

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE HUKAT

JUNE 27-28, 2014

30 SIVAN 5774

Rosh Hodesh Tamuz will be celebrated on Shabbat & Sunday, June 28 & 29.

DEDICATIONS: By Morris Dweck - Le-Iluy Nishmat Moshe Ben Bahia Dweck HaKohen – 5 Tamuz
Happy Birthday to Mariyah

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting Friday evening 8:11 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP

SHABBAT Class at 8:30, Relevant Daily Halachot based upon the teaching of HaRav Ovadia Yosef Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:17AM
We will endeavor to keep it to the 7 aliyot, somech, samuch and maftir each week.
Rav Aharon will give the Derasha in the morning

Kiddush: Sponsored by Herman and Rebecca in celebration of their anniversary
Please sponsor a Kiddush or Seudah Shelishi or breakfast in memory or in honor of a loved one

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30

Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach from 5:30 to 6:30
We are doing this program with the Bach and the program will be held at
The Sephardic Congregation for the latter part of the summer.

Pirkei Avot with Rav Aharon at 6:45
Mincha at 7:30 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 8:00
Class with David
Birkat HaMazon at 8:50
Arbit at 8:55 - Shabbat Ends – 9:11

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited
Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM (ADDITIONAL NEW TIME Sunday Mornings 7:30)
Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

Thursday Nights 8:30-9:30 Virtual* Class facilitated by Rabbi Yosef Colish.
Practical Laws of Shabbat for Sephardim

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Editors Notes

Chukat – Does prayer work?

It seems that over the early summer months the Torah portions repeat a theme week after week. The Jewish people complain or sin or worse, G-d sets out to punish them and Moses prays to G d on the peoples' behalf and the punishment or plague is halted. Again in this portion of Chukat, the nation complains about the Manna and they are punished with fiery snakes. Moses prays and following G d's instructions, he fashions a copper serpent and places it atop a pole. Those bitten, would look at this snake and be healed. Moses' prayers meet with success again.

Chukat also tells us about Moses striking the rock which then gives forth water. The Rabbis teach us that Moses and Aaron committed a grave error. The conventional explanation being that they struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The two will now be punished and refused entry into the land. We will see that Moses will offer up 515 prayers to Hashem in an attempt to be permitted to go into the land of Israel. Whereas his prayers time and again for Israel seem to work, here they appear to fail. Moses will die in the desert, just as we see the death of Aaron this week.

The last two weeks have been depressing. The thought of the three kidnapped boys, what they are going through and what their parents are going through weighs heavily on all our minds. I was asked last week if I think all the prayers we are offering can possibly help. We spoke about it on Thursday night and again in a brief class in Manhattan Friday morning and again on Shabbat in Long Beach.

There is no doubt in my mind that prayer is effective. We are brought up with the story of our mother Leah, who as the older sister appears slated by fate to marry Esav, while her sister Rachel will marry Jacob, but we are taught that through the power of her

prayers and her tears, she changes her fate and becomes the mother to our Kings and our priests.

Last week we read about Samuel in the Haftarah, but there never would have been a Samuel without the prayers of his mother Hannah. The Rabbis tell us that her prayer not only lead to his birth and saved him later on, it was her prayer that went back into time to help the sons of Korach climb out of the pit and survive.

I recall discussing prayer with Rabbi Abittan z'sl. Does G-d need our prayers? I don't think so. The Rabbi always explained that the verb for prayer in Hebrew is typically reflexive; this means that prayer changes me. If I change myself, then in some small way I change the world as everything is interdependent. In this new changed world, one can hope for a different outcome than might otherwise have come about.

The abduction has had an effect on Jewish people throughout the world. It is times like these that cause us to set aside our differences. My daughter Mikhayla told me how people throughout Israel had come together. People were handing out tefilah cards on street corners. People were committing to making changes in their lives. People are cooking for the soldiers called out.

Shimon Peres met with the parents of the abducted teens on Thursday at his Presidential Residence. "Three families like this can lift up a nation to heights previously unknown, and I'm not exaggerating. It's been several days that Israel is different, unified, joined, praying, fighting,"

Emily Amrousi wrote on Friday about the visit of Finance Minister Yair Lapid's to the home of one of the kidnapped boys, Gilad Sha'ar in Talmon. Bat-Galim, Gilad's mother, told Lapid on Friday about the groom who arrived at their home on the morning of his wedding as a sign of support to strengthen them, and about the prayers being held worldwide for the safe return of their son and the IDF soldiers searching for him, Naftali Frenkel and Eyal Yifrah. His response was amazing to me. "I too won't be able to look in the mirror knowing that I didn't do the maximum" to free the teens, Lapid told Gilad's mother. "I haven't prayed for six years. Since the bar mitzvah of my son I haven't been in a synagogue. When the story of your sons broke, I looked through the entire house searching for my grandfather's siddur (prayerbook). I sat and prayed," acknowledged Lapid.

Last week we also learned that Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar of the Likud party has made a commitment to observe Shabbat and attend Torah classes. How many others have changed?

So given our commitment can we expect all of our prayers to be answered?

In our Synagogue, we have been discussing the concept of Avodah Zarah. Avodah Zarah is my opinion is not worshiping a silent and powerless piece of wood. Zarah represents something strange and disconnected. This Avodah Zarah was the great temptation in Jewish society from its founding until the destruction of the First Temple.

This seems incomprehensible to us today. Can it be as simple as a human being fashioning an idol and then worshiping the product of his own hands? It just seems preposterous. Yet, we are told that had we lived during that period of Biblical history, the tempting allure of Avodah Zarah would have been almost irresistible.

In the world of the Temple and the Mishkan, the people were surrounded by ten miracles daily and the reality of G-d was clear. In such a world, how could one turn to an ineffective piece of stone?

There is always balance in the world and if the holiness of G-d is so real than there must be an equal draw to the dark side. As we understand from our Rabbis the dark side was an effort to manipulate the spiritual forces behind the natural world. The dark side disconnects from G-d and uses short cuts to manipulate the system for me. G-d allowed a system which would allow people to choose. And the practitioners of the dark arts would manipulate these forces whether they are angels or demons to do their will. An analogy may be paying off the worker to steal from his boss. The worker is this angelic force and the boss is G-d. Yet the boss realizes and allows the theft as this was part of the test of life in those days. When the Temple was destroyed and the Shechinah went into hiding and the glaring certainty of G-d's presence in the world was concealed, the dark side too became inaccessible. This is what I believe is meant by the Talmud telling us that our Taavah or desire for avodah zarah was removed then. There always must be balance. So to us this Avodah Zarah seems ridiculous.

But for those who lived during that time, this worship was a method whereby the will of the person was fulfilled. All prayers were answered when one understood the system.

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg writes: "In our post-idolatrous, monotheistic, Jewish society, it might be

philosophically difficult to achieve a precise definition of the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of G-d, but look at a god — an idol — without these attributes. It may be manipulated. Ultimately, I, the worshiper can get what I want out of this idol god. I can manipulate it if I am clever enough.

"... Monotheism tells me: I cannot manipulate G-d. It is G-d's will, not mine, that prevails. I may or may not understand G-d's will, but I do understand that it is His will that is determinative, not that of an idol, and not that of a personal will of mine that I attribute to an idol."

My father, a'h, would bless us with the common blessing, "May Hashem grant, Kol Mishalot Libecha – All the Desires of Your Heart". But he would add LeTovah for the good. Being within the painting and having a very limited perspective, we may not understand exactly what is best for us in the long run. I have heard it said by Rabbi Abittan's teacher, Rabbi Yosef Soloveitchik: "Thank G-d for the prayers that were not answered!"

Rabbi Goldberg writes: "Some 20 years ago, when Palestinian terrorists kidnapped Nachshon Wachsmann, his parents asked that all of Israel light Friday night candles and pray for Nachshon's safe release. At the Western Wall alone, some 100,000 people gathered to pray for Nachshon. The intensity of the prayer, the purity of the prayer, the sheer sound of the prayer, the righteousness of the request, the community solidarity, led some of the people at the Wall to believe that this deep kavvanah guaranteed Nachshon's safe release. "Actually, he was killed right around the time of those prayers.

"The next day, Nachshon's father was asked what had happened to all those prayers. The question presumed the right to anticipate a positive response to prayer offered with supreme kavvanah

"Nachshon's father responded: Our prayers were answered. The answer was no.

"Nachshon's father understood the nature of prayer in Judaism."

We should pray. We should change. We should grow and we should hope. But in the end we must have faith.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The laws of the Red Heifer, are detailed. In Nissan of the 40th year, Miriam died. The well dried up and the nation gathered against Moshe and Aharon to complain about their thirst.

2nd Aliya: The hitting of the rock occurred and Moshe and Aharon were forbidden to enter into Eretz Yisroel. Edom refused to allow the Jews to travel through their land.

3rd Aliya: Aharon died and Elazar succeeded his father as Kohain Gadol. They encountered the southern Canaanites (13 miles west of the Dead Sea) and bested them in battle. Following Aharon's death the protective clouds departed and the nation began to complain about the living conditions. G-d sent poisonous snakes to attack the nation and Moshe was instructed to create the copper snake on a stick to miraculously save those having been bitten. The nation traveled to Yeshimon northeast of the Dead Sea.

4th Aliya: In the conclusion of Chukas, the nation was refused access to the lands of Sichon and Og and Moshe led them into victorious battle against them. Parshas Balak begins with King Balak's offer to Billam the Prophet to curse the Jewish people and G-d's refusal to allow him to accept.

5th Aliya: Balak sent a second negotiating team and Billam was given permission to go. Along the way the incident with the talking donkey occurred.

6th Aliya: Billam failed his first two attempts at cursing the Bnai Yisroel and blessed them instead.

7th Aliya: Billam attempted his final curse but again blessed the Jews. As he left in disgrace, Billam told the assembled coalition of kings of their eventual destruction by the Jews. As a parting shot against the Jews, he advised Balak to seduce the Jewish men with Midianite women which would bring G-d's wrath down upon the nation. The Parsha concludes with the incident of Baal-Peor and Pinchas's heroism.

Haftarah: Yishayahu 66:1-24 - This week's Haftarah is from Yishayah Chap. 66 and reflects the fact that today is also Rosh Chodesh. Yishayah describes the ultimate downfall of all our enemies during the war of Gog and Magog. The Navi explains that this world is the manifestation of G-d's presence and glory. Yet, we are incapable and sometimes unwilling to properly recognize G-d's manifest presence. Even when the Bais Hamikdash stood the Bnai Yisroel did not appreciate their opportunity to be close to G-d and

serve Him. The Navi forewarns that insincere expressions of devotion are tantamount to offering blemished sacrifices and G-d will punish those who lack sincerity and devotion.

Nevertheless, the institution of the Bais Hamikdash and prayer are our only means for communication love and devotion. Therefore, those who truly mourn for the absence of the Bais Hamikdash and the Temple services will also merit to rejoice in her redemption and reconstruction. When the Bais Hamikdash will be rebuilt the nation will again be able to witness the Rosh Chodesh offering and service, and fully participate in expressing their commitment

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"This is the teaching regarding a man if he will die in a tent." (Bemidbar 19:14)

The Gemara quotes the great Rabbi Resh Lakish "From where do we know that the words of the Torah will not remain with a person unless he kills himself for it? It's the pasuk that says, 'This is the Torah of a man who dies in the tent,' which means the Torah will remain with a person only if he is ready to 'kill himself' in the tent of Torah." The verse that is quoted is referring to the laws of ritual impurity (tum'ah). However, it also hints to the level of dedication needed to be a Torah scholar.

One Sunday morning Rabbi Bension Abba-Shaul came into his classroom in Porat Yosef to give his usual morning lesson. 'Okay where are we holding?' he said, as if three days hadn't passed since the last lesson on Thursday. He gave a quick review of the section of Gemara they were learning. "Okay please read the Tosafot," he said to one of the students. "I didn't prepare it," he answered. The students knew full well that you can't read a Tosafot in front of Rabbi Abba-Shaul unless you prepared it and you knew it inside and out. When the Rabbi heard that response, he was surprised. "Why not? Since Thursday you had Friday, Friday night, Shabbat and Saturday night?"

At that point he tells his students to listen to his story. "When we were your age, Hacham Ovadiah Yosef and me, we used to pray Friday mornings with the sunrise minyan. We grabbed a piece of cake, and right after prayers were over we learned in the shul together non-stop until we heard the signal (in Jerusalem a siren is blown to signal that Shabbat will begin soon) close to Shabbat, and we ran to the mikveh to immerse in the water for the honor of Shabbat and from there we hurried and went straight to pray the Shabbat prayers."

The students were listening in amazement and then said, "But what about Shabbat?" He

answered, "Listen to this. One time on Sunday morning we came to the lesson of the 'Moreh,' the Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Ezra Attiyeh, and he asked us how many hours did you learn on Shabbat? One student said one hour, one said two hours, and one said three hours. At that point the Rabbi got agitated and said, 'I want you to learn seven hours straight without stopping!' We were shocked. It was hard for us to comprehend this. But the 'Moreh' would not give in. 'If you learn seven hours straight then I know you will become B'nei Torah and you will be learning leshem Shamayim.' So we took up the call of the 'Moreh' and that's how we greeted every Shabbat. We learned in the shul called 'Be'er Sheva.' There we learned seven straight hours, with great diligence, from the morning until Minhah! And that's how we merited, like the words of the 'Moreh,' to become B'nei Torah and learned leshem Shamayim."

From these words to his students we get a glimpse of how much Hacham Ovadiah and Hacham Abba-Shaul "killed themselves in the tent of Torah," all while they were very young. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

After Miriam passed away and the well which provided water for the Jewish people dried up, Moshe was told to speak to a rock which would become a source of water. When Moshe spoke to the rock and no water came out, he hit it twice, and although water came gushing forth, he and Aharon were punished that they would not be allowed entry into the land of Israel. What is amazing about this episode is that years before, in a similar situation of no water for the Jews, Moshe was told to hit the rock! Why all of a sudden is hitting the rock incorrect and only speaking to the rock the right way?

The Rabbis tell us that in the beginning year of the career of the Jewish people, hitting a rock was appropriate. But after forty years being guided by Hashem, we must mature enough that the miracles should happen with words rather than by hitting. This is comparable to a child who has to be hit when he is young, but afterwards only a word is necessary. We have to learn from here that what was acceptable in the beginning of our career has to be upgraded as we get older and wiser. We should not be doing the same thing year after year, rather we should be mature enough to serve Hashem in a more advanced way. What was good enough for children is not good enough for adults! Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

SPEED LIMIT

A nervous father handing the car keys to his teenage son often cautions the new driver to "Watch the speed limits!"

You must pay attention to the signs in order to avoid getting a ticket, because speed limits vary from area to area and from road to road.

Construction zones have reduced limits with increased fines. You really do have to be careful.

In order to set speed limits, experts study the roads and determine the safest speed for each segment of highway and street. Pedestrian traffic, play areas, proximity to schools and business districts, road conditions and visibility, are all to be taken into account before the experts set the safest maximum speed.

In life, you are traveling all the time. This constant movement gives rise to the question: What is the safest maximum speed? In both material and spiritual matters, weighing the variables is the wisest exercise you can do to prevent accidents.

When you are traveling through your prayers, your work, your social interaction, or your meals, always stop to evaluate whether you are traveling at a safe speed. Carefully consider all variables before proceeding. Pulling on the reins is a good habit to develop, and it could prevent many accidents from happening. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Meeting a Child's Unique Educational Needs**

Parashat Hukat begins with the famous law of Para Aduma, the red cow that was burned and its ashes mixed with water that would be used to purify those who came in contact with a human corpse. Contact with a human corpse results in a status of Tum'a (impurity), and in order to regain his status of Tahara (purity), the person would have to be sprinkled with the special water prepared with the ashes of the Para Aduma.

The most unusual feature of the Para Aduma is the opposite effect the water had on different people. When a Kohen sprinkled the water on a person who was Tameh, the person would thereby become Tahor, while the Kohen who performed the sprinkling would become Tameh. And thus the Para Aduma waters would bring purity to those who were impure, and bring impurity to those who were pure.

The Torah introduces this section with the words "Zot Hukat Ha'Torah" – "This is the statute of the Torah." Rather than introducing this discussion as the laws of the Para Aduma, the Torah instead describes these laws as "Hukat Ha'Torah." It seems that the special properties of the Para Aduma are relevant not only to

the particular context of Tum'a and Tahara, but more generally, to the entire Torah.

Indeed, the concept of something being beneficial for one person but detrimental to another is truly the "statute of the Torah," a fundamental rule about Torah education. The same school and educational approach which works wonders for one child would be destructive for another. Just as the Para Aduma waters purify some and contaminate others, similarly, an educational method can be "purifying" and uplifting for some students but worthless or even harmful for others. This is the "Hukat Ha'Torah" – that each student's needs must be individually assessed. We cannot use Torah education as a cookie-cutter trying to turn every child into the exact same kind of adult. This would be going against the "Hukat Ha'Torah," the fundamental rule that a system which is right for one person is wrong for another.

Unfortunately, I have met many parents who make their educational choices for their children based on considerations that have little, if anything, to do with the children's individual needs. Too often, parents choose a school or yeshiva in Israel not to meet the child's needs, but to meet their own needs. They might be embarrassed to tell their friends that their child attends school X, and will score points by proudly reporting that the child attends school Y. They might be concerned about a stigma associated with a certain school that best suits their child, and refuse to enroll the child in that school. They might have connections in a prestigious institution that they can leverage to have their child admitted, even though it is clearly the wrong choice for that child.

This problem is especially common when it comes to children with special needs. I recall one incident involving a child who was not speaking at the age of four, and the parents were reluctant to enroll their child in an institution specializing in this particular area because of their fear of a stigma. Rather than provide the child with the most suitable and beneficial framework, the parents were instead worried about their reputation.

The lesson of the Para Aduma is the "Hukat Ha'Torah" – the rule we must follow in educating our children. Our decisions must be made based solely on the individual needs of the child, not on the needs of anybody else. This way we ensure that each and every child receives the "purification" he or she needs and grows to become a devoted member of Am Yisrael.

Rabbi Wein CHRISTIANITY AND ISRAEL

It is well known, though hardly discussed in public, that the creation and existence of the State of Israel has created serious theological problems for sections of the Jewish community. But the creation and existence of the State of Israel has created even greater theological and emotional problems for much of the Christian world and many different branches of the overall Christian religion.

The recent visit by Pope Francis to Israel, at one and the same time soothed relationships with the Jewish world and yet exacerbated the almost irreconcilable issues that separate Judaism from Christianity. The main problem that the State of Israel poses to Christian thought and tradition is that somehow it was never to have happened.

A large part of Christian thought and tradition condemned the Jews to eternal exile and to an always subservient role regarding its relationship with the Church and Christian civilization generally. That the Jews should somehow possess an independent state of their own – not only that but in the Holy Land itself - was an event that Christian doctrine deemed to be enormously improbable if not impossible.

For many decades the Church of Rome did not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel and found it difficult to reconcile itself to Jewish domination and control (no matter how benign and fair) of the Christian holy places in the Land of Israel. This attitude is slowly changing and great strides towards reconciliation and cooperation between the Vatican and the Jewish state have been made over the past two decades. This is certainly to be seen as a positive development after so many centuries of hatred and violence sponsored by the Church against a hapless Jewish people.

The situation with the mainstream Protestant denominations is murkier. The recent vote of the Presbyterian American church encouraging divestment of investments in companies that provide Israel with machinery and building supplies and technologically advanced capabilities is an example of the latent anti-Jewish theology and attitude that has dominated much of the Protestant church over the past centuries.

As the Anglican and Presbyterian churches have become the cutting edge of the new culture and permissiveness of Western society – supporting gay marriage, for instance, and thereby reversing the tenets of its own Bible – they have adopted the

mantra of the Left in becoming openly anti-Israel. The existence of the State of Israel and whether it should be supported or damned is a deeply divisive one within the Protestant movements.

The extremely "progressive" leadership of certain Protestant denominations is not necessarily representative of the mass body of church members and believers. Nevertheless, it is deeply disturbing that the Presbyterian Church can take upon itself the responsibility of telling the Jewish people, who are embroiled in a life and death struggle with a Moslem enemy sworn to its destruction, that they are not entitled to build and protect themselves in their own homeland. Speaking out of both sides of their mouth at once, the Presbyterian Church supports the right of the State of Israel to exist but just does not want it to have the material tools necessary to guarantee that existence.

There is a significant section of Protestant denominations that wholeheartedly support the State of Israel and who have donated very large sums of money to Jewish charitable and educational organizations operating in the State of Israel. Since many of these denominations also sponsor widespread missionary and proselytizing activities, there has been a determined campaign mounted here in Israel to refuse the acceptance of these monies, no matter how worthy the causes they apparently support.

There is a great split in the observant Jewish society on this issue. There is rabbinic opinion on both sides of the question and there is no doubt that this flood of Christian money given to Israeli institutions has had beneficial educational and social results. Nevertheless, lurking behind all of it is the increased missionary activity of many Christian denominations here in Israel.

These activities are aimed at Jews, mainly very poor new immigrant families. The laws against Christian missionaries and their activities in Israel are not enforced because of diplomatic reasons and international consequences. So the question remains as to the true intent of the Christian supporters of the State of Israel.

In a world filled with enemies and with those who wish us no good, it would be cavalier and almost foolish to cast away the hand of friendship which these Christian denominations have extended to the State of Israel and the Jewish people. How to square this circle and arrive at a wise decision remains a troubling issue for us. Thousands of years of enmity are not easily forgotten but in the world that we

inhabit, friends are hard to come by. Wiser and greater minds than mine will decide what is a reasonable policy and solution to these issues.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Miriam, Moses' Friend

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now, you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20: 10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (ibid., v. 12).

The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I argued in an earlier Covenant and Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17: 6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some but it was bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet (Ex. 15: 22-26).

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained. Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what to do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17: 1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different?

The answer is stated explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20: 1)

Immediately after this we read: "Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron." A famous Talmudic passage[1] explains that it was in Miriam's merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam's death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses' response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses' own mother Yocheved. Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Num. 12: 1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest prayer on record – five

Hebrew words – "Please, God, heal her now." Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week's parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on his or her own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18: 18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him, (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate, and (3) a soul-mate or soul-mates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, "The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well." [2]

Leaders need confidants, people who "will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena." A confidant cares about you more than about

the issues. He or she lifts you when you are low, and gently brings you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, "Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through."^[3]

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah^[4] counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship. He calls it the "friendship of trust" [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom "you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded," hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses' early life suggests that Miriam was Moses' "trusted friend," his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right she was also one of her brother's sources of strength.

Even the greatest cannot lead alone.

[1] Taanit 9a.

[2] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Leadership on the Line, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, 227.

[3] Ibid., 200.

[4] Maimonides, Commentary to Mishnah Avot 1: 6.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"They shall take for you a red heifer, perfect" (19:2)

Included in "perfect" is also the requirement that also the color should be perfect without any hairs of a different color. Here we see the possibility of understanding this mystifying procedure of the purification by the Parah Adumah. This heifer, with a beautiful coat of red hair without a blemish even in the perfection of its color, was therefore a rarity, and it was so expensive that its owner became wealthy when he sold it to the public use (Kiddushin 31A).

Yet despite its striking beauty, this enormously costly creature could accomplish nothing of the purification procedure while it was still in a state of its beauty.

Only after slaughtering it and then burning it into ashes could it achieve the purpose of purifying the unclean person or object.

This symbolizes a vastly important parallel: The Israelite is to Hashem the most precious object in the world. Even one Israelite is more valuable to Hashem than the entire Universe ("For my sake the world was created" – Sanhedrin 37A). Yet throughout his life he is susceptible to sin or even to entire self-ruination, no matter how perfect he is. The most beautifully righteous man becomes truly purified only when he dies and is interred and his body turns to ashes, exactly like the Parah Adumah.

"Greater are the righteous after their death, more than in their lifetime" (Hullin 7B) and the procedure of the Parah Adumah comes to emphasize the importance of the Afterlife as the culmination of all men's efforts to gain true excellence in the eyes of Hashem. The righteous, that bask in the splendor of Hashem's favor, perceive that their death and destruction of their bodies constituted the final purification.

The Israelite individual is the most precious object in the entire Universe while he is alive. Yet his ultimate and most sublime excellence is achieved when he becomes ashes in the earth.

Quoted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller Z'TL

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