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Parashat Chukat 5770

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## On the Parashah... The Sin of Mei Merivah

Our Parashah begins with the Mitzvah of the Parah Adumah, one of the "Chukim" - unfathomable Mitzvot of the Torah. It goes on to relate how Moshe Rabbenu struck the rock to bring forth water for the thirsty congregation at Mei Merivah. This sin is also a mystery.

"Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the Nation of Israel - therefore you [Moshe and Aharon] shall not lead this congregation into the Land which I have given to them" (Bemidbar 20:12). What was the sin of Mei Merivah for which Moshe and Aharon were punished so severely? The command which Hashem gave was clear, there is a clear description of what Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon did and said, and their punishment is also stated explicitly. What is not clear is what their sin was. There are almost as many explanations as there are commentaries on the Torah.

Rashi's commentary follows the opinion found in the Zohar (Bereshit 20) and the Midrash (Yalkut Reuveni 70). He explained that "Hashem did not command them to strike the rock, but rather to speak to it. Had they spoken to the rock and produced water, it would have been a tremendous sanctification of the Divine Name. If a deaf and dumb rock does G-d's bidding when spoken to, although it is not dependent upon G-d's mercy for its daily needs as we are, how much more must human beings fulfill the Divine commands" (Bemidbar 20:8-12 with Rashi). The Ramban disagreed with this explanation since Moshe Rabbenu was commanded to take his staff (ibid. v. 8), and the implication is that he was to use it. Furthermore, he asks why it is less miraculous to draw water from a rock by knocking it with a staff than by speaking to it? Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook sharpened the question by noting that hitting an inanimate object seems more "natural" and appropriate than talking to it. As the Nation of Israel comes closer to Eretz Israel, they gradually assume a more natural, less overtly miraculous way of life. The clouds disappear upon Aharon's death, the well no longer follows them when Miriam dies. Later, when they actually

enter Eretz Israel, the Manna no longer falls. It would therefore seem more appropriate for Moshe Rabbenu to strike the rock at this point (see Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, Chukat 1). Why do these commentaries stress the difference between speaking to a rock and striking it?

Man is defined as a "speaking animal." His ability to perceive abstract ideas and moral imperatives and to express them in words is what sets him above the rest of the animal world. On the verse, "And man became a living soul" (Bereshit 2:7), the Targum Onkelos translates "a speaking soul," and Rashi explained that it means the ability to think and to speak. Through Man's verbal ability, he communicates with and influences society and is able to translate thought into action. This requires proper usage of the power of speech. There are times to be silent and times to speak. Our Sages ask, "What is man's special skill in this world?" They answer, "To act as if he were mute" (Chulin 89a).

Does this mean he shouldn't discuss Torah and Mitzvot either? No, the Torah teaches: "You shall speak righteously" (ibid.). It takes great skill sometimes to differentiate between speech that is beneficial and a Mitzvah, and that which is damaging and prohibited. Since speech expresses man's very being, it is essential that the Nation be led by persuasion and not by coercion. The Aramaic word for "leader" is "Dabar" - speaker.

When Hashem wished to appoint Moshe Rabbenu to lead the Nation of Israel out of Egypt, he protested: "I am heavy of mouth and of tongue" (Shemot 4:6). He felt himself unable to communicate with the people. Hashem then pronounced "Aharon, your brother, shall speak" in your place (ibid. v. 14-16). Eventually, though, Moshe Rabbenu acquired the power of leadership through speech. The phrase "And Moshe spoke" appears innumerable times in the Torah, and the whole book of Devarim is one long speech given by Moshe Rabbenu before his death (see beginning of Midrash Devarim Rabbah). Important as speech may be in leading the Nation, there is obviously also a need for means of coercion. We don't depend on the power to persuasion to convince a thief to compensate for his theft, we grab him by the neck and bring him to judgment. There is a need for courts and police. However, these are secondary, the primary force must be verbal. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah explained that Moshe Rabbenu had such a great overpowering personality that when he became personally involved, even to the slightest extent, in the incident at Mei Merivah, he expressed himself in a silent strike. But the Nation of Israel at this point, preparing to settle Eretz Israel, was in need of a leader who would not overpower them. Thus, his punishment was appropriate: "Moshe would die and Yehoshua would bring them into Eretz Israel" (Sanhedrin 17a). Moshe is compared to the sun (Baba Batra 75a). Sunshine may sometimes be overpowering. Its light is so strong that the stars cannot be discerned during the day, even though they are always present. The light of the sun, of Moshe Rabbenu, overpowered and concealed other lights. Yehoshua however "is like the light of the moon" (Baba Batra ibid.). The light of the moon allows other lights to be seen too. When we entered Eretz Israel, there was no room for coercion. The Nation must be led by words and not by force. Moshe Rabbenu was therefore punished by not being allowed to continue to lead the people

by force into the Promised Land. He would die and a different type of leadership would take over. The Rambam's commentary is in a similar vein. He explained Moshe Rabbenu's sin as one of anger (Shemoneh Perakim, chapters 4 and 7) because he called the Nation "rebellious," although their demand for water was not considered a sin. Although the Torah does not state that they were punished for speaking angrily, the Maharal explained that angry speech is a sign of a lack of faith. Anger is an expression of an attempt to force things to be what you want, while soft speech implies the belief that others can be influenced by reason. The power of speech is man's greatest strength, and we must believe in its power to change even inanimate objects, not only people's hearts (see Sefer Ha-Ikarim 4:22). As Yeshayahu said, [Hashem] fulfills His servant's word" (44:26). For example, Yehoshua prayed, "Sun - stand still in Gibeon and moon in the valley of Ayalon" (Yehoshua 10:12), Moshe Rabbenu commanded the earth to swallow up Korach (Bemidbar 16:30) and Eliyahu Ha-Navi imposed a drought upon all of Eretz Israel (Melachim 1 17:1). The sin of Mei Merivah and Moshe Rabbenu's punishment teach us, once and for all, that force is not the way to educate.

### Rav Aviner on... How Much Does a Spouse Cost?

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shelach 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

How much does a spouse cost? A lot! And rightly so, for that is the most important thing in life. When people are married, and married happily, they solve all their problems together, but if they are single, or having a rocky marriage, everything limps along. For something worth a lot, you've got to pay a lot. Thus, you've got to pay a lot of money to the matchmaker, whether this is his profession, a secondary occupation or a one-time act. A couple is worth all the wealth in the world. So, please pay several hundred shekels in advance for the time investment, and if the match works out, each side should pay 5,000 NIS, for a total of 10,000. That's very little compared to the cost of the wedding, especially if it is an expensive wedding.

And why SHOULDN'T you pay the matchmaker? After all, if you hire a surgeon privately, you pay him an enormous sum, and that is just for his treating the human body; all the more so here, where it is for the soul. We pay lawyers thousands and tens of thousands, and that is just to safeguard money; all the more so here where one's very life is at issue. It's not enough to cry over there being 600,000 unmarried males and females amongst our people, and to exclaim, "What will be with them?"

Rather, we have to make an effort to solve the problem. After all, we don't rely on miracles, and we don't wait for a match to fall out of the sky. You also can't rely on those good souls who devotedly volunteer to make matches, because they have other commitments. They don't have oodles of time at their disposal. A matchmaker must make calls, match up candidates, persuade, follow up, remove all obstacles, and patch up all the quarrels. And all that requires a great investment in time.

One therefore has to be serious and pay out a serious sum of money. Not in advance, as noted above. Rather, with G-d's help, after the match works out well. After all, there are other mitzvot as well for which money is collected, and the Halachah delineates set sums for each type. You're not paying for the mitzvah itself, but for

the person's time. People in this category include physicians, mohels, Torah scribes, cantors, people who give Torah lectures, Rabbis, and soldiers as well.

Just relying on volunteers is not a serious approach. If someone strives and exerts himself for something so important, he should be paid. And even if it happened without any effort, he should be paid 10,000 shekels. That's a paltry sum compared to what a wedding cost. After all, it is thanks to the matchmaker that everything turned out well, and the couple is together, in love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. That is certainly more important than a band or a photographer or another plate at the meal. And even after the wedding, the matchmakers and pre-marital counselors very often accompany the couple.

It is hard to understand why people expect others to make an effort for them for free. As noted, one should not pay in advance, because there have been numerous instances of terrible fraud. One should pay only several hundred shekels for the ongoing expenses. A real estate agent likewise takes a lot of money, and here we are talking about more than a home. We're talking about the CONTENT of the home, the SOUL of the home. The Rabbis said: One's wife is one's home. So, pay the matchmaker, pay the counselors, and you'll be privileged to build faithful homes in Israel.

## Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel - #2

It once happened that a Jew who lived in Eretz Yisrael had a brother in Bei Chuzah in Babylonia and the brother died. He therefore had an obligation of "Yibum" (If a man dies childless, his wife is expected to marry the brother of her deceased husband). He asked Rabbi Chanina: Is it permissible to temporarily leave Eretz Yisrael to fulfill the Mitzvah of "Yibum" and return to Eretz Yisrael with her? His Rabbi responded harshly and referred to widow as a non-Jew because she lived outside of Israel: "Your brother married a non-Jew and died. Blessed is He who killed him! And you are going to follow in his footsteps!?" (Ketubot 111a, Tosafot on Avodah Zarah 13a and Shut Pri Ha-Aretz vol. 3 Yoreh Deah #7).

## **Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law**

### An Oath to Finish a Gemara

Question: Someone made a Neder (oath) to learn a Massechet to be completed on the day of someone's Yahrzeit. As the day approaches, he will only be able to complete the Gemara if he learns it quickly with a simple understanding of the words. Is it preferable to free him from the Neder or for him to learn it in the quick fashion?

Answer: He should finish the Massechet with the basic understanding since it is a great merit for the deceased, and then relearn that part in depth.

## Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

### To whom should I Donate

Q: Should I give tzedakah to someone who is in a difficult financial situation because he does not have health insurance and he needs an operation or someone who is having an expensive wedding?

A: Both are considered tzedakah, but it is preferable to give to people who are poor not of their own fault.

### Modesty

Q: I see more and more men and women – single or married – who talk and laugh with one another, and even G-d-fearing individuals stumbling in this...

A: You should give them the benefit of the doubt that they do not know how horrible this is, and that they have not merited learning Gemara, Rambam, Shulchan Aruch or Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 152:8.

### Asking for a Raise

Q: I feel that my salary is less than I deserve, is it permissible for me to ask for a raise or is it a lack of faith?

A: It is not a lack of faith. It is very good. A person should ask for what he justifiably deserves. See Baba Kamma (92b) regarding Avigail's request from King David.

### Honoring Parents

Q: My father asked me to do something and my mother asked me not to do it. What should I do?

A: Humbly ask them to work it out between them and not to rip you in pieces (see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 240:14 with commentators).

### Honoring One's Father-in-Law

Q: Is it permissible to call my father-in-law by his first name?

A: Yes, if he wants you to do so (Sedei Chemed, Ma'arechet Chatan Ve-Kallah).

### Covering One's Hair

Q: Why do married women cover their hair for modesty reasons but single women do not?

A: It is an intimate beauty saved for her husband.

### Studying Secular Subjects on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to study secular subjects on Shabbat?

A: Some authorities are strict, but the basic Halachah is that it is permissible. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 307:17.

### Bima

Q: Is it permissible to place the Bima in a shul a little bit forward?

A: It must be in the middle. Shut Chatam Sofer 6:86.

### Hunting

Q: Is it permissible to hunt animals?

A: For making a livelihood, it is permissible. If it is for pleasure, it is cruel. Shut Noda Bi-Yehuda (Mehadura Tanina Yoreh Deah #10).

### Aliyah from Yemen and Maran Ha-Rav Kook

Q: I heard that a secular Jew named Yavnieli disguised himself as a religious Jew and deceived the Jews of Yemen to make Aliyah, and that Rav Kook was a partner in this act and supported him by giving him a letter with Halachic questions for the Rabbis of Yemen.

A: It is a lie. Yavnieli disguised himself not in order to deceive the Jews of Yemen but in order to deceive the Turks who forbade Aliyah. The Sefardic Chief Rabbi, Ha-Rav Uziel, wrote that he was an upright person. Rav Kook believed that Aliyah from Yemen would bring blessing, since they were G-d-fearing people who worked hard to make a livelihood and also learned Torah and performed mitzvot, and it would be a good antidote for the secularists. Rav Kook wrote a letter with questions, not to deceive the Rabbis, but to know how to rule in Halachic matters relating to their community (Ohev Yisrael Bi-Kedusha of Rav Be'eri pp. 169-179).

### Money of a Wanted Man

Q: If a soldier stops a wanted man and takes his money, is it considered theft?

A: It is certainly theft. It is also a most severe military transgression.

### Charedei or Religious-Zionist

Q: Should I associate with Charedei or Religious-Zionists?

A: Charedim have distinction in the realm of fear of Hashem. Religious-Zionists have the distinction in relating to the revival of our Nation in its Land. We are neither of these two types but students of Moshe Rabbenu. The Torah states that we must excel in both fear of Hashem and in supporting the revival of our Nation. You should therefore connect to people who have both distinctions.

### Theft in Shopping

Q: Is it permissible to buy in a store which does not give a receipt?

A: Certainly not. It is theft (Shut She'eilat 2:375).

### Cheating on a Test

Q: I cheated on a test and received a high grade. My parents want to buy me an expensive gift because of my grade. I regret it, but don't want to tell them because they will be angry at me. What should I do?

A: Learn the material really well.

### Gender of Fetus

Q: Is there a problem to tell others the gender of the fetus? The evil eye?

A: There is no problem. It is a personal decision.

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