

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In his recent bestseller, *The Social Animal*, New York Times columnist David Brooks writes: "We are living in the middle of the revolution in consciousness. Over the past few years, geneticists, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and others have made great strides in understanding the building blocks of human flourishing. And a core finding of their work is that we are not primarily products of our conscious thinking. We are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness." (pg x)

Too much takes place in the mind for us to be fully aware of it. Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia estimates that the human mind can absorb 11 million pieces of information at any given moment. We can be conscious of only a tiny fraction of this. Most of what is going on mentally lies below the threshold of awareness.

One result of the new neuroscience is that we are becoming aware of the hugely significant part played by emotion in decision-making. The French Enlightenment emphasised the role of reason, and regarded emotion as a distraction and distortion. We now know scientifically how wrong this is.

Antonio Damasio, in his *Descartes' Error*, tells the story of a man who, as the result of a tumour, suffered damage to the frontal lobes of his brain. He had a high IQ, was well-informed, and had an excellent memory. But after surgery to remove the tumour, his life went into free-fall. He was unable to organise his time. He made bad investments that cost him his savings. He divorced his wife, married a second time, and rapidly divorced again. He could still reason perfectly but had lost the ability to feel emotion. As a result, he was unable to make sensible choices.

Another man with a similar injury found it impossible to make decisions at all. At the end of one session, Damasio suggested two possible dates for their next meeting. The man then took out a notebook, began listing the pros and cons of each, talked about possible weather conditions, potential conflicts with other engagements and so on, for half an hour, until Damasio finally interrupted him, and made the decision for him. The man immediately said, "That's fine," and went away.

It is less reason than emotion that lies behind our choices, and it takes emotional intelligence to make good choices. The problem is that much of our emotional life lies beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

That, as we can now see, is the logic of the chukim, the "statutes" of Judaism, the laws that seem to make no sense in terms of rationality. These are laws like the prohibition of sowing mixed seeds together (*kelayim*); of wearing cloth of mixed wool and linen (*shaatnez*); and of eating milk and meat together. The law of the Red Heifer with which our parsha begins, is described as the *chok par excellence*: "This is the statute of the Torah" (Num. 19:2).

There have been many interpretations of the chukim throughout the ages. But in the light of recent neuroscience we can suggest that they are laws designed to bypass the prefrontal cortex, the rational brain, and create instinctive patterns of behaviour to counteract some of the darker emotional drives at work in the human mind.

We know for example -- Jared Diamond has chronicled this in his book *Collapse* -- that wherever humans have settled throughout history they have left behind them a trail of environmental disaster, wiping out whole species of animals and birds, destroying forests, damaging the soil by over-farming and so on.

The prohibitions against sowing mixed seeds, mixing meat and milk or wool and linen, and so on, create an instinctual respect for the integrity of nature. They establish boundaries. They set limits. They inculcate the feeling that we may not do to our animal and plant environment everything we wish. Some things are forbidden -- like the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The whole Eden story, set at the dawn of human history, is a parable whose message we can understand today better than any previous generation: Without a sense of limits, we will destroy our ecology and discover that we have lost paradise.

As for the ritual of the Red Heifer, this is



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directed at the most destructive pre-rational instinct of all: what Sigmund Freud called Thanatos, the death instinct. He described it as something "more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides". ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *On Metapsychology*, p294) In his essay *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he wrote that "a portion of the [death] instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness", which he saw as "the greatest impediment to civilisation."

The Red Heifer ritual is a powerful statement that the Holy is to be found in life, not death. Anyone who had been in contact with a dead body needed purification before entering the sanctuary or Temple. Priests had to obey stricter rules, and the High Priest even more so.

This made biblical Judaism highly distinctive. It contains no cult of worship of dead ancestors, or seeking to make contact with their spirits. It was probably to avoid the tomb of Moses becoming a holy site that the Torah says, "to this day no one knows where his grave is. (Deut. 34:6). God and the holy are to be found in life. Death defiles.

The point is -- and that is what recent neuroscience has made eminently clear -- this cannot be achieved by reason alone. Freud was right to suggest that the death instinct is powerful, irrational, and largely unconscious, yet under certain conditions it can be utterly devastating in what it leads people to do.

The Hebrew term *chok* comes from the verb meaning, "to engrave". Just as a statute is carved into stone, so a behavioural habit is carved in depth into our unconscious mind and alters our instinctual responses. The result is a personality trained to see death and holiness as two utterly opposed states -- just as meat (death) and milk (life) are.

Chukim are Judaism's way of training us in emotional intelligence, above all a conditioning in associating holiness with life, and defilement with death. It is fascinating to see how this has been vindicated by modern neuroscience. Rationality, vitally important in its own right, is only half the story of why we are as we are. We will need to shape and control the other half if we are successfully to conquer the

instinct to aggression, violence and death that lurks not far beneath the surface of the conscious mind. *Covenant and Conversation 5777* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks 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]." [Num. 20:10–11].

Moses entered the stage of Jewish history by heroically striking an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an Israelite slave [Ex. 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 *kahal* ["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 [vayikahalu] 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!
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The unraveling of the destiny of the generation of Jews that left Egypt reaches its climax in the Torah reading of this week. All of the leaders of the people will not bring them to the promised land of Israel. This is true not only of the leaders of the individual tribes in the desert but even Moshe and Aharon are doomed not to witness the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel.

The will of Heaven in this area, as in almost all other areas of life and history, remains inscrutable to us ordinary humans. We do not comprehend the punishment of Moshe and its apparent severity. Commentators to the Torah have labored along and hard over the centuries to attempt to explain this mystery but it must be admitted, that in spite of their brilliant insights, the mystery still remains.

We are left, as always, amazed and in awe at the judgment of Heaven. We are bound to accept that judgment even if it is beyond our realm of comprehension. Moshe will make numerous attempts to mitigate this decision but Heaven will not waiver in its enforcement.

This week's Torah reading generally deals with laws and commandments that are beyond comprehension, such as the ritual involving the red heifer. The punishment meted out to Moshe also fits into this category of laws and commandments from Heaven that are beyond human understanding. So there is this thread of mystery that combines to make up the contents of the Torah reading of this week.

Aside from delving into the mysterious ways that Heaven deals with our world and with us as individuals, the main task that lies before us is how to continue and strengthen ourselves physically and spiritually no matter what the results of Heaven's judgment are.

Over the past century enormous events have overtaken the Jewish people. All of these events remain mysterious to us. Why did the Holocaust take place? Why did our generation merit the creation of a Jewish state in our ancient homeland of the Land of Israel? How has Torah study ascended to such a lofty level both in spirit and numbers in a generation of

assimilation and intermarriage?

All of these questions go to the heart of Jewish existence and society in our time. And to a great extent, they are all questions for which no real answers have ever been provided. But what is clear is that instead of delving intellectually into these issues, we should rather face their consequences and attempt to positively affect opportunities and situations. Complaints and finger pointing over past mistakes will not really help us in our current struggles and challenges.

To a great extent, these attempts at hindsight and rational explanations of what is essentially beyond our understanding are futile and counterproductive. Our task is to build the future and not necessarily to try and explain the inexplicable. We are judged by what we do and accomplish and not by what we attempt to understand or explain. That is really the essential message of the Torah reading of this week. ©2017 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There 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." ©2017 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN

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One of the most challenging incidents in the entire Torah, and perhaps most appropriately in Parshas Chukas, which begins "zos chukas haTorah -- this is the law that is beyond human reason and comprehension", is mei-merivah, i.e. Moshe's sin at the rock. Just as we cannot understand the laws of the parah adumah (the red heifer), similarly we cannot understand how Moshe who "In My entire house he is the trusted one" (Bamidbar 12:7) could disobey Hashem. The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh lists no less than ten possible explanations as to what was Moshe's sin, from the opinion of Rashi that he hit the rock instead of speaking to it to that of the Ma'asei Hashem, that Moshe and the Jewish people differed as to which rock should be addressed, the nation having dug out and selected a different rock location, and Moshe in anger at the people threw his staff which hit the rock and water emerged.

I'd like to focus on the opinion of the Ramban who concurs with Rabbeinu Chananel that Moshe's sin was that he and Aharon said to the people (20:10) "Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" They said the word "notzi" which means literally "we shall bring forth", giving the impression that they, with their knowledge and capabilities, will produce the water. They should have used the word "yotzi" which clearly means that He (referring to Hashem) will perform the miracle, as indeed Moshe said (Shemos 16:8) "in the

evening Hashem gives you meat to eat, and bread to satiate in the morning."

It is thus understandable, continues the Ramban, that where Hashem clearly announces why Moshe does not enter the promised land (Devarim 32:51), He enumerates two wrong doings: 1) "Asher m'alterm bee" literally you trespassed against Me or the sin of m'ilah, and 2) "Lo kidashtem osi" -- you did not sanctify me among the children of Israel.

The Ramban notes, that what transpired here was assessed by Hashem to be an act of m'ilah. M'ilah is misuse-abuse of sanctified property, most often associated with misuse of the Beis Hamikdash, its possessions, and karbanos. The Ramban is broadening the horizon and definition of m'ilah. Moshe had an incredible opportunity. The Torah (20:10) informs us that Moshe and Aharon "gathered the congregation before the rock." Rashi cites the medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 10:9) that the entire nation, literally millions of people, were able to miraculously stand in front of the rock to see and hear the proceedings. Thus, in this environment Moshe's use of "notzi" rather than "yotzi" was a form of m'ilah, taking the credit and honor that was due Hashem and on some level attributing the success to himself and Aharon. The absence of a great kiddush Hashem -- sanctification of Hashem's name was thus a chilul Hashem on Moshe's level on their part.

What emerges from these few terse words of the Ramban is that the entire world is His stage, and man constantly has the opportunity to either bring honor, or the antithesis, to His name. The Talmud (Brachos 35a) teaches "it is forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without first reciting a bracha and whoever derives benefit from this world without first reciting a bracha -- ma'al." Ma'al means he has committed an act of m'ilah, i.e. stealing from the Holy, the unauthorized use of His property, as indeed we are taught (Tehillim 24:1) "to Hashem belongs the Earth and its fullness."

The difference between eating with or without a bracha might be compared to "notzi" vs. "yotzi". With a blessing, one is acknowledging that she-hakol, everything and every aspect of this nourishment came about only through His directive and involvement. True, man is involved with sowing and harvesting and baking, still one admits with a blessing that He (Devarim 8:18), "gives you strength to make wealth," which is understood by Targum Unkelus to mean, "He gives you the intelligence and ideas to succeed and progress." Without the recitation of a bracha it is "notzi", man is ascribing too much to himself and his involvement.

The recitation of brachos is not only simply a matir -- enabling one to rightfully enjoy their food, but a personal religious encounter acknowledging His presence and participation in all we do. ©2017 Rabbi B. Yudin and TorahWeb.org

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 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.

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DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Vort from the Rav

The chukim were classified by our rabbis as unintelligible, enigmatic, mysterious. Though it is forbidden to ask for the reasoning pertaining to certain divine categorical imperatives, we may inquire into the interpretation of the law. There is a difference between explanation and interpretation.

Take physics, for example. Physics does not ask "why" because "why" is not a scientific question; it is a metaphysical question. There can be no scientific "why" for water freezing at 32 degrees Fahrenheit or for light traveling at 186,000 miles per second. Asking "why" God issued certain commandments is seeking to comprehend the unfathomable. Man must recognize that the ultimate "reason" for mitzvos is beyond his grasp: the very question of "why" in regard to mitzvah observance is philosophically invalid.

When we ask "why" in the context of human activity, we are truly asking, "What motivated him?" Motivation carries an implication of an unrealized need. But with regard to the divine, it is impossible to ascribe

motivation to God because He has neither needs nor deficiencies. Thus, in response to the question of why God created the world, we cannot answer that it is because He is kind and wanted to bestow goodness to the world; this assertion implies that God has some vague "need" to do good. The only acceptable answer to the question is, "He willed it" as Rashi comments on this verse, *gezerah hi milfanai*.

However, the question "what" can be asked. What is the meaning of this *chok* as far as I am concerned? What does the *chok* tell me? One does not ask, "Why did God legislate *Parah Adumah*?" or "How does it purify the ritually defiled?" but one can ask, "What is its spiritual message to me?" or "How can I, as a thinking and feeling person, assimilate it into my world outlook?"

The *avodah shebalev* must be present in every religious act, in the ritual as well as the moral. Although the *kiyum hamitzvah* can be achieved through a mechanical approach, *avodas Elokim* means not only to discharge the duty, but to enjoy, rejoice in and love the *mitzvah*. But the *avodas Elokim* is unattainable if the *chok* does not deliver any message to us. In order to offer God my heart and my soul, in order to serve Him inwardly with joy and love, the understanding and involvement of the *logos* in the *ma'aseh hamitzvah* is indispensable. We cannot experience the great bliss, the great experience of fulfilling divine commandments, if the *logos* is neutral, shut out of that involvement.

We have no right to explain *chukim*, but we have a duty to interpret *chukim*. What does the *mitzvah* mean to me? How am I to understand its essence as an integral part of my service of God? We do not know why the *mitzvah* was formulated. What the *mitzvah* means to me, how I can integrate and assimilate the *mitzvah* in my total religious consciousness, world outlook and I-awareness that is a question that is not only permissible, but one that we are duty-bound to ask. (RCA Lecture, 1971; *Derashot Harav*, pp. 226-227) (From the newly released *Chumash Mesoras HaRav: Sefer Bamidbar*.) ©2017 Dr. A. Lustiger & *torah.org*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

My 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 JB LOVE

Mei M'riva

L'ilui nishmas avi, mari, Sh'muel ben Baruch, a'h

"**N**ow you will see: You [Moshe] have questioned my measures...therefore, now you will see, what is done to Par'oh you shall see, but not what will be done with the seven nations once I've brought [yisrael] to the Land." (Rashi: Sh'mos, 6:1)

"You shall bring them: Moshe prophesied that he would not enter the Land." (Rashi, Sh'mos, 15:17)

"...Since you lacked the faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of b'nei yisrael, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the Land..." (B'midbar 20:12)

"None of these people, this wicked generation, shall see the good land which I swore to their forefathers to give them. Except Calev ben Yefuneh, he shall see it.'... And Hashem was angered at me as well, because of you, and said, 'you too will not arrive there.'" (D'varim, 1:35-37)

"And die on that mountain and join your people, like Aharon died on Mount Hor, and joined his people. Because you were unfaithful to Me amidst b'nei yisrael at the waters of meriva, in Kadesh." (D'varim, 33:50-51)

Why was Moshe denied entry into erez yisrael? Was it decreed as early as his first mission to Par'oh? Did he know about it at the yam suf? Why did he blame it on bnei yisrael, and connect it to their sin with the spies? Why does G-d consistently refer only to the incident at the waters?

Let us look at the incident of the waters. This scenario had been played out before, (Sh'mos, 17) but for certain details: In Sh'mos, the nation had not been used to getting water in the desert for forty years. In Sh'mos, Moshe was told to take the Elders of yisrael with him when giving the people water. In Sh'mos Moshe was told specifically to hit the rock. In Sh'mos the rock is called a tzur, a flintlike, hard rock, whereas in B'midbar he is told to speak to (at) a sela, a sort of composite stone not usually as hard as a tzur.

One does not treat a grown child as one does a toddler. Once a child can speak, and be spoken to, reason and explanation should replace (at least precede) corporal, or shock, warning or punishment. The "immature" slave generation that left Egypt needed one kind of treatment, the generation which would enter erez yisrael, raised free and cared for by G-d from childhood, needed quite another. The former was a tzur

which at times needed to be hit. The latter, a sela, which should be talked to and reasoned with.

Moshe Rabeinu, upon his very first mission, showed himself not to be a man of patience.

"Why have You made it worse for this people? Why have You sent me?" (Sh'mos, 5:22) You said you would save them if I went to Par'oh, Nu? G-d was not dealing here with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaacov who died with the belief that someday the land would indeed be theirs without ever having seen the promise realized. G-d already hinted (not said) that this impatience could be Moshe's nemesis. If you don't learn to control this trait, someday it will prove to be the reason you will not see the fate of the seven nations.

In the song of the sea Moshe leads b'nei yisrael in the immortal paean to G-d's salvation. The pinnacle of which is the realization that mi chamocha ba'elim Hashem. Chazal interpret the sentence, who is like you baimim, among the silent. (B. Gittin 56b) How G-d can silently put up with the sins and blasphemy and mistreatment of His people by the nations is the supreme wonder. Moshe was shocked at G-d's infinite patience. The prophesy which brought him to this shocking revelation, and the fact that he was so shocked by it, could not allow him to say, "I will bring them." The spirit of Moshe that knew patience was foreign knew that he wouldn't be bringing b'nei yisrael into the Land. Yes, it could still change, but the spirit that feels one way cannot prophesy otherwise.

And here we are forty years later and Moshe is put to the test. The people are not the frightened, insecure mass of newly freed slaves and the rock is not a tzur. These people do not need, as does a toddler, the stick, the anger and the impatience with their restlessness. Here is a sela to be talked to and reasoned with. Yes they are just as noisy as their predecessors, just as rebellious but this nation are to become an independent nation in their own land. They are different. Are you, Moshe? Even if you think they haven't learned anything in forty years, have you?

But wait. This entire episode happened before. I was told to take the stick. I was told to hit the rock. And now, again I'm told to take the stick. Again the people are a mob. Again they're shouting. This time I have no Elders with me. Just Aharon, Me and a stick.

Why the stick if Moshe is to talk to the rock? Why no back-up group? Do you get the feeling that Moshe was being set up? Indeed, this is the big test. This is the one thing that needed to change since the beginning of Moshe's ministry. Now it is crucial, will he be the leader of this generation or not? All the cards are stacked against Moshe. This is not the b'chira at the level of fifty-fifty odds that we all face. This is the b'chira of the emissary of G-d and must show that he has substantially changed his attitude in forty years. And he didn't make it.

In the end, just like the generation of yisrael

were not the ones who would inherit the land, neither would the leader who was designated for that generation. This test was more to prove it to Moshe than to G-d. You were the perfect leader for the tzur generation, not for the sela. In fact, once it was decided by the All-Knowing that the generation which left Egypt would not be going into the land, it was decided that Moshe wasn't going either. All that was left was to show Moshe why.

And Moshe, understanding all this fully, tells b'nei yisrael when he discusses the episode of the spies (not the water) that it was because of them, at that time, that G-d decreed that he would not enter the land that He had promised.

I heard this beautiful allegory from the master of homiletics, Rabbi Harry I. Wohlberg zt"l, many years ago. I cannot learn this episode without thinking of it.

All prophesy filters through the self of the prophet. (B. Sanhedrin 89a) Though ultimately this didn't apply to Moshe since, "the sh'china spoke through his throat," this was not yet true at the time of k'rias yam suf. (V. Sh'mos Rabbah 3:1 and D'varim Rabbah 1:1) Chazal have, on various occasions put the question of tzadik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo in the mouth (mind) of Moshe. Here we have it as an extension of his need for closure.

This time it is the stick that had been given Aharon and it must be taken out from the sanctuary. (V. Rashbam and Ibn Ezra.) All this trouble for a stick when Moshe was to talk to the rock!

One might say that G-d had in mind to show that although the stick was at hand it was not the method which would be used. But from Moshe's standpoint one must wonder.

Of course it could have gone the other way. G-d did not decide the test. G-d merely made the inevitable show itself, Moshe hadn't changed and therefore was not the leader for the next generation.

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