outreach to his brethren, an act of courage and self-sacrifice that forced him to flee the house of Pharaoh.

The striking of the rock, however – which in reality was directed at the People of Israel, whom he called "rebels" – was an expression of deep frustration

with a nation that had defied his teachings and fomented rebellion after rebellion to undermine his and God's authority. What had happened to cause Moses to lash out at his beloved nation?

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Harlap (1883–1951), a close disciple and confidant of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, describes in his multi-volume *Mei Marom* the change in Moses' mindset towards the People of Israel by distinguishing between two descriptive nouns for them, which are usually taken for synonyms: *kehal* and *eidah*, assemblage and community.

A *kehal* ("assemblage") consists of the many individuals who gather together, the separate and disparate persons who make up a crowd.

An *eidah* ("community") is guided by a specific purpose, which serves to unite and connotes individuals united by their commitment to historic continuity from generation to generation. Indeed, the very term *eidah* comes from the same Hebrew root as witness (*eid*) and testimony (*eidut*). The continued survival of the nation of Israel despite exile and persecution in accordance with the Divine covenant serves as eloquent testimony to the reality and truth of God's presence and of Israel's mission: humanity perfected in a world redeemed.

With this background, let us take a fresh look at our Biblical portion. Immediately following Miriam's death, the desert wells dry up and the Israelites assemble as a crowd of disparate rabble (*vayikahal*) in complaint against Moses and Aaron. In response, God addresses Moses: "Take the staff, and you and Aaron assemble the community (*hak'hel et ha'eidah*). Speak to the rock in their presence and it will give forth its water. You will thereby bring forth water from the rock and allow the community (*ha'eidah*) and their beasts to drink" (*ibid.*, v.8).

Please take note that Moses is told by God to assemble the community (*eidah*). However, "Moses and Aaron assembled the assemblage (*kahal*) in front of the rock" (*ibid.*, v.10)! They, the leaders, had lost the vision of Israel as an *eidah*, a witness-community!

What a literal reading is teaching us is that God wanted Moses to look at the motley crew of complainers and see that behind the façade of rabble were to be found witnesses ("eidim") of the Divine. Moses was thereby supposed to appreciate the great potential of this people: that standing before him were the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, and the parents of Yishai, David, and the righteous Messiah.

God expected Moses to see through the angry mob and inspiringly extract from deep within them the faith of their forebears and the glory of their descendants. But Moses, disappointed and disgruntled, personally devastated by their "ingratitude," can only see a congregation of kvetching individuals, a mass of

fearful and immature freedmen dancing before a Golden Calf; a Datan and an Aviram who refused to even meet with him; a disparate crowd of people who allowed themselves to become paralyzed in fear before the Canaanites.

He had lost sight of the community of Israel and could only see the assemblage of Israel; he spoke to what was in front of him instead of to their potential, the great moments and the noble individuals who comprised historic Israel and forged the Israelites in front of him. And so, he became incapable of speaking with love; he could only strike out in anger. Given this attitude, Moses cannot continue to lead the nation towards the fulfillment of its historical destiny.

Many years ago, I had the unique pleasure and privilege of spending an unforgettable Sabbath with one of the great scholars of the 20th century, Rabbi Dr. Charles Chavel z"l. I could not resist asking him how, despite the fact that he served as a rabbi of a congregation, he nevertheless found the time to be so prolific in Jewish scholarship, producing special editions of and commentaries on Rashi and Nahmanides, as well as responses to difficult Talmudic questions asked by Rabbi Akiva Eiger.

"I always had small congregations," he told me, "small in number and sometimes even small in soul. After a difficult board meeting with Mr. Goldberg and Mrs. Schwartz, I yearned for the company of profound minds and deep perspectives. Who could be greater antidotes to small-minded and mean-spirited individuals than Nahmanides and Rabbi Akiva Eiger?"

Rabbi Chavel understood the secret; he had the capacity to look beyond the assemblage and see the community. He realized that, in the final analysis, his "small congregations" were inspired and spawned by Nahmanides and Rabbi Akiva Eiger, by Moses and Aaron, by Abraham our Father and Sarah our Mother. This is the perspective with which we must, each of us, view our present-day Jewish communities, as well!
© 2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

Parshat Chukat describes the third time that the Jews complained about a lack of water (20:1-14) as they arrive at a place named Kadesh. Between the people arriving and complaining, we are briefly told that Miriam dies and is buried in Kadesh (20:1). The *passuk* (verse) immediately following Miriam's death starts with, "and the congregation had no water..." which makes it seem that the shortage of water was a direct result of Miriam's passing. Why is Miriam's death relevant to this third water shortage? Furthermore, the second water shortage was resolved by Moshe hitting a rock (Shemot 17:6). Why was Moshe punished for hitting the rock when he's done it before with positive results?

Rabbi David Fohrman explains that Miriam's strength lies in her faith that things will work out. This conviction was in evidence when Moshe was placed in the river, and Miriam watched from a distance to see how things worked out. Miriam's faith was thenceforth associated with water, such that the rock that supplied the Jewish people with water traveled with them and stopped providing water when Miriam died. Now that Miriam is gone, G-d needed a new champion to take over. Moshe, however, failed this test by not following directions exactly as they were given, displaying a lack of faith that disqualified him from leading the people into the Promised Land.

Miriam had a positive energy that benefited everyone around her. When she died, it highlighted to everyone around her how important a positive attitude is to one's well-being, a lesson that also prevented Moshe from entering Israel. Our Parsha helps us understand that life can be as good as our attitude and mindset. ©2022 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc. This Dvar is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Chana Haddas Ressler, who inspired me to read and explore

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In the portion of Chukat, the Torah tells us that when the priests transition a person from a state of tumah (ritual impurity) to one of taharah (ritual purity), virtually all of the priests involved become tamei in the process (Numbers 19:1–22; Yoma 14a). Why?

On a basic level, the Torah teaches the price one pays when becoming involved with those who are tamei. One can easily be influenced by the spiritually troubled person and end up diminished. Reframing Newton: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

It should be noted, however, that the period of tumah incurred by the Kohen lasts only one day, a price worth paying in order to uplift those who are down.

Perhaps, to offer a different rationale, those who are pure must feel the pain of those who are not by becoming impure themselves. In other words, people must place themselves in the shoes of the other to gain a sense of how it feels to be tamei. And so, as the Kohen facilitates the removal of impurity, he himself becomes impure.

The message from this transference is that spiritual leaders must endeavor to enter into the souls of those they are leading. Leaders should be a part of, rather than apart from, their constituents, sharing in their highs and lows, joy and pain.

Another approach has been suggested. When the Kohen purifies another, it is quite possible for him to feel a sense of haughtiness and egotism. After all, through his efforts, the person who was tamei has been released from a precarious state.

To counteract these possible feelings of

arrogance, the Torah declares that the Kohen, the purifier, must himself become impure. Precisely when he reaches the highest high, purifying the impure, he is reminded of his limitation, knowing he will soon become impure.

This moment teaches that it is important for leaders to step back from exalting themselves in their accomplishments. A true leader remains humble. Here is an example of a chok that may have deeper meaning, as it teaches leaders to empathize and be self-effacing. ©2022 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week deals with a ritual in the Temple -- that of the Red Heifer -- which is characterized as being a commandment beyond the ken of human understanding and rational interpretation. It remains a primary example of certain commandments that, at their very core, are not easily interpreted or made relevant to human behavior, nor to moral understanding and judgment.

The Torah itself calls this commandment a chok, which must be obeyed without question or doubt, for it is beyond human comprehension and understanding to genuinely appreciate and value its essence and purpose. This is the reason the entire Torah reading of this week is called Chukat -- the law and commandments of the Torah for which no explanation will be given.

If we review previous narrative portions of the Torah that we have read and studied over the past weeks, we can easily conclude that all the events that were described -- the murmurings, rebellions, false reports and evil speech and the crimes against Moshe and Aaron also fit the category of being a chok -- something irrational, inexplicable and beyond logical comprehension.

We all believe, somehow, that we live in a rational world, and that we can make rational decisions based upon knowledge, facts, experience, and history. However, the truth is that very few of our decisions are made rationally and are often based on other factors on a constant and recurring basis. Human behavior is almost by definition irrational and inexplicable. It is because of this truth that the Torah gives us laws and commandments that are rational and inexplicable, to match our human moods and decision-making processes.

We can easily understand that if it were not for the Torah itself guiding us through life, giving us daily support, guidance, and stability, certainly the national life of the Jewish people would be chaotic in the extreme. It is this chaos of irrational behavior which is

universally present amongst all people in the world, which leads to the fall of empires and to catastrophic decisions brought about by irrational policies and a great deal of human arrogance.

It is noteworthy to see that in world history, almost all the major empires of the world collapsed and eventually fell because of internal pressures of the society rather than by actual external aggression. These pressures are caused by human nature, both emotionally and ideologically. Once the original basis and emphasis that brought about success and growth in the Empire dissipated, because of the irrational behavior of leaders of these empires, the collapse of those would not be long in coming.

I have always found it to be ironic that the most irrational of all creatures -- human beings -- have the temerity to criticize Jewish tradition as not being rational or easily explained in so-called "factual" terms. It is the purpose of the Torah to instruct us, guide us, and constrain us. It is the purpose of the Torah to counter human irrationality with a form of heavenly certainty that is beyond our understanding. History has proven this assertion correct. ©2022 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Reasons for Mitzvot

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

In Parshat Chukat, the Torah refers to the mitzva of the *Parah Adumah* (Red Heifer) as a *chok*, a mitzva that seemingly has no rational explanation. The Talmud cites a verse (*Vayikra* 18:4), "You shall follow My commandments (*chukotai*)," and comments: "These are the decrees of the King and there is no explanation for them... You do not have permission to think about them" (*Yoma* 67b). Does this really mean that there is no rationale for the *mitzvot*? Could it mean that we have no way to understand the mitzva's rationale, but there is a rationale known to G-d?

If there is such a rationale, why shouldn't it be revealed to humanity? Possibly because there were *mitzvot* whose reasons were revealed (specifically, that the king should not have too many wives lest they lead his heart astray, or too many horses lest he return to Egypt), and this led to the downfall of a great leader (Shlomo). On the other hand, we could argue that since reasons were given for those *mitzvot*, and for many others besides (such as Shabbat and *tzitzit*), this would seem to imply that all *mitzvot* do have a rationale. If the reason is not revealed, that is because it does not necessarily explain all that can be found within a given mitzva. Thus, King David proclaims, "I have seen that all things have their limit, but Your commandments are broad beyond measure" (*Tehillim* 119:96).

This may be at the root of the disagreement between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehudah as to whether we are permitted to seek reasons for *mitzvot*. Many *Rishonim* offer rationales for *mitzvot* (including the Rambam in both the *Mishneh Torah* and the *Moreh Nevuchim*). It would seem that they side with Rabbi Shimon, who permits seeking reasons for *mitzvot*.

According to these *Rishonim*, not only is it permitted, but it is a good idea to explore the rationale for the *mitzvot*. However, other *Rishonim* disagree and say that this is what our Sages warned us about when they said regarding a prayer leader (*Mishnah Berachot* 5:3), "Someone who says 'Your mercy extends to a bird's nest' should be silenced, because he makes it seem like G-d's ways are compassionate, when in reality they are decrees." ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Second Song

Most Jews are aware of the song that Moshe and the B'nei Yisrael sang in praise of Hashem after they had crossed the Red Sea on dry land and saw the Egyptians drowned in the waters. The words of "Az Yashir Moshe, thus will sing Moshe" are repeated every morning in our prayers. But there is a second song that was sung by the B'nei Yisrael after many had died by snake bites as a result of their complaining to Moshe about food and water, and after Hashem had called the people to gather while He gave them water. This time we see the people alone praising Hashem without Moshe. They sang out "Az Yashir Yisrael, thus will sing Israel."

The Torah brings us this brief song, nowhere near as elaborate as the Song of Moshe: "Come up, O Well, announce it! Well, that princes dug, that nobles of the people excavated, through a lawgiver, with their staff. A gift from the Wilderness – the gift went to the valley, and from the valley to the heights, and from the heights to the valley in the field of Moav, at the top of the peak, overlooking the surface of the wilderness."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out two possible reasons for this song. The first reason was from the Midrash which explains that the Well brought forth blood and limbs of the Amorites who attacked the B'nei Yisrael at Nahal Armon. The second reason for this song was to praise and thank Hashem for the forty years of water that He had given the B'nei Yisrael in the desert through the Well of Miriam and now through the stone that Moshe had struck.

The first explanation follows Rashi, who explained that Hashem wanted the people to know of the miracles He had performed for them. The Amorites had hidden in caves on the mountainside of a valley through which the B'nei Yisrael would have to pass. They prepared an ambush with catapults to fling large boulders from these caves down on the people and

destroy the B'nei Yisrael. There were protrusions on the mountainside opposite these caves. Hashem caused an earthquake, and the protrusions on one mountainside went into the caves opposite them and killed the Amorites who had been hiding from the B'nei Yisrael. The people did not know what had happened, so Hashem caused the blood and limbs of the slaughtered Amorites to fill the valley. In this way, the people would witness the hidden miracles that He had performed. Since this happened immediately prior to this song, Rashi gives this as the reason for the song.

The second reason for the song, namely, the water that Hashem had delivered to the people through Moshe, is more difficult to justify as it occurs much earlier. HaRav Sorotzkin asks why, if the people were praising the water that Hashem provided, did they wait until now to thank Him. Even if they had not praised Hashem all the years of Miriam's Well, why did they not praise Hashem immediately after Moshe struck the rock to give them more water from Hashem? After all, the people had complained immediately before this when Miriam's Well ceased to provide water when she died. The Ateret Z'keinim explained that the people were consistently in danger for lack of water and could not praise Hashem until they believed that the danger was finally over. They were reluctant to give Blessings of Thanks before that danger was ended. Even though the Rock brought forth water for them, they were uncertain whether that miracle would continue until they came to an inhabited land where wells had already produced water. At that point, they knew that wells were present all the rest of the way into their Land.

Two reasons are given why Moshe did not participate in this song by name. The Kli Yakar explains that the words, "Well that princes dug, that nobles of the people excavated, through a lawgiver, with their staff," were referring to Moshe and Aharon. Moshe was too humble to sing a song of praise to himself. The Or HaChaim includes the Avot (Forefathers) as part of "the princes." It is recorded in the Torah that each of the Avot dug Wells. Even the Rock that Moshe struck is a reminder of the large Rock that Ya'akov removed from the Well when he saw Rachel approaching. Rashi explains the second reason why Moshe's name was not included in the song. Moshe was punished because of the Well, either because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, he called those who complained rebels, or because he yelled at the people and made it appear that Hashem was angry with them. Since the Well marked his downfall and excluded him from entering the Land, he believed that it was inappropriate for him to take any credit for the Well.

Another question asked by HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin and the Or HaChaim, is why the B'nei Yisrael sang a song of praise to Hashem for the water that He provided in the desert but did not sing a song of praise

for the Manna that sustained them every day. Neither answers the question directly, but the Or HaChaim does appear to propose an answer by emphasizing the reason why the Well was praised. The Well, more so than any other object, represents Hashem's gift to the people. Here we are not speaking of the water alone, but what it represents. Our Rabbis have always equated water with the Torah, Hashem's source of a good and productive life through His Laws. Water and Torah are a source of life. The Manna was also a source of life, but only while the B'nei Yisrael were in the desert. Once they entered the Land, that source was no longer available. The B'nei Yisrael understood the greater significance of the water which enabled them to prevent thirst, but also enabled them to gain Torah every day. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch uses the metaphor of the flowing water as the words of the Torah. "Moshe and the elders of the people brought it into existence by the spiritual stylus of their scepter of law. It was given them from Horev, the Mountain of the Law, and now it was presented to them a second time from the wilderness and became a stream flowing down from Hashem, and accompanied them up the heights, and down the valleys into the fields of the valley of Moav, and finally up to the summit of a height, and now from there looks down on the vista of the wilderness through which it had wandered."

We may all find ourselves at times in a spiritual wilderness. Our tribulations can cause us to doubt the continual presence of Hashem. We may be tormented with fear that our special relationship with Hashem is no longer. When we see the hatred of others towards our People, we question Hashem's support and protection. Yet, we must remember that His Torah can raise us to the heights from which we can gain even greater perspective. His Torah will flow from His Well and lift us again to be able to reach new spiritual heights. May we each seek out His Torah and become spiritually uplifted © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Why did you bring the congregation of Hashem to this desert to die there, we and our animals?" (Bamidbar 20:4) When Miriam died, there was no water for the Jews to drink, as the spring which followed them was in her merit. They clamored around Moshe and Aharon and demanded an explanation. As the Ohr Hachaim explains, they asked two questions: Why would you take us to the land of Israel through this desert where one could die of thirst, if you don't have the ability to provide water for us? Then they asked, "...and if the only safe route was through the desert, why did you even take us up from Egypt if you knew you'd be putting us in such mortal danger?!" Upon hearing this, Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces, unable to answer.

What was the problem? It wasn't Moshe who chose to take the Jews from Egypt, but Hashem! The Torah even tells us specifically that it was Hashem who didn't allow them to go the inhabited way but insisted on taking them through the desert. Why didn't Moshe answer that it was not he, but Hashem, who made those decisions? Why was he stymied for an answer?

Moshe could not say this was because the Jews were in such a frazzled state they would not be able to hear what he had to say. They had already ignored the fact that they'd survived in the desert for nearly 40 years with a miraculous water source. They ignored the fact that the daily Mon was proof of Hashem's Divine Providence, and instead looked at Moshe as a physical leader whose efforts now seemed to fall short.

Moshe could not answer them that Hashem had provided for them because they were too far afield from that plane of understanding. Then, Hashem called to Moshe and told him to speak to the rock. When it didn't provide water immediately, Moshe hit it with his staff, and water came out. However, Hashem was upset by this and Moshe was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps the point of speaking to the rock was to answer the Jews' questions in a way that they would not accept from Moshe. Had he led them to the rock and told them he was going to bring water forth from it, he would have them believing he would provide water in a physical manner. Then, when he spoke to the rock, it would show that things happen not through Man's power, but by the word of Hashem. It would be a multi-step process, bringing them around again to recognition of Hashem, just as the Tzitzis remind us of Hashem's throne, one step at a time.

Alas, Moshe hit the rock, thereby eliminating the power of this response. They expected physical action and they got it. Their question of how Moshe could take them out was not answered as it should have been, that it was Hashem who did it. Instead, Moshe played into their belief at that moment that Man's actions define outcomes. The declaration that Hashem is in control of all was undermined, and now it is up to us to try to revive it.

In Czarist Russia, a man had to visit the capital city but was afraid. The rampant anti-Semitism was even harsher in large cities and he feared for his life. Though he would wear a hat and would not appear overtly Jewish, he feared that he would be beaten or worse.

He went to his Rebbe, and asked for protection. "Hashem is with His children at all times, you need not be afraid," said the Rabbi. "But, Rebbe," pleaded the man, "I need extra protection, you must help me." The sage said nothing but rose and went into his private study, returning with a small velvet pouch. From it, he pulled a small, burnished gold disc, which looked like a

small shield. "Carry this with you, and remember that Hashem is your protector."

The man was overjoyed and carefully put the pouch into his pocket. His trip to the capital was not only safe, but the extra confidence he had made it more successful than he had imagined. Upon his return, he thanked the Rebbe for the shield. "This worked so well," said the traveler, "where did you acquire it?"

"It was Hashem who protected you, my child," said the Rebbe. "As for this," he said, reattaching the disc to the front of his pocket watch, "I bought it from Mendel the watchmaker." ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"Whoever touches the dead body of any human being shall become tameh for seven days. He shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall become tahor." Be'er Mayim Chaim: "We understand that the Torah incorporates many different readings in a single verse. It is plausible that our verse alludes to the process of teshuvah."

The reason for this ought to be apparent. When a person sins, the aveirah that he bears results in a kind of death, until he purges himself of it. Chazal make this explicit: "Evildoers are considered dead even while they are still physically alive." (Berachos 18B) At its spiritual core, death is not simply the absence of life, but is a kelipah named "death." This kelipah -- a spiritual structure seemingly devoid of any significant spiritual content -- truly lacks real vitality, which is a function of spiritual worth and value. Possessing none of its own, this kelipah exists only through its flimsiest connection to ruchniyus, which is a consequence of Hashem's presence on some level inhering in everything without exception. (Without that connection, it could not exist.)

Chazal teach that every aveirah accompanies the one who committed it, staying with him on the way to the Day of Judgment. Specifically, the aveirah persists in the form of a kelipah that does not simply fall away. The chronic evildoer is laden with these kelipos through the legion of sins he has performed. He is coated and encrusted with so many of these death-kelipos that he can be considered dead himself. The consequences of this are two-fold. He becomes captive to the kelipos that surround him, and subservient to them. His life is therefore no longer his own. Moreover, he damages the way the spiritual worlds interact with our lower world. The kelipos that surround him are receptive to any spiritual nourishment. In effect, they draw away the Divine ohr sent to this world for positive purposes, and divert it to strengthen their negative existence.

Realizing how he has become mired in sin, and

the calamitous effect this has had on him, body and soul, a would-be penitent has two chief options.

The first is Torah study, purely for the sake of Hashem, without any admixture of lesser intentions. When a person attaches himself to Torah, he has in effect attached himself to HKBH Himself. If the attachment is strong enough, he wrests himself away from the dominion of the kelipos, and enters into His domain.

The second is the full observance of Shabbos, in all its detail. Chazal testify (Shabbos 118b) that one who fully observes Shabbos is forgiven even for overt idolatry. The supernal kedushah of Shabbos that is made available from on high is so powerful that kelipos simply cannot attach themselves to it.

The reciprocal relationship between the ohr of Shabbos and the kelipos underlies our definition of prohibited melachah on Shabbos. All of those melachos are sourced in kelipos. Before Adam sinned, the earth produced its bounty without human effort. As a consequence of the first sin, the earth and its inhabitants were cursed with 39 curses. Each curse is related to a melachah. When the future tikkun comes about, the land of Israel will once again produce cakes and wool garments, (Shabbos 30b) i.e. without the assistance of human labor. The 39 melachos will have become irrelevant.

In this vein, we can reexamine our pesukim: "Whoever touches the dead body of any human being," i.e. when a person has sinned, and therefore made strong contact with the death-kelipos, "He shall become tameh for seven days." The seven are the seven lower sefiros, the sefiros of activity. All of them become not only defiled, but become conduits carrying Hashem's ohr to dark places. "He shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day." He can rid himself of his ghastly burden through the mitzvos of three and seven, i.e. the study of what the gemara (Shabbos 88a) calls a Torah of threes, and the observance of the laws of the seventh day. If he follows this formula, then "He shall become tahor." (Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bamidbar 19:11) ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

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'lalah -- 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 & TorahWeb.org

