

Dvar Torah for Parshat Chukat

Based on *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #189*

Numbers 20:10 (loosely rendered)

[Moshe] said to [the gathered Israelites], “Listen you nudniks! You think I can get water from just any rock?!”

Rashi: Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon did not know to which rock to speak because Miriam's rock had gotten mixed among other rocks. The Israelites asked, “What's the difference from which rock you get us the water?”

verse 11

Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff and water gushed forth.

Rashi: The first time only a few drops came out because he was supposed to speak to the rock, not hit it. However, they addressed the wrong rock and it gave nothing. “Maybe we have to hit it, like the first one?” When Moshe was ready to strike, the correct rock presented itself and Moshe struck it.

verse 12

God said to Moshe and Aharon, “Since you failed to sanctify Me...you will not bring the congregation into the Land...”

Rashi: God swore that they would not bring the people into the Land to prevent Moshe and Aharon from praying too much to forgive them.

verse 13

These are the Waters of Contention....

Rashi: These waters were the ones referred to by Pharaoh's astrologers before Moshe was born. "The Israelites' savior is destined to suffer by water," they said. This was the reason Pharaoh decreed that every Jewish male should be drowned.

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #189

[Rebbe Nachman] spoke of how God's ways cannot be understood. One of the holy Arizal's sons once died. The Arizal said that the child died because of a secret teaching that he {the Arizal} had revealed to Rebbe Chaim Vital. The Arizal actually had no choice. Rebbe Chaim had pressed him greatly, and the Arizal was compelled to reveal the secret. The Arizal himself had said that the only reason that he came to this world was to rectify Rebbe Chaim's soul. He was therefore compelled from on high to reveal this mystery at Rabbi Chaim's request.

Although he was compelled, the Arizal was still punished. These are the ways of God that cannot possibly be grasped by human intellect.

Many people find *Bereishis* (Genesis) the most interesting of the Torah, with Creation, the Deluge, the Patriarchs and the Tribes. Some prefer *Shemot* (Exodus), with Moshe Rabbeinu's birth, selection, the Plagues, exodus and Revelation. Personally, I find *Bamidbar* (Numbers) the most intriguing—and theologically challenging: the spies, Korach, the Jews complaining about food, drink and whatnot. And then there's this week *parshah*, where Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon the Kohein get severely sentenced for an unintentional crime (aka, sin).

The episode of hitting the rock is a very troublesome. The Ohr Hachaim Hakodesh lists *ten* different explanations of what the crime was—**AND HE REJECTS THEM ALL!** These explanations were not offered by first-graders. They were offered by the likes of Rashi, Rambam and Ramban.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakodesh offers his own explanation (*Numbers* 20:8) and so does Rebbe Nachman (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #20). I'm not going to stick my head in the lion's mouth this week. I just want to use this episode to underscore a fundament that Rebbe Nachman considered crucial: Faith.

Even before Moshe Rabbeinu was born, astrologers knew that he would suffer from water. Was he cursed or doomed to suffer from water? Wasn't there anything he could have done to avoid it?

After forty years of faithful service for the Jewish people, on the verge of entering the Promised Land, Moshe Rabbeinu is performing yet another kindness for them—providing them with water—and because of a mistake that might not even have been his fault, he is denied his dream of entering the Land.

Is this the reward for loyalty? Can someone be punished for doing a mitzvah, albeit imperfectly? A mitzvah **protects** a person (*Sotah* 21a)!

Moshe Rabbeinu is even told that he cannot rescind the decree. What happened to *teshuvah* (repentance) and forgiveness?

No one likes dissonance and so we throw *pilpul* (dialectics) at these questions, some of it possibly even effective. Yet ultimately we must accept the Rebbe's answer: These are the ways of God that cannot possibly be grasped by human intellect.

In fact concerning such questions we read in *Likutey Moharan* (II, Lesson #52):

“The Rebbe often said, ‘Quite the contrary! There **should** be questions on God. It is fitting and proper for Him; it is in accordance with His greatness and majesty. Because He is so great and majestic, well beyond our ken, it is certainly impossible for us to understand how He runs the world. So of necessity there must be questions on God...If He ran the world the way we thought He ought to, that would mean He thinks like us, God forbid!’”

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

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[Home](#) | [Dvar Torah Index](#) | [Bamidbar Index](#)