

Chukas

חקת

Why Didn't Moshe Rabbeinu Enter Eretz Canaan? Our parashah relates

that after Miriam's death, the fresh-water spring which had miraculously traveled with Bnei Yisrael disappeared. Bnei Yisrael complained to Moshe, who turned to Hashem. He said: "Take your staff and talk to the rock, and it will provide water." Instead of doing this, Moshe yelled at Bnei Yisrael, and then hit the rock (twice). Immediately, Hashem informed Moshe that he would die in the desert. What was Moshe's sin? Below is a sampling of answers:

Rashi (to 20:12): Had Moshe spoken to the stone as he had been told to do, Bnei Yisrael would have said, "If an inanimate stone which has no needs obeys Hashem's commands, how much more so must we obey Him?!" By not bringing about this kiddush Hashem/sanctification of G-d's Name, Moshe caused a chillul Hashem/desecration of G-d's Name.

Rambam (in Shemoneh Perakim, ch. 4): Bnei Yisrael believed that every word that Moshe spoke came from Hashem. Therefore, when Moshe yelled at them, they assumed that G-d was angry at them. This caused a chillul Hashem because there was no reason for Him to be angry at the moment. **Ramban** (to 20:1, quoting Rabbeinu Chananel): Moshe said (20:10), "Notzi"/"We will give you water," instead of, "Yotzi"/"He [Hashem] will give you water." This minimized the miracle and implied that Moshe would find water using his own wisdom. **Later commentaries** note that Moshe's death sentence is mentioned ten times in the Torah. This may be an allusion to his failure to use the letter "yud" (in yotzi) instead of "notzi"). The gematria of yud is ten. **Rabbeinu Bachya** (to 20:8, as explained by later commentaries): In an earlier incident (Shmot 17:6), Moshe brought forth water by hitting a rock once. By now

hitting the rock twice, Moshe implied that Hashem had weakened. **Sforno** (to 20:8): Moshe and Aharon made a conscious decision to lessen the miracle from a wholly supernatural one (in which a stone would turn to water when it was spoken to) to a more concealed miracle (in which water would appear to flow out of a rock naturally). They did this because they believed that Bnei Yisrael were unworthy of an open miracle and that their attempt to cause such a miracle would therefore fail. In fact, however, Bnei Yisrael needed to see an open miracle at just that moment to refute their belief that Hashem had taken them from Egypt to abandon them in the desert. **R' Yosef Albo** (in Sefer Ha'ikarim): Moshe should not have waited for Hashem's instructions. He should have felt pity for them and ordered water to appear. "A tzaddik decrees and Hashem fulfills." **R'**

Yitzchak Abarbanel: Moshe's death had been decreed earlier because he had caused the spies to err through his instructions. Aharon's death was decreed because of his part in the Golden Calf. A leader who does not protect his people will be found lacking and unfit to lead. For some reason, however, Hashem waited until our parashah to announce His decrees. **Maharal** (in Gur Aryeh): All of Moshe's actions during this incident showed a slip in the level of his own emunah/faith. For example, he hit the stone twice (not once) and he yelled at Bnei Yisrael. One whose faith is perfect never loses his temper because he knows that all of his troubles are from G-d. A person with faith is always happy. **Me'am Lo'ez**: By losing his temper, Moshe slighted the honor of G-d's people, and therefore, of G-d himself. **Sefat Emet** (R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l, the "Gerrer Rebbe"): Moshe's death was not a punishment per se. Rather, the actions of hitting the stone and talking to it represent two different kinds of leadership. [On various occasions, the Rebbe offered different descriptions of the two types of leadership – see Sefat Emet: Years 5647, 5650, 5654.] Moshe's actions showed that he could not provide the kind of leadership that the new generation needed. Because of this "generation gap," Moshe had to be replaced. **R' S.R. Hirsch** (The Pentateuch, p.371): Moshe's loss of his temper showed that he had lost

hope in Bnei Yisrael's ability to fulfill their destiny as a people. He wondered if all that he had toiled for was in vain. For this, he died. R' Hirsch adds: "[T]he impressive fact remains that, on account of such a small, easily to be understood, momentary weakness in their emunah, the leaders had to suffer the same fate that was meted out to the generation of the wilderness for their continuous lack of emunah. The grave of the great leader at the very border of the Promised Land to which he had at last brought his people, next to the graves of those who died in the wilderness, now bears everlasting witness to the impartial justice of the Divine rule, in the scales of which the slightest errors of the great saintly men weigh equally to the worst sins of ordinary mortals."

Truth prevails

"אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול" - מעשה היה שנצטרכו ישראל לפרה אדומה ולא מצאו. אחר כך מצאו אותה אצל גוי אחד. הלכו ואמרו לו: מוכר לנו את הפרה שיש לך. אמר להם: תנו את דמיה. אמרו: וכמה הם דמיה? אמר להם: ארבעה זהובים. אמרו לו: אנו נותנים. עד שהם הולכים להביא את הדמים, הרגיש אותו הגוי להיכן הם צריכים את הפרה, וכיון שבאו והביאו את דמיה, אמר להם: איני מוכרה לכם. אמרו לו: שמא להוסיף על דמיה אה מבקש? הרי אנו נותנים לך כל מה שתבקש. ואתו רשע, כל שהיה רואה אותם דחוקים עליו היה מעלה עליהם את המחיר. אמרו לו: טול חמשה זהובים, ולא היה מבקש. טול עשרה, טול עשרים, שלשים, חמשים, מאה - לא היה מבקש - עד שהגיעו לאלף זהובים וקבל עליו ליתנה להם במחיר הזה. התנו עמו וגרמו אותו והלכו להביא לו את הזהובים. מה עשה אותו רשע? אמר לגוי אחד חברו: בוא רואה היאך אני משחק ביהודים הללו! כלום הם מבקשים אותה פרה ונותנים לי כל הדמים, אלא מפני שלא עלה עליה עולם - הריני נוטל את העול ונותן עליה, ומשחק אני בהם ונוטל את ממונם! וכך עשה: נוטל את העול ונותן עליה כל הלילה. וזהו סימנה של פרה שלא עלה עליה עול: שתי שערות יש בצוארה במקום שהעול נתון, וכל זמן שלא עלה עליה עול, שתי השערות זקופות הן, ואם ניתן עליה עול - מיד הן נכפפות. ועוד סימן אחד יש בה: עד שלא עלה עליה עול, עיניה שוות, ואם עלה עליה עול - עיניה מפלבלות והיא מסתכלת בעול. כיון שבאו ליטול את הפרה ממנו וכל אותו הזהב בידם - מיד נכנס והעביר את העול מעל הפרה והוציאה להם. כיון שהוציאה להם, התחילו מסתכלים בה ורואים אותן שתי השערות שנכפפו, והעינים שהן מפלבלות מן העול. אמרו לו טול, אין אנו צריכים לה, ואפילו בחנם אין אנו נוטלים אותה ממך. כיון שראה אותו רשע, שהחזירו לו פרתו ויצא ריקם מכל אותו הזהב - ואותו הפה שאמר "אני משחק ביהודים הללו", התחיל אומר: "ברוך שבחר באומה זו!" - ונכנס לו לתוך ביתו ותלה חבל וחנק את עצמו. [תנחומא].

R' Avraham Abele Gombiner z"l (the "Magen Avraham," one of the most important commentators on the Shulchan Aruch; Poland; died 1682) writes: On Friday of the week in which Parashat Chukat is read, some individuals have the custom to fast because, on that day in 5004 [1244], twenty wagon-loads of Sefarim / Torah works were burned in France. This fast day was not established on the day of the month on which that tragedy occurred, as most commemorations are, because it was revealed to the sages of that time in a dream that the decree was connected with the Parashah, as we read (19:2), "This is the decree [regarding] the Torah." Also, in 5408 [1648, during the Chmielnicki Massacres], two great Jewish communities were destroyed on that day. (Magen Avraham, end of ch.580) **R' Tzidkiyah ben Avraham Ha'rofeh z"l** (Italy; died 1275) lived at the time of the first event above. He provides some additional (and some different) details: We have written this as a remembrance of what occurred in our own days due to our many sins — the Torah of our Elokim, approximately 24 wagon-loads of books of Talmud, Halachah and Aggedeta, was burned in France on Friday of Parashat Chukat in the year 5002 [1242]. We heard from some of the rabbis who were present that they asked through a dream whether this was a Divine decree, and they were answered: "This is the decree [regarding] the Torah." They decreed that, from that day onward, individuals who are able to should fast on Friday of the week of Parashat Chukat. May its ashes atone for us like a burnt-offering on the altar's pyre! (Shibbolei Ha'leket)

Forgiving times

"ותמת שם מרים" - תניא, אמר רב אמי: למה נסמכה מיתת מרים לפרשת פרה אדומה, לומר לך: מה פרה אדומה מכפרת, אף מיתת צדיקים מכפרת.
[מועד קטן כ"ח, א'.]

ונתתם אתה אל-אלעזר הכהן והוציא אתה אל-מחוץ למחנה ושחט אתה לפניו

You shall give it to Elazar the Kohen; he shall take it to the outside of the camp and someone shall slaughter it in his presence (19:3) A chassid of **R' Simcha Bunim Alter z"l** (the "Gerrer Rebbe";

died 1992) once came to seek the Rebbe's blessing before undergoing a medical imaging procedure. It was Friday, Erev Shabbat Parashat Chukat. The Rebbe gave his blessing and added enigmatically, "It's in this week's parashah." Upon leaving, the puzzled chassid asked several scholarly chassidim what the Rebbe might have meant. After discussing it amongst themselves, they answered as follows: The Aramaic translation of the Torah known as Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel in his commentary to this verse states that the Parah Adumah / Red Heifer must be examined for the eighteen signs of treifah / blemishes that render an animal non-kosher. Commentaries ask, however, how this is possible, since the gemara (Chullin 11a) states that the Parah Adumah must be burnt whole. (Many of the treifot are internal, for example, certain types of holes in certain internal organs, and cannot be detected when the animal is whole!) Commentaries answer: the midrash states that during all of the forty years that Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, they had no need for sunlight. Rather, the Clouds of Glory radiated a special light that was brighter than the sun and even allowed people to see through solid objects. This, said the chassidim, explains the Rebbe's comment: how did Bnei Yisrael check the Parah Adumah for internal treifot? They used "x-ray vision"! (Otzros Tzadikei Ve'geonei Ha'doros)

ולקח הכהן עץ ארז ואזוב ושני תולעת והשליך אל-תוך שרפת הפרה

The priest shall take some cedar wood and hyssop ... and throw it into the midst of the burning cow (19:6) The cedar wood and the hyssop were also thrown into the fire. Cedar symbolizes excessive pride, and hyssop symbolizes excessive humility. Both of these character traits are not seemly in a person. The same way that one should not hold himself too high, one should also not walk around depressed all the time. A person needs a certain amount of enthusiasm and pride, as it says, "And he lifted his heart in the ways of G-d." (Kli Yakar) Along the same lines, **Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk** used to say: A man should have two pockets. In one he should put the concept of "I am but dust and ashes," and in the other, "For me the world was created."

וכבס בגדיו הכהן ורחץ בשרו במים ואחר יבא אל-המחנה וטמא הכהן עד-הערב

And the Priest is impure until the evening (19:7) **Rabbi Yizchok of Vorki** said that the essence of the Red Heifer (i.e., that is, the whole procedure of purifying those who were spiritually impure) is the whole concept of "love thy neighbor". His grandson, **Rabbi Mendel of Vorki**, explained that this is because the priest who was involved in the purification process himself became impure by the same process that purified the person who came to him. Giving up something yourself in order to help another is the ultimate love for one's fellow man. When one truly loves another, one feels pleasure in all the sacrifices made for him / her. (Growth Through Torah)

Kiss of death

"ותמת שם מרים ותקבר שם" - תניא, אמר ר' אלעזר: נאמר כאן "ותמת שם מרים" ונאמר אצל משה "וימת שם משה על פי ד'" - מה התם על פי ד', אף הכא על פי ד'. ומפני מה לא נאמר בה "על פי ד'" ? מפני שגנאי הדבר לאומרו. ומכאן שלא שלט בה מלאך המות ורמה ותולעה.
[בבא בתרא י"ז, א'.]

הוא יתחטא בו ביום השלישי וביום השביעי יטרה ואם לא יתחטא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי לא יטרה

"He shall purify himself with it on the third day and on the seventh day become pure; but if he will not purify himself on the third day, then on the seventh day he will not become pure." (19:12) Literally, this verse teaches that one who has become defiled by contact with a corpse must be sprinkled with water containing the ashes of the parah adumah/ red heifer on the third and seventh days. **R' Chaim Tirer z"l** (1760-1817; better known as "R' Chaim of Czernowitz"; rabbi in several Bessarabian cities and early chassidic figure) offers an additional lesson: The "third day" refers to the Torah, which the Gemara (Shabbat 88) refers to as the "Tripartite Torah." [Some interpret this as referring to the three parts that make up the acronym Tanach — Torah, Nevi'im and Ketuvim.] The "seventh day" refers to Shabbat. The only way for a person to purify his soul is through study of Torah and observing the sanctity of Shabbat. (Be'er Mayim Chaim)

זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל כל הבא אל האהל וכל אשר באהל יטמא שבעת ימים
 "... a man who will die in the tent" (19:14) The Talmud interprets the above verse in a homiletical manner. "Tent" alludes to the tent of Torah. Therefore, the verse is to be understood as follows: Torah will endure only in one who "kills himself" for it [Berachos, 63b]. The **Rambam** explains that a person should deprive himself of sleep and limit his physical indulgences in his pursuit of Torah studies [Yad, Talmud Torah 3:12]. What needs to be understood is that this appears to contradict the concept that adherence to the Torah is supposed to offer vigor and vitality (we are commanded to "live by adhering to the precepts [Vayikra, 18:5]", not "die through their observance [Yoma, 85b]"). Furthermore, practically, weakening oneself is counterproductive to effective Torah study. In order for a person to internalize that which he is being taught, he must be willing to accept the authority of his teacher. An egocentric person will have difficulty submitting himself to the will of Hashem. By saying a person must "kill himself", the Talmud means that he must eradicate any sense of egocentricity within himself. Commensurate to his success in diminishing his egocentricity will be his ability to internalize Hashem's word, i.e. the Torah. Limiting one's physical indulgences is the method in which one negates his egocentricity. The purpose of doing this is not to weaken oneself physically, rather to internalize the message that the world is not here only to serve him. This can be attained without causing oneself any physical harm. [Rabbi Yochanan Zweig on the Parsha]

וכל כלי פתוח אשר אין צמיד פתיל עליו טמא הוא

And any open vessel that has nocover attached to it is Tamai. (19:15) The pasuk is not only telling us about an open vessel in a room with a dead body, but the pasuk is also hinting to us about anything open. If a person doesn't keep a closed mind in certain areas and surely a closed mouth he will become Tamai. A person must learn to keep stray thoughts out. In the Chidushei Hagaon **Rabbi Shimon Sofer**, he writes that the reason that a person must keep his head covered at all

times, is to remind him to keep impure thoughts out. Otherwise a persons head - thoughts and ideas - could become Tamai. It is interesting that throughout the generations, the various groups that left the fold - the first thing they did was to take off their yarmalkas. This was to show they are not bound to any special ideas or thoughts. They were free - open - to think and do as they please without any restrictions. (Taam VoDaas)

ולקחו לטמא מעפר שרפת החטאת ונתן עליו מים חיים אל-כלי

"He shall put upon it mayim chaim / spring water in a kli / vessel." (19:17) The Torah is referred to as "mayim" (see Yeshayah 55:1) and as "chaim" (Mishlei 3:18). "Kli" is an acronym of Kohen, Levi, Yisrael. Here we have an allusion to the custom of calling a Kohen, a Levi, and a Yisrael up to the Torah. (Da'at Zekeinim Mi'Ba'alei Ha'Tosafot)

And he shall put running water (literally "living waters") into a vessel (19:17) Just as water has the ability to move mountains, make arid deserts flourish and overcome all boundaries and obstacles, so too is the Jewish people blessed with this ability - provided, of course, that the water is flowing and not frozen into ice. When a Jew is enthusiastic and spirited in his service of G-d, anything is possible. But if he is cold and apathetic, he will achieve nothing. (Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin)

ולקח אזוב וטבל במים איש טהור והזה על האהל ועל-כל-הכלים ועל-הנפשות אשר היו שם ועל הנגע בעצם או בחלל או במת או בקבר
And he shall take hyssop (19:18) The lowly hyssop plant is symbolic of humility. In the Torah, the musical cantillation above these two words, indicating how they are to be chanted, is called a "kadma ve'azla." How can a person achieve true humility? By remembering where he came from ("kadma" means "former" or "before") - "a putrid drop" - and where he is going (the literal meaning of "azla") - "to a place of dust, maggots and worms." (Peninim Yekarim)

והזה הטהר על-הטמא ביום השלישי וביום השביעי וטמאו ביום השביעי וכבסו בגדיו ורחץ במים וטהר בערב

And the pure individual shall

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sprinkle [the ashes] on the defiled individual (19:19) The Talmud Yerushalmi (Demai chapter 3) quotes R' Yehoshua ben Kabsoi who said: "I used to understand from this verse than any one pure individual can purify only one other person. Then I learned from the treasure-house of Yavneh that one individual can purify many people." **R' Eliezer Menachem Man Shach zatza"** explains that the treasure-house of Yavneh refers to the Yeshiva which R' Yochanan ben Zakkai was able to save from the Roman sword. That Yeshiva guaranteed the future of Torah Judaism. Who would have thought that one person (in that case, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai) could make such a difference? The truth is, however, that one person can purify many people. (Michtavim u'Ma'amarim)

ולמה העליטני ממצרים להביא אתנו אל המקום הרע הזה לא מקום זרע ותאנה ונפן ורמון ומים אין לשתות

"Why did you have us ascend from Egypt to bring us to this evil place? — not a place of seed, or fig, or grape, or pomegranate; and there is no water to drink!" (20:5) **R' Tuvia Goldstein z"l** (1917-2003; rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Emek Halachah in New York) writes: Bnei Yisrael spent 40 years in the desert, most of them after they had received the Torah. Presumably, therefore,

they were already obligated to observe mitzvot. Yet, our verse suggests that there was no vegetation in the desert—if so, from where did they get a lulav and etrog? Perhaps one might argue that the desert miraculously produced plants while Bnei Yisrael were there (see Tosafot to Chullin 88b). However, we read (Yirmiyah 2:2), “Thus said Hashem, ‘I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your following after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.’” Thus, it seems more reasonable to maintain that Bnei Yisrael did not observe the mitzvah of lulav and etrog in the desert. R’ Goldstein continues: This would explain a seeming anomaly in the verses regarding the festivals. Regarding Pesach we read (Vayikra 23:6), “On the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzot to Hashem; you shall eat matzot for a seven-day period.” Here, the festival and the commandment to eat matzah are mentioned in the same verse. Not so regarding Sukkot, about which we read first (ibid verse 34), “On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of Sukkot, a seven-day period for Hashem,” and only later (ibid verse 40), “You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree . . .” The festival and the mitzvah of lulav and etrog are separated in the Torah because, at one time at least, Sukkot was observed without a lulav and etrog. [Nevertheless, after discussing other aspects of this question, R’ Goldstein suggests that a definite conclusion is impossible.] (She’eilot U’teshuvot Emek Halachah)

ויאמר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן יען לא האמנתם
בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל לכן לא תביאו
את הקהל הזה אל הארץ אשר נתתי להם

“Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon, ‘Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the Land that I have given them.’” (20:12) R’ Levi ben Gershon z”l (“Ralbag”; 1288–1344) writes that this verse should not be understood as punishing Moshe, and Moshe’s hitting the rock is not the immediate reason why Moshe did not enter Eretz Yisrael. Rather, Moshe did not enter Eretz Yisrael because Bnei Yisrael were not worthy at that time of

conquering Eretz Yisrael quickly. Yet, if Moshe had entered the Land, he surely would have completed the Mitzvah of conquering Eretz Yisrael in short order (unlike his successor, Yehoshua, who did not complete the conquest even after 14 years). How, then, are we to understand Hashem’s criticism of Moshe in our verse? Hashem is saying: “Maybe, if you had spoken to the rock instead of hitting it, you would have raised Bnei Yisrael to a higher level of faith, such that they would then have deserved to conquer the Land quickly. Then, you could have entered the Land with them!” Ralbag continues: This understanding is proven by a number of verses. We read that Hashem said to Yehoshua (Yehoshua 1:2): “Moshe, My servant, has died. Now, arise, cross this Jordan [River], you and this entire people . . .” Hashem calls Moshe “My servant,” a term reserved for exceptionally righteous people, indicating that Moshe had not sinned. Also, Moshe himself told Bnei Yisrael (Devarim 1:37), “With me, as well, Hashem became angry because of you, saying, ‘You, too, shall not come there.’” Moshe would not have blamed Bnei Yisrael for his inability to enter the Land if it had been his own fault. (Commentary to Yehoshua, ch.1, “Ha’to’elet Ha’shelishi”)

וירדו אבותינו מצרימה ונשב במצרים ימים

רבנים וירעו לנו מצרים ולאבותינו

“The Egyptians did evil to us and to our forefathers.” (20:15) Rashi comments: From here we learn that the Patriarchs suffer when troubles befall the Jewish people. With this mind, says Rav Eliezer David Gruenwald **zatza”l**, we can understand the statement in the Haggadah: “We were slaves . . . and if Hashem had not taken our forefathers out of Egypt...” Since the paragraph begins in first person, why does it switch to speak of our forefathers? The answer is that the Patriarchs were redeemed from Egypt with us. In fact, in the Patriarchs’ merit, Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt earlier than they deserved. (Chasdei David)

R’ Asher Wallerstein z”l R’ Asher was born in 1754, in the old age of his father, the Sha’agas Aryeh (one of the greatest Torah scholars of the 18th century). R’ Asher was a student of his father and of R’ Meir Zayeh of Metz, and later served as rabbi of Karlsruhe. R’ Gedaliah Rothenburg of

Bodingheim, a student of the Sha’agat Aryeh and of R’ Asher, writes of the latter (in his approbation to the former’s Talmud commentary, Gevurat Ari): *The son is a limb of his father . . . and is a famous rabbi known throughout the diaspora. . . As a youngster, seven or eight years old, he already had a sharp and well-honed mind. At that age, if he was shown a difficult passage by Rambam and was told in what part of the gemara the answer lay, he could work out the answer in a short time. When he became bar mitzvah, his father said to him, “Because I know that you have a clear mind and that you are a vessel which is fit to receive the Torah of Hashem, therefore be strong and become a person who is great in Torah - “A wise son pleases his father” [in the words of Mishlei 10:1] - then I will be honored because of you in the world of Truth.” When he was 15 years old, he studied with his father an entire tractate every day . . . When he was 17 or 18, the rabbinical court and the Torah scholars of Metz and all the travelers who passed through Metz were amazed by his sharpness and vast knowledge, and his father publicly declared that his son was sharper than he.* The best known student of R’ Asher was R’ Yaakov Ettlinger, author of the popular Talmud commentary, Aruch La’Ner, and teacher of R’ Samson Raphael Hirsch. R’ Ettlinger attributed to R’ Asher the most powerful influence on his way of learning. Some of R’ Asher’s Talmudic interpretations are printed in Sheilos U’teshuvos Sha’agas Aryeh Hachaddashos and in R’ Ettlinger’s Binyan Zion. R’ Asher died in 1837. (Gedolei Hadoros ; Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch [Artscroll])

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