

A MESSY WORLD

It is fairly obvious to any unbiased observer of our current world scene that things are pretty messy right now. The economic markets are reeling from the unexpected decision of the British electorate to leave the European Union. The sectarian wars in the Moslem world in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Saudi Arabia continue without mercy, without abatement and with no exit strategy in sight.

The United States is experiencing a period of racial tension, a throwback to a similar situation a half-century ago. The difference being that back then the naïve amongst us thought that legislation, governmental programs and other social initiatives would solve the problem of racial friction and discrimination. But currently, no one really believes that the underlying issue of race and the legacy of slavery that shaped it are really on the way to solution and amelioration.

Iran blatantly continues its aggressive military buildup, certainly ignoring the spirit, if not even the letter, of the nuclear disarmament agreement that it signed. And, the world powers that agreed to that treaty are powerless to truly enforce it. All in all, the world scene is fraught with difficulties and dangers. And there is certainly no strong leadership present in the United States or the Western world that seems able to deal with this messy situation.

In the midst of all of this there is an election campaign beginning in the United States to elect a new president with neither of the candidates currently inspiring much confidence or hope for the future. It seems that we have literally painted ourselves into the proverbial corner.

Here in Israel we are living under the shadow of a possible earth shaking political scandal that will certainly end the life of the present fragile coalition government. I hope that there is nothing to the rumors currently circulating in the Israeli media regarding this potential scandal. But, we have witnessed before how the mighty and powerful have been brought down by their misdeeds, greed and bad judgment.

It would be naïve in the extreme to think that this scenario cannot repeat itself once more. In the best of circumstances, the mere possibility of this potential disgrace is disturbing and undoubtedly will have political and social effects.

Here in Israel, as in the United States (as pointed out above,) the ugly specter of ethnic discrimination and strife has reared its head once again. In Israel we also thought that the bad, old days of the 1950s and 1960s were behind us and that we were past the worst parts of the Ashkenazic-Sefardic ethnic divide. However, some of the enlightened ones amongst the Israeli Left have reignited the fires of attack and discrimination against the Sefardic population by disparaging, insulting and demeaning their society, culture and beliefs. This naturally has led to a heated back-and-forth debate that really accomplishes nothing and only infects old wounds once again. All of this makes for a truly hot summer.

The difficulties outlined above will eventually work themselves out for good or for better. Life constantly brings problems and issues to the fore. The main thing is to be able to isolate the truly existential problems from the passing distractions that will always abound. The distractions are usually more fascinating than having to deal with the pertinent, basic issues involved in national and personal life.

Survival of the Jewish people, as a uniquely Jewish people, is the major issue that confronts us in this generation. All of the distractions may impinge upon the central issue and perhaps even influence its direction and solution, but the distractions should never become the key issue itself.

So, governmental leaders here in Israel will come and go, ethnic frictions will continue to exist even though we hope they will be lessened and ameliorated, the world economy will eventually stabilize itself and today's distractions will enter tomorrow's books of history. But the issue of Jewish survival, here in our ancient homeland and in the Diaspora, is capable of being dealt with only by our continuing efforts and consistent fortitude.

We should invest more of our resources and talents in dealing with the central issue and let some of the distractions die on the vine from benign neglect. Our efforts should be concentrated in building Jewish loyalty and traditional knowledge in the next generation of Jewish youth. The great maxim of Hillel applies here – if I am not for myself than who will be for me? And so it is.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

CHUKAT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 37b) suggests that the source of the prohibition of bishul akum is from the Jews' encounter with Sichon. Even though not all of us are reading parshas Chukas this week, this still provides an opportunity to discuss the types of bishul akum problems that may happen.

In a previous article, we began a discussion of bishul akum problems that can happen in the comfort of one's home. We now continue our discussion...

Bishul Akum Problems in the Home, part II **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Commuter crisis

Mrs. Goldman* is stuck in a typical commuter predicament. The traffic is not moving, and it is well past the time that she should be putting up supper. She calls the non-Jewish babysitter, Jenny, to apologize for the delay and asks her to find something in the freezer to warm and serve the kids. Jenny finds some blintzes, places them on ceramic cookware and pops them into the toaster oven. That evening, when Rabbi Goldman returns from kollel, Mrs. Goldman tells him about her frustrating commute home. Rabbi Goldman realizes that they may now have a kashrus concern in their house.

As I explained in the previous article, Jenny's warming the blintzes created a bishul akum problem. Frozen blintzes are inedible at the time the company freezes them. When you remove these products from your freezer and heat them, you are cooking them, whether you realize it or not. Therefore, when Jenny warmed these foods, she not only cooked them, but she also made them into prohibited bishul akum, thus rendering the foods and the equipment non-kosher, although she meant no harm.

Even in the comforts of your own home?

When Mrs. Goldman's mother heard about the calamity that had befallen her grandchildren, in that they ate non-kosher bishul akum food, she reacted with surprise: "But does bishul akum apply in your own house?" Indeed, she is not the first to raise this issue.

Does the prohibition of bishul akum exist when the food is cooked in a Jewish house? Since neither of the reasons for the prohibition --- the risk of social interaction or the kashrus concerns -- exists when the food is prepared in a Jewish house by a hired hand, perhaps the prohibition does not exist either. Indeed, one of the early Baalei Tosafos, Rav Avraham ben Harav David, contended that no bishul akum prohibition exists when food is prepared in a Jewish house.

However, Rabbeinu Tam disputed this conclusion, contending that in the vast literature Chazal provided concerning the prohibition of bishul akum, they made no such distinction. Furthermore, Rabbeinu Tam contends that the reasons for bishul akum apply, even in a Jewish house (Tosafos, Avodah Zarah 38a s.v. Ela). The Shulchan Aruch rules according to Rabbeinu Tam (Yoreh Deah 213:1), although some authorities rule that, even according to Rabbeinu Tam, the prohibition of bishul akum does not apply to long-term hired household servants (Issur VaHeter, quoted by Taz, Yoreh Deah 113:3). This approach is not accepted by most later authorities (Chachmas Odom 66:7).

Three times and you're safe!

There is a lenience regarding kashering from bishul akum that does not apply to most halachos. Ordinarily, if an earthenware or ceramic vessel absorbs non-kosher taste, there is no way to kasher the equipment, and it has been rendered permanently non-kosher. In such a case, your beautiful ceramic may be used henceforth as a planter or for some other decorative purpose, but not for food preparation.

However, Chazal were lenient when the essence of a prohibition is rabbinic in origin, as is the case with bishul akum. They permitted kashering even normally non-kasherable earthenware by boiling the vessel three times (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 113:16). Thus, Mrs. Goldman may kasher her favorite ceramic bowl by boiling it three times, and it can then be returned to kosher use.

Microwaved blintzes

Would the same prohibition apply if Jenny had heated the blintzes in the microwave instead of the toaster oven?

Why should it make any difference?

Indeed, one of our generation's greatest halachic authorities, Rav Shmuel Wosner of Bnei Beraq, ruled that no difference exists between having a gentile cook food in a microwave oven or by any other means: it is prohibited as bishul akum.

However, I have read opinions from other rabbonim who dispute this conclusion. I will explain some of their reasons.

Smoking

The Talmud Yerushalmi discusses whether there is a prohibition of bishul akum when food is cooked by smoking. One should be aware that there are several different methods of preparing food that are all called "smoking," but for our purposes we are discussing food that is cooked by heating it in hot smoke. (Some types of sausage, including frankfurters, are often cooked this way.)

Why should smoking be different from any other type of cooking?

Most cooking is performed either in a liquid, usually water, or through baking or roasting, which are through direct heat without any liquid medium. All these methods of food preparation fall under the prohibition of bishul akum. Frying is also prohibited because of bishul akum, since oil is, likewise, considered to be a liquid medium as in regular cooking (Aruch HaShulchan 113:24). Smoking, on the other hand, involves cooking food without direct heat in a non-liquid medium, which is qualitatively different. The question is whether this distinction in the cooking method is significant enough that Chazal did not include it in their prohibition of bishul akum.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that food smoked by a gentile is not prohibited because of bishul akum (Yoreh Deah 113:13). Thus, he concludes that where the method of food preparation differs significantly from what Chazal prohibited, the prohibition does not exist, even though the reasons for the prohibition of bishul akum apply just as well.

Steaming

Some foods are cooked in steam, rather than in water. If cooked this way by a gentile, are they prohibited as bishul akum? This is a very common case, since much commercial production, including canned vegetables and tuna, for example, are cooked in steam. In addition, many oriental foods include rice, which is commonly steamed.

This question became germane in the 19th century, when factories began cooking food through steam. Similar to smoking, food cooked in steam, although closer to water, is also not direct heat and is not a method of cooking that existed in the days of Chazal. Does the halachic lenience that applies to smoking apply equally to steaming?

This issue was debated by the authorities of the time. An early responsum debates whether cane sugar is prohibited because of bishul akum, since the ground sugar cane was cooked in steam.

(Others authorities permitted cane sugar for a variety of other reasons [Aruch HaShulchan 113:23.]

Some authorities permitted steaming, just as smoking is permitted. Others permitted for a different reason, contending that steaming is a totally new production method that did not exist in the days of Chazal and was therefore not included in the prohibition. We find that some later authorities rely on this heter, but only in combination with other reasons to permit the food (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak). On the other hand, other authorities contend that the heter of smoking cannot be extended to something cooked in vaporized water (Darkei Teshuvah 113:16).

Thus, some rabbonim would permit Jenny to cook blintzes or fish sticks in the microwave, whereas others would contend that this alternative form of cooking does not change the situation. I leave it to the individual to discuss with his rav or posek whether he permits the use of food cooked by a non-Jew with a microwave oven.

Seminary sous-chef

At this point, I would like to discuss the following shaylah I was once asked. A seminary discovered that the mother of their cook is not Jewish, and therefore the cook, herself, is not Jewish. The question was whether the seminary needs to kasher its entire kitchen.

There are two possible reasons to permit the seminary's kitchen without kashering, both of which also apply to the Goldmans' ovens and pots. The household in which the food was cooked is Jewish, so that, according to Rabbi Avraham ben Rabbi David, the food is not bishul akum. In addition, there are Rishonim who contend that although Chazal prohibited bishul akum, they did not prohibit utensils that cooked bishul akum. Both of these positions are rejected as the final position in Shulchan Aruch, but perhaps based on the two together, one could avoid kashering. Since there are authorities who might permit the utensils under these circumstances, one should ask a shaylah from one's halachic authority whether one needs to kasher the equipment.

Conclusion

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than the Torah laws. In this context, we can explain the vast halachic literature devoted to understanding this particular prohibition, created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from major sins.

*Names have been changed.

FORGIVEN BUT NOT FORGOTTEN – Rav Yochanan Zweig

HaShem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: Speak to Bnei Yisroel and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow... (19:1-2)

This week's Parsha describes the mitzvah of Parah Adumah; the extremely rare occurrence of a perfectly red cow whose ashes would be used in the process of purifying those that had come into contact with the dead.

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the term "to you" which is in the singular even though HaShem was addressing both Moshe and Aharon. He goes on to explain that the Parah Adumah was a mitzvah that would always be referred to as the cow that Moshe prepared in the desert. In other words, this mitzvah is permanently associated with Moshe Rabbeinu.

What exactly does this mean? While it is true that Moshe organized the procedure in the desert, why would a Parah Adumah a thousand years later still be referred to as Moshe's? How did Moshe come to acquire the naming rights to the Parah Adumah, and why this mitzvah as opposed to any other?

Rashi, in his addendum to the end of the section describing the Parah Adumah, describes ten similarities between the processing of the

Parah Adumah and the sin of the golden calf. In other words, the Parah Adumah is meant as an atonement for the sin of the golden calf. How does this dovetail with the main purpose of the Parah Adumah, that of purifying those that have come into contact with a dead person?

The Gemara (Shabbos 146a) informs us that death left the world when HaShem gave the Torah on Har Sinai to Bnei Yisroel. Death came into the world when Adam sinned by eating from the tree of knowledge. In other words, Bnei Yisroel accepting the Torah was a rectification of Adam's sin and therefore death left the world. The Gemara continues; when Bnei Yisroel sinned by the golden calf death returned. In fact, HaShem had proclaimed a death sentence on the entire Jewish people.

Moshe was the only one not included in the death sentence of the golden calf. Actually, HaShem offered to rebuild the Jewish people solely from Moshe, but Moshe refused. Instead, Moshe pleaded on behalf of Bnei Yisroel that HaShem should spare them. HaShem relented and, in fact, taught Moshe the process of achieving forgiveness by reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that we have incorporated into the Yom Kippur Davening.

The Parah Adumah, whose actual purpose is to remove the defilement that comes from being in contact with a dead person, is therefore an atonement on the sin of the golden calf which was the cause of death returning to the world. This explains why Moshe is forevermore credited with the mitzvah of Parah Adumah; it was he who pleaded with HaShem not to destroy Bnei Yisroel after the sin of the golden calf. The Parah Adumah, in effect, serves the exact function that Moshe accomplished when he prevailed upon HaShem to spare Bnei Yisroel. Having Moshe's name attached to the mitzvah is the very definition of the purpose of the Parah Adumah.

KISS OF DEATH

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

Chazal (Tashbatz Hakatan 447) use this as a source of the Jewish custom of pouring out all the water in the immediate vicinity of someone who has died. This is also mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch (Yorah Deah 339.5) and the Shach (ad loc) explains that this story in the Torah is the source. The reason given is that when the angel of death uses his sword to take a person's life he dips his sword in the nearest available water to clean his blade and the blood of the deceased, where one's nefesh resides as it were, enters the water. We therefore pour out all the water in the immediate vicinity.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Miriam died through a kiss. This is referring to a death directly through HaShem without the intercession of the angel of death. Rashi explains that although by the deaths of Moshe and Aharon the Torah says "by the mouth of HaShem," by Miriam's death there is no such statement because it is not respectful to HaShem to speak in such a manner. Therefore it was, in effect, hidden.

Chazal, based on the Gemara (Moed Katan 28a), explain that we know that Miriam died through a kiss by the extra word "there" that appears in the Possuk. In other words, the Torah could have simply written "Miriam died and was buried there." From the extra word "there" we make an exegetical analysis as an analogy to the deaths of both Moshe and Aharon where the word "there" also appears by their death. Just as their deaths were through a kiss, so too was Miriam's.

On the face of it this is perplexing; why does it matter how we know that Miriam died through a kiss? An exegetical analysis is a perfectly valid way of teaching us a concept. As an example; nowhere in the Torah does it say that one must fast on Yom Kippur. The Talmud (Yoma 77b) proves the obligation from the same type of exegetical analysis. Yet everyone knows that we must fast on Yom Kippur. So too here, once we have an exegetical analogy, everyone knows that Miriam died through a kiss. So why is it considered "hidden"?

Finally, if there was no angel of death involved in Miriam's death, then how can that be the source for the custom of pouring out water in the area around one who has died?

The essential difference between the death by the hand of the angel of death and of a kiss by HaShem, is that by the angel of death a murder is essentially taking place. But by HaShem the soul recognizes its

source with which it yearns to be reconnected and the soul leaves the body willingly, and as a body without a soul cannot survive, it dies. In this case the body isn't violated in the same way that the angel of death performs his function.

This is the explanation of Miriam dying in a hidden manner. This doesn't mean that we do not know how she died; it's only that her manner of death wasn't made apparent to the Jewish people at that time because it isn't a respectful way to conceive of HaShem. How do we know that it was hidden from them? Because they poured out all the water ("there was no water for the assembly"), indicating that they thought she died through the angel of death.

Did You Know...

In this week's Parsha, after Sichon, King of Emorites, attacks and is defeated by Bnei Yisroel, Og, the King of Bashan, does the same exact thing - and, of course, he is soundly defeated as well. But what's interesting to note is the manner in which he died: The Gemara (Berachos 54b) says that Moshe was ten Amos tall, his staff (or axe, as Artscroll defines it) was ten Amos tall, he jumped ten Amos high, and only hit his ankle. If this is to be understood literally, (and Rashi there confirms that Moshe was 10 Amos) this would make his ankle 60 feet high (according to the Chazon Ish that an Amah is two feet).

But how tall was Og? All we need to do is compare him to a regular sized person, with bigger numbers. A normal six foot person is 72 inches with about three inch ankle space. So a person's height is 24 times three inches, or 72 inches. Therefore Og's (minimum) height is 24 times 60, or 1,440 feet tall!

To put this in perspective; this is taller than the Empire State Building and 240 times the size of a person. Even at his height, he had plenty of space to breathe, as humans can live at an altitude of almost 20,000 feet. At 240 times the size of a normal person he would "only" have to eat about an entire cow a day, as it contains a little over 500,000 calories. In addition, if a six foot person were standing next to Og he would be almost exactly this big: [-----]. His body, being that huge (and we imagine, pretty impossible to move), should be found somewhere around the Golan Heights, because Josephus (Antiquities 4:5:3) identifies Bashan as being somewhere near the Golan Heights.

Healing the Trauma of Loss – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Chukat - Covenant & Conversation 5776 / 2016 on Spirituality

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

The rabbis were critical of one who mourns too much too long.¹ They said that God himself says of such a person, "Are you more compassionate than I am?" Maimonides rules, "A person should not become excessively broken-hearted because of a person's death, as it says, 'Do not weep for the dead nor bemoan him' (Jer. 22:10). This means, 'Do not weep excessively.' For death is the way of the world, and one who grieves excessively at the way of the world is a fool."² With rare exceptions, the outer limit of grief in Jewish law is a year, not more.

Yet knowing these things did not help. We are not always masters of our emotions. Nor does comforting others prepare you for your own experience of loss. Jewish law regulates outward conduct not inward feeling, and when it speaks of feelings, like the commands to love and not to hate, halakhah generally translates this into behavioural terms, assuming, in the language of the Sefer ha-Hinnukh, that "the heart follows the deed."³

I felt an existential black hole, an emptiness at the core of being. It deadened my sensations, leaving me unable to sleep or focus, as if life was happening at a great distance and as if I were a spectator watching

a film out of focus with the sound turned off. The mood eventually passed but while it lasted I made some of the worst mistakes of my life.

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

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

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

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

Only after I lost my father did I understand the passage. What had happened immediately before? The first verse of the chapter states: "The people stopped at Kadesh. There, Miriam died and was buried." Only then does it state that the people had no water. An ancient tradition explains that the people had hitherto been blessed by a miraculous source of water in the merit of Miriam. When she died, the water ceased.

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

Bereaved, you lose control of your emotions. You find yourself angry when the situation calls for calm. You hit when you should speak, and you speak when you should be silent. Even when God has told you what to do, you are only half-listening. You hear the words but they do not fully enter your mind. Maimonides asks the question, how was it that Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive. He answers, because he was in a state of grief, and the

Shekhinah does not enter us when we are in a state of grief.⁴ Moses at the rock was not so much a prophet as a man who had just lost his sister. He was inconsolable and not in control. He was the greatest of the prophets. But he was also human, rarely more so than here.

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

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

Nonetheless it seems to me that – here as in so many other places in the Torah – there is a story beneath the story, and it is a different one altogether. Chukkat is about death, loss and bereavement. Miriam dies. Aaron and Moses are told they will not live to enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies, and the people mourn for him for thirty days. Together they constituted the greatest leadership team the Jewish people has ever known, Moses the supreme prophet, Aaron the first High Priest, and Miriam perhaps the greatest of them all.⁵ What the parsha is telling us is that for each of us there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter. “It is not for you to complete the task.” Even the greatest are mortal.

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

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

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

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

Those we loved and lost live on in us, as we will live on in those we love. For love is as strong as death,⁶ and the good we do never dies.⁷

*Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chukat
For the week ending 16 July 2016 / 10 Tammuz 5776
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights
All or Nothing at All
“This is the chok (decree) of the Torah...” (19:1)*

Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men, managed to explain the reasons for all of the mitzvot. All but one, that is. When he came to the law of the Red Cow, despite all of his efforts he was not able to plumb its depths. He then abandoned his attempt to give reasons for all of the mitzvot, and concluded that all of his explanations were not absolutely accurate.

The question arises: Why didn't he just admit that one mitzvah was beyond his comprehension, but all of his other reasons were still valid?

King Shlomo realized that if he could not comprehend one mitzvah, then he had understood nothing up until then as well. He realized that every single mitzvah of the Torah is interlaced with all the others, and a failure to understand one is a failure to understand any of them completely.

G-d is One — an ineffable Unity — and His Torah reflects this. It too is an ineffable unity.

Shlomo HaMelech says in the Book of Tanach called Kohelet: “I thought I could become wise, and it is beyond me. What existed is elusive and so very deep. Who can fathom it?” (7:23)

In other words, “I thought I could become wise,” and understand the meaning of every mitzvah, “and it” — the mitzvah of the Red Cow — “is beyond me.” Thus, even “what existed is elusive” — even my understanding of the mitzvot that I have examined is imperfect. For “Who can fathom” the ineffable unity of the Torah?

Sources: Beit HaLevi for Parshat Ki Tisa as seen in Talei Orot

OU Torah

Chukat: The Many Songs of Leadership

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Everyone has his or her own voice. Some express it loudly and clearly; some just mumble or whisper. There are those who let their voices be heard only in their professional lives and are silent and withdrawn at home. Others use their voices only within their families and stifle their voices in the outside world.

Our voices can be expressed in a variety of ways: through speech, through the written word, and even by means of our postures and gestures. Our voices can also be expressed through song.

In a book he wrote for managers of organizations coping with the complex challenges of the 21st century work environment, Stephen Covey makes the following statement: “There is a deep, innate, almost inexpressible yearning within each one of us to find our voice in life.” That statement is the basis for his book, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness*, which is designed to help organizational leaders find their voices and inspire others to find theirs.

Each of the great leaders of the Jewish people, from biblical times down to the present, had his or her own distinctive voice. The voice of Abraham was heard throughout his world; the voice of Isaac was almost silent in comparison. Moses described his own voice as defective, yet he was capable of supreme eloquence. Joshua's voice is never described as wanting in any way, yet we have few examples of his personal unique voice.

Some of our great leaders, including Moses, expressed their voices in song. We have the Song of the Sea in which the voice of Moses dominates; his sister Miriam responds to Moses' song in her own voice; the Prophetess Deborah and King David are exemplary in their ability to use the medium of song to express their unique and distinctive voices.

All of the above are examples of how individual Jewish heroes and heroines found and expressed their voices. This week's Torah portion, Parshat Chukat, provides an example of an entirely different kind of a voice: not the voice of one person, but the voice of an entire group, indeed of an entire nation. It is the Song of the Well, of the Be'er:

“...the well where the Lord said to Moses, ‘Assemble the people that I may give them water.’ Then Israel sang this song:

Spring up, O well – sing to it –

The well which the chieftains dug,

Which the nobles of the people started

With the sceptre, and with their own staffs.

And from the wilderness to Mattanah,

and from Mattanah to Nahaliel,

and from Nahaliel to Bamoth..." (Numbers 21:16-19)

This is a much briefer song than the song that Moses led when the people of Israel miraculously crossed the Sea. But part of this passage too, at least in the synagogues with which I am familiar, is chanted melodically.

I have long been impressed by the fact that this week's Torah portion, in which the Song of the Well appears, describes a critical transition in the leadership of the Jewish people. From the time of the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish people essentially have had three leaders: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. In this week's parsha, Miriam dies and is buried; Aaron too is "gathered unto his people" and is mourned; and Moses learns that his leadership role will come to an end sooner than he had thought, before the Jewish people enter the Promised Land.

This is indeed a story of transition, of the end of an era, of the passing of the mantle of leadership to a new generation.

No wonder then that the song sung in this week's parsha is so very different from the song sung by Moses at that triumphant moment near the beginning of his leadership career.

Our Sages tell us in the Talmudic tractate of Sotah that the Song of the Sea was sung by the people responsively. That is, Moses said the first phrase, which the people said after him. He proceeded then to the second phrase, and the people echoed him. Moses was an authoritative leader, and the people were obedient followers. Moses was the active composer of the song, the choirmaster as it were, and the people were but the choir.

In this week's Torah portion, two of the leaders pass from the scene, and Moses learns that his leadership authority is waning. The Song of the Well is an entirely different leadership song from the Song of the Sea. In this week's song, the entire people sing as one. It begins not "Then Moses sang this song," but rather "Then Israel sang this song." The leadership passes from one Divinely chosen charismatic leader to the people as a whole.

The people find their voice, and it is the voice of song. How beautifully this is expressed in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Chukat Note 764):

...after 40 years, the people finally matured and began to sing a song on their own accord, saying, "Master of the Universe, it is now incumbent upon You to do miracles for us and for us to sing, as it is written: 'It has pleased the Lord to deliver us and that is why we sing our song all the days of our lives...'" (Isaiah 38:20)

Jewish history has known epochs in which there were clear leaders, gifted and often charismatic individuals who, by virtue of their wisdom or heroism, seemed ordained by the Almighty Himself to lead our people. But we have also known times, such as the present, when such prominent leaders are not apparent.

It is at times such as these that we all must assume leadership responsibilities. It is at times such as these that we cannot afford to humbly refrain from acting as leaders in our own families and communities. It is at times such as these that we must, each of us, find our own voices and sing the songs of leadership.

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OU Torah

An Enigma Wrapped in a Riddle

Rabbi Ari Kahn

In a sense, the Israelites had been lulled into a false sense of security. As they moved from one disaster to the next, Moshe was always there to put out fires. Together with his brother Aharon, Moshe had guided the nation from slavery to freedom, from Mount Sinai to the cusp of the Land of Israel. There had been murmurings, dissent, and even a full-scale rebellion along the way, but the leadership team of Moshe and Aharon, had always been there to avert disaster and expertly guide the people. And then, quite suddenly, out of the blue, we are informed that their leadership, and their very lives, will be coming to an end.

Painting the story in broad strokes is easy: It begins with one of the Israelites' countless complaints, in this case, about water. A miraculous solution is presented, — and then, the unexpected: A death sentence is handed down. What had changed? Why was this incident different from all the others? Why this doom, death and disaster now? The text itself is enigmatic:

God spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Take the staff, and you and Aharon assemble the community. Speak to the rock in their presence, and it will give forth its water...' Moshe took the staff from before God as he had been instructed. Moshe and Aharon then assembled the congregation before the rock. 'Listen now, you rebels!' shouted Moshe. 'Shall we produce water for you from this rock?' With that, Moshe raised his hand, and struck the rock twice with his staff. A huge amount of water gushed out, and the community and their animals were able to drink. God said to Moshe and Aharon, 'You did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify Me in the presence of the Israelites! Therefore, you shall not bring this assembly to the land that I have given you.' These are the Waters of Dispute (Mei Merivah) where the Israelites disputed with God, and where He was sanctified. (B'midbar 20:7-12)

What was their mistake? At what point had Moshe and Aharon displayed a lack of faith? What was the nature of their sin? For millennia, commentaries have discussed and debated the inner meaning of the text. If the Torah chose to honor Moshe by suppressing the details of his sin, the result was the opposite: All manner of accusations have been hurled at Moshe and Aharon to explain the harsh punishment they received. Was it Moshe's anger (which is not explicitly mentioned in the text)? Did he implement God's instructions imprecisely? Or was it something else?

Context may be important: This week's parasha opens with the law of the red heifer. The ashes of this heifer are used as an antidote to the ritual impurity generated by death. Rashi comments on the very particular term used to describe this law:

This is the statute of the Torah: Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, "What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?" Therefore, the Torah uses the term "statute —(chok)," [as if to say,] I have decreed it; you have no right to challenge it. (Rashi B'midbar 19:2)

A chok, Rashi explains, is a law whose logic is elusive, a statute we must accept unquestioningly in a "leap of faith." These types of laws often torture us; they cause us to question ourselves, our reason, even our sanity. Generally, Rashi's comment (which, in turn, is based on a rabbinic position) is understood as being directed toward the illogical or even paradoxical nature of this particular ritual: The person who was ritually impure "magically" becomes pure when sprinkled with the ashes of the red heifer, while the person who actually prepared the potion becomes impure.

However, Rashi may not be addressing the inner contradiction of the red heifer ritual at all. In fact, it is hardly likely that the "nations of the world" would have been the least bit surprised by a ritual potion that has seemingly magical properties: The entire world of idolatry was involved in the occult. The only thing which may have troubled pagan onlookers — or given them cause to mock this ritual — was the fact that even the Jews adhered to practices that have no logical basis.

As for us, something much deeper torments us in this parasha, a paradox more profound than that of the red heifer ritual: death itself. The mystery of death is the impenetrable thing that lies at the heart of this ritual and is its impetus. It is not the impurity and subsequent purity that challenges our powers of reasoning and tortures our minds; it is the inescapable, inexorable fact that people die.

The death sentence issued against Moshe and Aharon is not arbitrarily placed in this parasha; this broader context is part of the message: Their deaths are part of this greater mystery. God's rebuke may well be a tantalizing hint at this greater context: Moshe and Aharon failed to lead the people to a level of faith that would have solved this great mystery once and for all, failed to elevate the people to the level of spiritual enlightenment that would have relegated death itself to the past. Moshe's death, then, remains as much a mystery as any and every other death. We search the text for a clue to Moshe's sin, in vain. Indeed, in the closing verses of the Torah, we are told that Moshe's death will forever remain shrouded in mystery:

...And no person knows the place of his burial, unto this day. (D'varim 34:6)

Perhaps Parashat Chukat teaches us that the mystery is not only the place of Moshe's burial, but the cause of his death as well. Just as no

human being knows, has known, or ever will know where Moshe is buried, so, too, does the "reason" for his death – like every other death – remain unknowable. [1]

[1] This idea was suggested by Y. Nachshoni, *Hagut b'Parshiot haShavua, B'midbar* (p. 651).

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Blessing of the Mon for Today

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'lalal - 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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The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Chukat: Faith over Reason

Thursday, July 14, 2016/ Tammuz 8, 5776

Faith is an oasis in the heart which will never be reached by the caravan of thinking. — Kahlil Gibran

Amongst the hundreds of commandments that God bestows upon the people of Israel, are many that on the surface are difficult to understand. These are classically called "Hok," or "Hukim" in the plural. King Solomon himself, that most wisest of men, is quoted as stating that the law of the Red Heifer, featured in this week's Torah reading, was beyond his comprehension.

The Temple rite of the Red Heifer consisted of a rare cow, completely covered in red hair, that was ritually slaughtered and subsequently burned. The resulting ashes were then mixed in water and that water was sprinkled over individuals, purifying those who had been ritually impure because of contact with the dead. What was perhaps most ironic about the rite was that the Kohen doing the sprinkling and having been ritually pure beforehand, became impure by the end of the rite, even though he was the source and cause of purification in others. It's as if by purifying the other, he absorbs some of the impurity himself.

Nonetheless, the Sfat Emet in 5632 (1872) explains the path to understanding these perhaps incomprehensible commandments. He states that of course every commandment has a reason, but that we can't understand the reason until after we accept the commandment without an explanation. Then, according to the level of faith, of acceptance of the commandment and the willingness to perform it without understanding, so too will be the level of understanding we achieve.

He further explains that the reasons behind these commandments are actually spiritual matters as opposed to merely intellectual exercises and only the spirit has the capacity to understand, or more accurately to "sense," the reason behind the commandments.

May we develop the capacity to believe so that eventually we may understand.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To the Jewish community of Uruguay on the celebration of its 100th anniversary.

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Parshat Hukat: The Life And Death Of Aaron The Priest

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

July 14, 2016 Thursday 8 Tammuz 5776

We are not all cut out to be leaders. We are not all born to be like Moses our Master and lead people around us powerfully and courageously.

"This is the statute of the Torah which the Lord commanded, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished heifer... And you shall give it to Eleazar the kohen, and he shall take it outside the camp and slaughter it in his presence... The cow shall then be burned in his presence; its hide, its flesh, its blood, with its dung he shall burn it.'" -Deuteronomy 19:2,3,5

When we look at three of the five books of the Torah – Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers – we cannot help but notice that Aaron, Moses's brother, seems somewhat concealed. Aaron was the kohen gadol, the high priest. He was in charge of all the work of the Temple and was one of the nation's leaders. But despite this, he was always in the shadow of his brother Moses's huge persona.

Moses was the nation's leader, its navigator. Aaron was his assistant. Aaron accompanied Moses to Pharaoh and spoke in his name because Moses had difficulty speaking and was "heavy of mouth." Aaron also hit the Nile because Moses felt he owed the Nile gratitude and could not hit it. Aaron was the second- in-command, the complement.

The only time that Aaron took the leadership upon himself seemed like an utter failure. While Moses went up to Mount Sinai to learn the Torah in order to bequeath it to the people of Israel, the Torah says (Exodus 32:1): "When the people saw that Moses was late in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron, and they said to him: 'Come on! Make us gods that will go before us, because this man Moses, who brought us up from the land of Egypt – we don't know what has become of him.'" The rest of the story is known.

Aaron tells the nation to bring their families' gold jewelry, in the hopes that it will kill time until Moses returns. The nation, however, quickly brings the jewelry, and when Aaron throws the gold into the fire, a golden calf is formed and the nation declares, "These are your gods, O Israel" (ibid. 32:4).

Why did Aaron do this? Why didn't he put the Children of Israel in their place and command them to wait until Moses returned? It is hard to understand all of his exact motives at the time. Our Sages say that Aaron's nephew, Hur, paid with his life for trying to oppose the nation's demand for the calf. Even the tone of the verse "the people gathered against Aaron" insinuates that Aaron was not left with much choice.

But we can learn something about Aaron's leadership.

He did not go against the will of the nation but tried to go with it in order to then lead it to the correct path. Though the Torah states that the making of the calf was a mistake and a sin, it is not a statement about the characteristics demanded of Aaron as a leader.

Aaron also did not set his eyes on leadership. When God assigned Moses the great mission of taking the Children of Israel out of Egypt, He said to him, "Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite?... He is coming forth toward you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart." Our Sages praise Aaron's joyous heart and that he was not jealous of his younger brother's rise to greatness. Aaron was not a leader all his life, but while standing in Moses's shadow, he brought the nation closer to God in his own way.

His entire life leads to this week's portion, Hukat, which tells us about Aaron's death. Moses and Aaron sin in a place called the waters of Meribah (Discontent) and God informs them that as a result of this sin, they will not enter the Land of Israel. Later, the Torah will tell us in great detail about the death of Moses prior to the nation entering the land. Moses tried desperately to appeal the decree. As the leader of the nation, he gave a powerful speech guiding the nation on issues of morality, which fills most of the book of Deuteronomy.

And Aaron? Aaron is silent. The story of his death takes up a small section in the portion, and even there, there is no mention of Aaron saying even one word about it.

Aaron takes his last steps the same way he acted when two of his sons died in a horrific tragedy. His reaction then is described as such: "And Aaron was silent" (Leviticus 10:3).

Aaron accepts. The midrash also describes at length Aaron's calm demeanor before his death. Moses undresses Aaron and dresses his son Elazar in his clothing.

And Aaron dies. Silently.

Then the Torah adds a few more words which symbolize Aaron more than anything. "...and the entire House of Israel wept for Aaron." Our Sages discerned that after Moses died, it simply said, "And the sons of Israel wept for Moses," and explained that the entire nation wept for Aaron because he pursued peace and promoted peace between friends and between wives and husbands. This was Aaron's way: peace, integrity, silence.

We are not all cut out to be leaders. We are not all born to be like Moses our Master and lead people around us powerfully and courageously. Some of us might take someone more like Aaron as our mentor, Aaron who, in his innocent and quiet manner, pursued peace and promoted peace in the nation.

*The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.
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Rav Kook Torah

Psalm 126: We Were Like Dreamers

Psalm 126 - Shir HaMa'alot - presents a vivid description of the redemption of the Jewish people as they return to their homeland:

"A Song of Ascents. When God brings about the return to Zion, we were like dreamers. Then our mouths will be filled with laughter, and our tongues with joyous song." (126:1-2)

The verb tense, however, is confusing. Presumably, this is a vision of the future redemption, when "our mouths will be filled with laughter."

Yet the psalmist also speaks of the past - היינו כחולמים - "we were like dreamers." Is this taking place in the past or the future?

Dreams of Redemption

We need to understand the importance of these dreams, and how they are connected to our national redemption.

We know of historical incidents when dreams served as a vehicle to redemption. Joseph became viceroy of Egypt and saved his family from famine through Pharaoh's dreams. Daniel attained his position of importance through the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar. What is the function of dreams in the world?

Every soul has certain segulot - hidden talents or qualities. The greater the segulah, the more it will struggle to be realized. One way in which these inner qualities express themselves is through dreams.

The nation of Israel also has special segulot - a unique potential for spiritual greatness. As the Torah promises, "You will be a segulah among the nations" (Ex. 19:5). When the Jewish people are exiled and downtrodden, this segulah quality seeks ways to be expressed. This drive for national self-fulfillment - that is the source for our dreams of redemption.

Anticipating Redemption

After death, the Sages taught, the soul is questioned by the heavenly tribunal: "Did you anticipate the redemption?" (Shabbat 31a). The fact that we are judged on this matter is a clear sign that it is important to anticipate the redemption. The Rabbis also spoke of the obligation to pray for our national return to the Land of Israel.

Yet the logic of this approach is not obvious. Why yearn for that which is beyond our control? The redemption is either dependent upon the actions of the entire Jewish people, or will take place at a time that God ordained!

To understand the significance of our dreams and prayers, it is instructive to recall the Talmudic saying, "Do not belittle any blessing, even that of an ordinary person" (Megillah 15a). Why should we take note of the simple wishes of a neighbor or friend? The Sages, however, imparted an important lesson: do not underestimate the power of a few words of encouragement. They may awaken and help realize our hidden potential.

This true for the individual - and for the entire nation as well. Secreted in the national soul of Israel is a potential for greatness. By remembering and anticipating this national destiny, we strengthen it and prime it to be realized. The value of anticipating redemption lies in its power to help bring it to fruition.

This is not a mystical belief, but a plain historical fact. Without a doubt, the unprecedented return of the Jewish people to their homeland after centuries of stateless exile could not have occurred without their continual yearnings and prayers over the centuries. The Zionist movement could not have convinced millions of Jews to uproot themselves if not for the people's deep-rooted longings for the Land of Israel. It is our faith and anticipation of redemption that enables the realization of Israel's national segulah.

Now we can understand why the verse says that "we were like dreamers" - in the past tense. The psalmist is referring to our dreams of redemption during the long years of exile. He is not describing a state of euphoria during the hour of redemption, but the means which enabled this redemption to take place.

בשוב ה' את שיבת ציון - "God will bring about the return to Zion" - because, throughout the ages, היינו כחולמים - "we were like dreamers." Our dreams and faith in God's promised redemption enabled our return to the Land of Israel.

Just as our personal dreams are an expression of our inner talents, inspiring us to develop them, so too, our national dreams, even in the darkest hours, facilitate the return to Zion and will enable the future fulfillment of our complete redemption.

(Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 226-227)

Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Bava Kama 44 - 50

For the week ending 16 July 2016 / 10 Tammuz 5776

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said (rhetorically): "Something at which that righteous person toils, is it possible that his child should 'stumble' (i.e., die) as a result of?" Bava Kama 50a

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated this principle — an example of a “Divine trait” by which G-d metes out mercy or punishment in this world — in response to a specific event that was brought to his attention, as the gemara on our daf relates:

The daughter of a man named Nechuniya “the well digger” (who dug wells for the use of people who would come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals — Rashi) fell into a deep well, and there was fear for her life. People informed the great Torah scholar and righteous man Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa as to this dangerous situation. In the first hour (when it was still possible for her to be alive in the well — Rashi) he told the people, “Shalom”, i.e. she is alive and well. In the second hour he repeated his declaration. In the third hour (when it she could no longer have survived being in the well — Rashi) he said, “She has already come out of the well.”

When the people asked Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa if he knew all this because he was a prophet, he replied, “I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but this is what I ‘said’ (i.e. ‘know’): “Something at which that righteous person toils at, is it possible that his child should ‘stumble’ (i.e., die) as a result of?”

Nevertheless, said Rabbi Acha regarding righteous Nechuniya the well digger, “His son died of thirst”. Rabbi Acha cited a verse (Tehillim 50:3) as the basis for the punishment in this case, which states in part: “...and around Him it storms furiously.” Rashi explains this to mean that “the righteous” — who “cleave and are around G-d” — are judged by a margin of transgression that is as narrow as a “strand of hair” (the word for “storm”, “sa’ara”, in the verse, is spelled with the letter “sin”, like the Hebrew word for “hair”, instead of the way storm is normally spelled, with a “samech”).

Tosaefot finds the death of the righteous well digger’s son by thirst difficult to understand, based on Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s principle that a matter in which a righteous person suffers will not be reason for his offspring to suffer, as he pronounced in the case of the well digger’s daughter. How could his son die in this manner, since the father toiled to dig water wells for the purpose of providing water to others so they should not be thirsty?

The difference, answers Tosefot, is that “in that thing itself, it is not fit for the child to suffer”. This answer may seem vague, but Tosaefot in Masechet Yevamot (121b, and as explained by the Ba’Ch there)

writes that a well, which was what the righteous father toiled at, did not cause the death of the son. Rather, it was the lack of water. Therefore Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s principle did not apply for the son, unlike its applying for the daughter who would not die as a result of the well of water, the type of item that her father dug. It appears that Rashi on our daf agrees with this explanation since he carefully explains “the toil of her father” as “digging wells and cisterns for people travelling to Jerusalem for the Festivals”, and the son did not, in fact, die in a well.

However, another take on Rashi’s commentary is that the father dug holes in the ground which he hoped would be filled with rainwater afterwards, but he did not dig wells of water per se. This is the difference between his daughter and his son: Although his daughter could not die in a well (since he dug wells), his son could indeed die from a lack of water (since the father did not provide water for the wells). (Etz Yosef)

Another possible answer is that the principle that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa taught is true only when the mitzvah is performed completely and perfectly “for the sake of Heaven.” The righteous father dug wells for the sake of the mitzvah of helping people fulfill the mitzvah to come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals, having sufficient water to drink along the way and arrive in good health. The father fulfilled the mitzvah exactly for the correct reason at the time of his daughter’s predicament, but he was lacking “by the breadth of a hair” in the perfection of this mitzvah at the time of his son’s fatal thirst.

One more answer I have heard is that when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated that a matter in which a righteous person toils and suffers will not be reason for his child to die, it is not truly a “principle” describing G-d’s actions. Rather, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was telling the people the words that he prayed to G-d for the safety of Nechuniya’s daughter, a prayer that he was certain would be received by G-d, and the daughter would be alive and well. (Apparently, there was no such prayer in the case of the man’s son, for whatever reason.)

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In dedication of Mr. Emilio Goldstein ע"ו