

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

HUKAT

JUNE 30, 2012 10 TAMUZ 5772

DEDICATIONS: By Sam to Roni ... Happy Anniversary
Mazal Tov and Chazak UBaruch to Adam Dahan Who Graduated from HAFTR
and who will be enlisting in the IDF in August

Need a volunteer to drive Abie Lieber home each Shabbat evening - Also need volunteers to house Abie

Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements
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Friday Night: Candles: 8:11PM - Afternoon and Evening service (Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM
Morning Service (Shaharith): 9:00AM – NATI ABITTAN will be reading the Torah this Shabbat
Please say Shemah at home by 8:18 AM
Kidush sponsored by Roni and Sam in honor of Keren's 8th Birthday. Happy Birthday from all of us

Please sponsor a Kiddush. You can email back, call IDA or go on to our website BenaiAsher.org. Dairy Kiddush starts at \$200, \$300 deluxe and \$400 with Bourikas. Meat Kiddush starts at \$350, \$450 for deluxe and \$600 for the works! Please dedicate one this summer in memory of a loved one, or in honor of a birthday, anniversary, or other occasion. We also need Seudah Shelishi sponsors at \$100 per week.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at 6:40 PM – is cancelled as Rabbi Aharon giving Seudah Shelishi Class
Childrens program at 6:40 with Rabbi Colish followed by Minha: 7:20 PM –
Seudah Shelishi and a Class 8:00 – Evening Service (Arbith): 9:00 PM - Shabbat Ends: 9:11PM

Because of an obligation David along with Jack with a few people from Atlantic Beach will be having a Seudah Shelishi and Arbit at the Water Club (and if we get enough guys Mincha at 7:45)

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday Morning, Halacha and Kosher kitchen cancelled this week
Daily 6:30 AM class – Shelah Hakadosh on the Perasha

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – cancelled this week.

Hebrew Reading Crash Course – 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome! We would like to pray Mincha and Arbit first on Monday nights. 8PM

Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav – With Michael and David
Hebrew Reading Crash Course 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome!

Ladies Shabbat Class at the home of Tina Lemberger – each Shabbat at 5:30

Volley Ball with Daniel Wagner – Sunday mornings at the beach at 10AM All summer long.

GREAT ADVENTURES: Thanks to Sam Shetrit and Rabbi Colish for organizing an incredible trip. Thanks to Penny for joining and thanks to all the sponsors for supporting our kids.

The Young Israel of Long Beach - SIMPLY TZFAT - IN CONCERT on the BOARDWALK & LONG BEACH B'LVD
JULY 2, 2012 8:00 PM



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Editors Notes

When I speak with Rabbi Abittan's sons, we often lament about how little we drank from his sea of knowledge (I guess this is the way of the world as I was sitting with my dad while writing this regretting how little we took from our grandfather whose study we never wanted to interrupt). If the Rabbi's knowledge was the ocean to us, we walked away with but a drop.

And then when I think of Rabbi Abittan's illustrious teachers, I imagine he must have felt that he drank but a drop from their oceans. After being brought to America as a boy by Mr. Isaac Shalom, he was put under the tutelage of Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz, the rosh yeshivah

of Mir in New York. After getting his Semicha in Mir, the rabbi traveled to Bnai Brak and became a student at the Ponevezh Yeshiva under the leadership of Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman and grew close to Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, who was the mashgiach ruhani. The rabbi told us that it was good to be little as he often was a fixture blending into the corner of the kitchen of the Gadol Hador, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, better known as the Chazon Ish. And after returning to the states, he became a favorite of Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik at YU. The Rav referred to Rabbi Abittan who had an encyclopedic memory and could quote almost anything by heart as The Sephardi.

And if we begin to imagine how each of these great Rabbis of the twentieth century imagined themselves getting only a drop from the oceans of their rabbis, we have to be humbled into realizing that for all we think we know, it's but a drop of a drop of a drop.

The Rabbis teach us that the epitome of knowledge is to realize

how little we really do know. Ramban, Nachmanides writes how limited his own understanding is when compared to the secrets of Torah. He compares his knowledge to the egg of an ant in relationship to a never ending universe.

A few weeks ago, I spoke with Rabbi Isaac Dwek who has been living in Lakewood. Spending summers and holidays in Deal from the age of ten and often being one of the few praying Vatikin at sunrise with Rabbi Dwek, I grew close to him. His mastery at giving lessons through story telling became a part of me. The rabbi has been a blessing to my wife Chantelle and our family. As a Kohen Hedyot, a Talmid Haham and a man who has dedicated his life to community, his berachot seem to have a direct line to heaven. I learned that each week, the rabbi records a short devar Torah on the perasha and this is distributed by Solomon Dushey. If any of you would like the link emailed each week, please let me know.

Two weeks ago, after listening to Rabbi Dwek, I again called him to discuss the concept of Bitachon, trusting in Hashem, as it related to the spies. My derasha given in the Synagogue based on this conversation that Shabbat was very well received.

This week as we read of the Red Heifer, the Rabbis remind us that even King Solomon, the wisest of all men stated that an understanding of the red heifer is far from me. As we know the waters of the red heifer purify but preparing the waters contaminates.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of the red heifer is a realization that we can't know everything. (Although those in our class will recall that the Arizal does with all

do respect to King Solomon explain the red heifer in a way which makes it much more understandable.) When we delve into something that we think we understand, we realize it's so much deeper than we ever imagined. (All the more so for any explanation of the Ari)

The Kotzker Rebbe was approached by a man who complained, I don't understand G-d. The Kotzker replied, "Thank you". Puzzled at the response, the man repeated, but again heard, thank you. The Kotzker went on to clarify, "You expect me to worship a G-d that you do understand?" How many men even understand their wives?

Much of life is beyond understanding. Life rarely goes according to plan. When we examine, even our business successes, we realize that nine out of ten times, even with our planning and plans, our successes come from the least expected coincidences. (remember G-d hides in coincidences). The idea is to trust in Hashem and have faith. Boreh Olam knows best.

One great rabbi would state that he learned not to complain when he didn't understand. Because if he would complain too loudly then perhaps, Hashem would say ok, come on up and we'll give you all the answers. I often am jealous of the simple faith of our grandparents. They had this tremendous faith and trust in G-d; they had humility and really lived by a credo that Hashem loves us and knows best. I wonder why we live in a generation where so many of us think we know better.

Rabbi Dwek quotes, the Third chapter of Tehilim - psalms. We begin Mizmor LeDavid. King David is singing while fleeing his son Abshalom who rebelled and

took over his kingdom. King David tells us that he lays down and goes to sleep. But where does he sleep? Not in a bed but while hiding in some field, some cave, or under some tree while his son had tens of thousands of people searching for David to kill him. One has to wonder, under those circumstances, how does one sleep? And all the more so, how does one sing? Bitachon! King David has trust and faith that whatever G-d does to him or for him is for the best and in his own best interest. Why would I worry when G-d is the driver and I am the passenger?

But do we have this faith?

Rabbi Abitan would tell us that when Israel was suffering a terrible drought and the Rabbis called for days of fasting and then prayers at the Kotel. Tens of thousands would come together and beseech G-d for rain. But did any of them bring their umbrella?

He would tell of the young child who came to Synagogue with her father on Shemini Aseret and was told that the prayer for rain would be said. "Do all the people really believe, Daddy," he asked, "that their prayers will help bring the rain?" "Of course," replied the father, "In that case," he insisted, "why doesn't anyone have their rain coats?"

Rabbi Dwek expands, that when blessed, we should have faith as if the blessing has come true already. He tells that a year ago on Simchat Torah, a young man came to him asking for a blessing that that winter year he would find his Nasib, become engaged and get married. The rabbi blessed him and told him, "celebrate as if you are engaged".

A couple of months later the boy called the Rabbi and told him Mazal Tov, he was engaged.

The Rabbi asked, "what happened"?

The boy explained, that on the night after Simchat Torah, he drank a LeChayim with his brothers telling them, "I am engaged". Who is the girl? He replied, "I don't know yet". The young man called Raymond Haber to ask about chatan classes. Who is the girl? I don't know yet!

He looked through the book store for books on marriage planning which he would buy. He started making the wedding list. And a couple of days later, he was introduced to perfect girl. Six weeks later, they were engaged.

We ask how did King David sing? We know that sometimes a Psalm begins, Mizmor LeDavid (A Psalm to David) and sometimes LeDavid Mizmor (To David a Psalm). The Talmud in Pesachim tells us that sometimes he sang first then had ruach hakodesh, a holy spirit rest on him and at other times the holy spirit rested on him and then he sang. In this chapter three where he is running for his life after being the King for thirty five years and finding that most of nation has rebelled against him, he sings first. He is telling us that he knows Hashem is going to come through for him. The holy spirit will rest on him. All will be as it should be.

This is the portion of Chukat. It's a portion from beginning to end (when we really have no idea of what sin Moshe committed and every commentary heaps something else onto the poor guy), the Torah is reminding us that for all we think we understand, we really don't. And that's OK!

It's a reminder to trust in Hashem, to praise him and to sing. It's a

reminder to put our faith in him for everything we need. It's a reminder to admit, "I don't understand". It's a reminder to be humble.

Within the fire of the parah adumah are a piece of cedar and a piece of hyssop. If he thinks he is great as the Cedar he should lower himself to that of a hyssop. We need to work on humility.

Rabbi Dwek closes by reminding us that having humility does not mean ignoring our self worth and potential. He tells of a recent Agudah convention chaired by Mr. Eddie Betesh. Eddie told a story. The Kotsker suggested that we carry a paper in each of our two pockets. In one we remind ourselves when haughtiness strikes, that we are but dust and dirt. In the other, of our potential by the Rabbi's words that we should each look at the world as if it was created exclusively for us.

When they were arriving at the hotel, a Rabbi came up to Eddie and said I heard you are the chairman of this great event. I need your help and advice on a project I am working on. Eddie responded that the role of chairman is simply an honorary title, and that the real leaders who could help are these great rabbis who are here.

A few moments later, he went to front desk to check in. "My name is Eddie Betesh, can you check me in?"

"Sorry sir, your name not on the list and its not in the system". "What do you mean not in the system? I am the chairman of the entire convention!"

Eddie says that at that moment he realized that he failed on both counts. One needs to know when to take out the paper reminding us that the world was created for us and that we are capable of so

much and at other times to take out the paper reminding us that we are but dust and ashes. What a lesson Eddie shared with all of us.

We should remember that the epitome of knowledge is to know how little we know and to never forget that Hashem who knows us, loves us and does what's best for us. Have faith in G-d and celebrate in Hashem in advance and B'H, He will celebrate in us.

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

PS ... Do you wonder what happened to the Occupy Wall Street protestors? I think they all moved to Tel Aviv. Most of us don't realize whats happening, but it has the potential of getting very bad. That's what I appreciated what my friend Nina wrote this week.

**LETTER FROM THE
CHAIRPERSON OF CHIBA
(Chug Yedidot Beit Hakneset
Hagadol)
Nina Muller**

In this week's Parsha, Chukat, a young generation of free men and women make their first conquests before entering the Land of Israel. As Miriam dies in the desert of Tzin, the heavenly water supply ceases. Violent social protests erupt. Moshe hits the rock although Hashem's instructions are clear—'vidibartem el hasela'—speak to the rock.

The same story happened forty years earlier in Refidim (Shmot 17:6) where Moshe is told – 'vihikita batzur'—hit the rock. What major difference transpired between these two seemingly similar events? Matan Torah—our acceptance of the laws of the Torah to guide our lives. To a young generation of responsible men and women, who possess free will (Na'Aseh vi'Nishma), one

speaks with reason—'vidibartem'. To the newly freed slaves in Midbar Sin, the modus operandi is power—'vihikita'.

It is by no means an easy task to transform the mind of a slave into one of a free man. Even Moshe Rabbenu was confronted with the dilemma—do I lead with words—'vidibartem' or with power—'vihikita'?

A thought comes to mind concerning the social arena today in Israel. Are our young people voicing their discontent with the social justice system--through calm protest or violence and broken windows?

May we merit the insight and understanding that as a free and democratic nation, we can choose to express our demands through our strong voices, not our mighty hands.

B'Virkat Na'aleh v'Natzliach,
Shabbat Shalom,

**Summary of The Weekly Torah
Reading:**

1st Aliya: The laws of the Parah Adumah- the Red Heifer, are detailed.

2nd Aliya: In Nissan of the 40th year, Miriam died. The well dried up and the nation gathered against Moshe and Aharon to complain.

3rd Aliya: The "hitting of the rock" occurred and Moshe and Aharon were refused entry into Eretz Yisroel.

4th Aliya: Moshe requested from Edom permission to travel through their land on the way to Eretz Yisroel. Edom refused.

5th Aliya: Aharon died and Elazar succeeded his father as Kohain Gadol. They encountered the

southern Cannanities (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. Hashem sent poisonous snakes to attack the nation and Moshe was instructed to create the "copper snake on a stick" o miraculously save the bitten.

6th & 7th Aliya: The nation traveled to Yeshimon - northeast of the Dead Sea. 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.

Judges: 11 1:33 - In the year 2779 Yiftach HaGiladi became Judge - Shofet. Yiftach is described as a gifted warrior who was seemingly unworthy of becoming the Shofet. His brothers had cast out Yiftach because he was the son of a concubine. While away from his family Yiftach gathered around himself an army of outlaws. Due to the oppression and tyranny of Ammon, Yiftach was asked by the elders of Gilad to return to the family and lead them against the forces of Ammon. Yiftach was victorious and remained Shofet for six years. There are a number of reason why the story of Yiftach was selected to complement Parshas Chukas. First of all the issue of leadership. The Talmud tell us that "Yiftach in his generation was like Samuel in his generation."

Although Yiftach was not the greatest scholar, he nevertheless was the recognized leader and a prophet. As such he was accorded the absolute support of the Halacha and the people. This support can at times appear as dogmatic as the law of the Red

Heifer. However, our absolute support for our acknowledged Torah leadership is the foundation of our legal system and the transmission of Torah from generation to generation.

The second reason has to do with the battle with Sichon. Sichon was king of the Ammonites who had taken possession of lands once belonging to Moab. Sichon refused to allow the Bnai Yisroel to pass through his lands and went to war against them. Sichon was destroyed and his lands were forfeited to the Bnai Yisroel. In our Haftorah, the king of Ammon, as cousins to the Moabites, claimed legal ownership to the lands which Moshe had taken from Sichon, who had taken them from Moab.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"The entire assembly saw that Aharon had perished and they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire house of Israel." (Bemidbar 20_29)

Once, a couple who were not getting along came to the Bet Din for a divorce. However, to their surprise, it didn't work out, because they met a Rabbi there whose job was to try to bring couples back together. He was successful and they returned to living happily in peace. They eventually had a child and wanted to name him after the Rabbi. They were Sephardic and their custom was to name after the husband's living father. They asked their Rabbi and he quoted them the Midrash that when Aharon died, all the people named their new child Aharon. They did this because Aharon was so successful in bringing peace to the people. Therefore, the Rabbi said they should try to convince their father, in an easy manner, and explain to him why they want to name the baby after

the Rabbi in the Bet Din, if they can.

In the book Tuvcha Yabih, the author talks about peace and harmony in the home. Many times the harmony is interrupted because of problems of livelihood. Once, a person came to complain that his shalom bayit was upset. The Rabbi asked him if he successfully earned a living. He answered that he wasn't having so much success. The Rabbi advised him to try various jobs to support his family. The Rabbi told him at the end that if he doesn't find success he should even take a job at the sanitation department as a garbage man. If this might seem extreme, that's because we fail to realize the extent of the obligation that the Torah demands each man to support his wife.

One cannot put a price tag on shalom bayit. And to this Aharon dedicated his life. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The symbol for healing that we are all familiar with is a serpent on a staff, and this comes from the perashah of the week. When the Jewish people spoke against Hashem and Moshe, they were bitten by snakes and other animals, and turned to Moshe for help. Hashem told him to fashion a snake onto a staff and let the Jewish people look at it, and they will be cured. The Rabbis ask, "Does a snake on a stick cure just by looking at it?"

The answer is that as they looked up, their heart turned to Hashem, and they realized that our Father in Heaven can do anything, and they rededicated themselves to Him. Then Hashem removed the illness because it was just a tool to get them closer to Him.

As we go through life today, we invariably have to go to doctors and use medicine. Although we don't see the serpent on the staff, we must "look upwards" and remember that Hashem is the Master Healer. He is the one who sent the illness and He is the one who can remove it. Every time we take even an aspirin, we should say a small prayer that Hashem should bring us to a complete recovery. We should also rededicate ourselves to Him and to His service so that the need for the illness will not be there, and this way we will have a full recovery. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Appreciate it While You Have it

"The nation settled in Kadesh; Miriam died there and was buried there. The nation had no water..." (20:1-2). Why did Beneh Yisrael suddenly run out of water when Miriam died?

Rashi explains that as Beneh Yisrael traveled through the desert, a miraculous, mobile well accompanied them to ensure that they would have a constant, adequate water supply. This well was provided in the merit of Miriam, an exceptionally righteous woman and prophetess, and once she died, the well was taken away, leaving the people without water.

The question, however, remains, why didn't the well remain even after Miriam's death? Was her great merit insufficient to continue providing the nation with water even after she passed on?

The Keli Yakar (Rav Shelomo Efrayim Luntschitz of Prague, 1550-1619) offers a remarkable

explanation. He notes that when the Torah reports the death of Miriam, it simply states that she died and was buried. No mention is made of eulogies or mourning, in contrast to the Torah's accounts of the deaths of Aharon and Moshe, where it is explicitly mentioned that the nation wept for the loss of their leader. It seems, the Keli Yakar observes, that the people were not moved by Miriam's death, and did not properly eulogize or mourn for her. They failed to appreciate the fact that their constant water supply was directly and solely due to her. God therefore took away the well so that the people would appreciate what an exceptionally righteous person they lost. As they did not properly appreciate the miracle of the well and Miriam's greatness which provided it, it had to be taken away.

The Keli Yakar's insight teaches us the importance of appreciating everything we have while we have it. If we take everything we have for granted, then God is compelled to take it away, Heaven forbid, so we can appreciate just how valuable it is.

Unfortunately, we take so many things for granted in our lives. People do not generally appreciate their vision until, God forbid, they or someone they know suffers vision loss. We do not appreciate our health until, God forbid, we or someone we know takes ill. We do not appreciate our children until we meet a childless couple.

Each morning, we are required to recite a series of Berachot thanking Hashem for things that may appear simple and trivial. First and foremost, we recite "Elokai Neshama" to thank God for restoring our soul, for enabling us to wake up in the morning. We recite the Beracha of "Poke'ah

Ivrim" to thank Him for our eyesight, "Malbish Arumim" to thank Him for our clothing, "Zokef Kefufim" to thank Him for allowing us to stand up straight, and "She'asa Li Kol Sorki" to thank Him for our shoes. We receive all these gifts, and so many more, each and every day, and our Sages who composed the liturgy wanted to ensure that we thank God for each one of them.

These blessings, like most of our blessings, are not fully appreciated until they are taken away from us. I once saw somebody I know running out of a burning building in a bathrobe; he was at the gym when a fire erupted, and he had no time to put on his clothes. This is when I appreciated the Beracha of "Malbish Arumim." When we hear of somebody who wrenched his back during the night, we appreciate the Beracha of "Zokef Kefufim." The Beracha of "She'asa Li Kol Sorki" came into focus for me after a bizarre experience I had once when I traveled to Mexico City to deliver a lecture in a large synagogue there. The hotel in which I stayed offered a free shoeshine service, whereby guests leave their shoes outside their room at night and then have it returned shined early the next morning. So, I left my shoes outside the room, and when I opened my door the next morning to go to the synagogue for Shaharit and my lecture...they were not there. I went down to the lobby to meet the people who had come to take me to the synagogue, and they saw me there without any shoes. This is when I appreciated the Beracha of "She'asa Li Kol Sorki," that even the shoes on our feet should never be taken for granted.

Rav Avigdor Miller (1908-2001) would occasionally put his head in a sink full of water for several moments, until he needed to

come out of the water for air. He explained that he wanted to feel grateful for the air we breathe at every moment of our lives. In order to truly feel appreciative, he deprived himself of air for several moments, during which time he was able to appreciate how precious the air is.

Part of the reason why it's so difficult for us to appreciate our blessings in life is because we're so busy complaining about our "problems." These "problems" are things like traffic jams, a flat tire, a head cold, a misbehaving child, or a broken piece of furniture. When our emotional energy is expended on worrying about these "problems," we are not able to feel happy and grateful for our blessings – that we have a spouse, children, a roof over our heads, a source of livelihood, friends, clothing to wear, and so on.

One Rabbi recommended that we each compile a list of ten blessings in our life and keep this piece of paper with us when we pray the daily Amida. When we reach the Modim section, in which we thank God "for Your wonders and favors that are given at all times," we should look at the list so we can be grateful for the particular blessings in our lives. This will help us experience true gratitude, and appreciate what we have while we have it, so that the Almighty will continue showering us with these blessings and not, Heaven forbid, take them away from us.

Rabbi Wein

The series of disasters that befell the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai, as recorded for us in the previous parshiot of the book of Bamidbar, reaches its climax in this week's parsha. Heaven decrees that neither Moshe nor Aharon or Miriam – the entire

leadership team of the Jewish people – will be allowed to enter the Land of Israel.

The treatment of Moshe individually seems rather harsh to our limited human understanding of these matters, in light of his seemingly minor transgression of smiting the rock instead of speaking to it. Because of this problem, some of the commentators and scholars – Rambam and Abarbanel for example – claim that the punishment was for an accumulation of previous minor transgressions that culminated with Moshe's striking the rock – a straw that broke the camel's back type of scenario.

Most commentators however concentrate on attempting to explain the matter in light of the statement in the Torah itself, that Moshe's punishment was due to the sole incident of his striking the rock instead of following God's instruction to speak to it.

Be this matter as it is in all of its wondrous complexity and difficulty, the bottom line is that the Jewish people will not enjoy Moshe's presence and leadership when they embark on their task of nation building upon entering the Land of Israel. All of Jewish history, in fact all of world history, would have been different had Moshe led Israel into its promised land. But it was not to be.

I think that among the many lessons and nuances present in this Torah lesson there is one that bears great relevance to understanding the pattern of Jewish history itself. And that lesson is that a leader, no matter how great he is individually – even if he is Moshe who is able, so to speak, to relate to God directly and at will – is still only a product of his time and circumstances.

If Moshe's generation, the generation that left Egypt and stood at Sinai to receive the Torah is not going to enter the Land of Israel, then Moshe himself will also not enter it. The leader is bound to the fate and occurrences of his generation and times. A great leader of one time is not necessarily the great leader of another period.

The Talmud points this out in many different ways: "Yiftach is the great leader for his generation just as Shmuel was the great leader for his time." Individually speaking, the two may not be on the same plane and level of spiritual greatness, but Shmuel is not the suited for leadership of Yiftach's generation just as Yiftach is not the right person to lead the generation of Shmuel.

Moshe is inextricably bound to his generation and cannot enter the Land of Israel. The rabbis also taught us: "The rule over the people of one time cannot impinge for even a hair's breadth over the rule over the people of the next generation." These ideas and axioms bound Moshe as well and they precluded him from entering the Land of Israel no matter his spiritual greatness and quality

Sir Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

Losing Miriam

It is a scene that still has the power to shock and disturb. The people complain. There is no water. It is an old complaint and a predictable one. That's what happens in a desert. Moses should have been able to handle it in his stride. He has been through far tougher challenges in

his time. Yet suddenly he explodes into vituperative anger:

“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)

It was such egregious behaviour, so much of an over-reaction, that the commentators had difficulty in deciding which aspect was worst. Some said, it was hitting the rock instead of speaking to it as God had instructed. Some said, it was the use of the word “we.” Moses knew that God would send water: it had nothing to do with Aaron or himself. Others, most famously Maimonides, said that it was the anger evident in the words “Listen now, you rebels.”

The question I want to raise is simply: what made this trial different? Why did Moses momentarily lose control? Why then? Why there? This question is entirely separate from that of why Moses was not allowed to enter the land. Although the Torah associates the two, I argue elsewhere that this was not a punishment at all. Moses did not lead the people across the Jordan and into the land because that task, involving a new generation and an entirely new set of challenges, demanded a new leader. Even the greatest figures in history belong to a specific time and place. *Dor dor u-parnasav*. “Each generation has its own leaders” (Avodah Zarah 5a). Leadership is time-bound, not timeless.

Behind Moses’ loss of emotional control is a different story, told with utmost brevity in the text: “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. Now there was no water for the community ...”

Moses lost control because his sister Miriam had just died. He was in mourning for his eldest sibling. It is hard to lose a parent, but in some ways it is even harder to lose a brother or sister. They are your generation. You feel the angel of death come suddenly close. You face your own mortality.

But Miriam was more than a sister to Moses. She was the one, while still a six- year-old child, to follow the course of the wicker basket holding her baby brother as it drifted down the Nile. She had the courage and ingenuity to approach Pharaoh’s daughter and suggest that she employ a Hebrew nurse for the child, thus ensuring that Moses would grow up knowing his family, his people and his identity.

Small wonder that the sages said that Miriam persuaded her father Amram, the *gadol hador* (leading scholar of his generation) to annul his decree that Hebrew husbands should divorce their wives and have no more children since there was a fifty per cent chance that any child born would be killed. “Your decree,” said Miriam, “is worse than Pharaoh’s. He only decreed against the males, yours applies to females also. He intends to rob children of life in this world: you would deny them even life in the world to come” (Midrash Lekach Tov to Ex. 2: 1). Amram admitted her superior logic. Husbands and wives were reunited. Yocheved became pregnant and Moses was born. Note simply that this midrash, told by the sages, unambiguously implies that a six year old girl had more faith and wisdom than the leading rabbi of the generation!

Moses surely knew what he owed his elder sister. She had accompanied him throughout his mission. She led the women in song at the Red Sea. The one

episode that seems to cast her in a negative light – when she “spoke against Moses because of his Cushite wife,” for which she was punished with leprosy – was interpreted more positively by the sages. They said she was critical of Moses for breaking off marital relations with his wife Zipporah. He had done so because he needed to be in a state of readiness for Divine communication at any time. Miriam felt Zipporah’s plight and sense of abandonment. Besides which, she and Aaron had also received Divine communication but they had not been commanded to be celibate. She may have been wrong, suggested the sages, but not maliciously so. She spoke not out of jealousy of her brother but out of sympathy for her sister-in-law.

Likewise the sages understood the two events that preceded Moses’ crisis – Miriam’s death and the absence of water for the community – as connected. It was in Miriam’s merit, they said, that the Israelites had water during the desert years. A well (Miriam’s well) accompanied them on their travels, and when Miriam died, the water ceased.

So it was not simply the Israelites’ demand for water that led Moses to lose control of his emotions, but rather his own deep grief. The Israelites may have lost their water, but Moses had lost his sister, who had watched over him as a child, guided his development, supported him throughout the years, and helped him carry the burden of leadership by her role as leader of the women.

It is a moment that reminds us of words from the Book of Judges said by Israel’s chief of staff, Barak, to its judge-and-leader Deborah: “If you go with me, I will go; but if you do not go with me, I

cannot go" (Judges 4). The relationship between Barak and Deborah was much less close than that between Moses and Miriam, yet Barak acknowledged his dependence on a wise and courageous woman. Can Moses have felt less?

Bereavement leaves us deeply vulnerable. In the midst of loss we can find it hard to control our emotions. We make mistakes. We act rashly. We suffer from a momentary lack of judgment. These are common symptoms even for ordinary humans like us. In Moses' case however, there was an additional factor. He was a prophet, and grief can occlude or eclipse the prophetic spirit. Maimonides answers the well known question as to why Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive, with the simplest possible answer: grief banishes prophecy. For twenty-two years, mourning his missing son, Jacob could not receive the Divine word. Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, remained in touch with God. It was God, after all, who told him to "speak to the rock." But somehow the message did not penetrate his consciousness fully. That was the effect of grief.

So the details are, in truth, secondary to the human drama played out that day. Yes, Moses struck the rock, said "we" instead of "God," and lost his temper with the people. The real story, though, is about Moses the man in an onslaught of grief, vulnerable, exposed, caught in a vortex of emotions, suddenly bereft of the sisterly presence that had been the most important bass-note of his life, Miriam, the precociously wise and plucky child who had taken control of the situation when the life of her three-month old brother lay in the balance, undaunted by either an Egyptian princess or a rabbi-

father, Miriam who led the women in song, sympathised with her sister-in-law when she saw the price she paid for being the wife of a leader, Miriam in whose merit the people had water in a parched land, the quiet heroine without whom Moses was temporarily lost and alone.

The story of Moses and the rock is ultimately less about Moses and a rock than about a great Jewish woman, Miriam, appreciated fully only when she was no longer there.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"This is the statute of the Torah". (19:2) The subject of Parah Adumah (the red heifer) is based on the fact of the Tum'ah of a dead body. This is the most severe form of uncleanness and is called "the father of the fathers of Tum'ah". One explanation for this severity of the uncleanness of the dead is as follows: The Chovot Halevavot (Yichud Hamaaseh 5) declares that the first and most prevalent doubt concerning the principles of Torah is the doubt in the truth of Life after death (Olam Haba).

We can readily perceive the reason for the persistence of such a doubt, in the fact of death itself. When confronted by such catastrophic phenomenon as death actually is, it requires strength of character and of intelligence to overcome the powerful impression caused by the death of a person. In order to reinforce the confidence in the Existence after death, it is imperative that we have as little contact with the dead as possible, and also that the dead be buried immediately. To encourage these principles, the extreme restrictions of Tum'ah of the dead are especially effective.

Death is the greatest falsehood in the Universe, for the fact of death causes men to weaken in their belief of the most important truth of the universe (after the belief in Hashem) which is the belief of Life after death.

"This world is but a vestibule before the World to come. Prepare yourself in the vestibule in order to enter the banquet hall" (Abot 4:16). Because of this effect of Death upon the minds of men, it is the worst form of Tum'ah.

"When a man dies" (19:4) Death is the greatest falsehood. When Hitler murdered 6 million innocents, and then he saw that he was losing the war and would face retribution, he thereupon swallowed a perfumed poison and thus painlessly left the world thinking he escaped the great punishment that awaited him. Thus the phenomenon of death is an enormous deception which conceals the True fate of the evil man in the Afterlife from men's eyes. Such enormous deception requires a very great label to identify it. The phenomenon of death can contaminate the mind with the materialistic attitude that death is the end. If life ends so completely, it loses its value. For why strive for excellence and virtue if it all ends in the grave? And therefore Hashem declares here that no Tum'ah is as severe as the uncleanness of death.

Quoted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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