



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Dr & Mrs David Wolfson on the birth of a granddaughter to Mr & Mrs Daniel Wacks.

Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Motti Gershon on the engagement of Miriam to Mendy Simmonds son of Rabbi & Mrs Benji Simmonds.

Mazel Tov to Dr & Mrs Miles Levine on the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of their grandson in Ramat Bet Shemesh.

Stormy Waters

Dani Epstein

Imagine if someone turned up for an audition as a magician for a major production, and all he did was pulled out rabbits from a hat and unknotted silk scarves by pulling them through a hoop. There is very little chance he would get the job. We are so inured to magic tricks that this sort of thing is regarded as trivial.

Now if the same fellow would pull out a watch through a shop window, for instance, without breaking the glass, that would be far more impressive. If he could hit a boulder with a stick and get it to produce millions of litres of water, then I would imagine he would turn out to be rather popular in the Middle East. Until ISIS gets to him, of course, and beheaded or burned him alive for sorcery.

Consider another scenario. Two pilots are flying a 747 carrying some 300 passengers across the Atlantic; twenty minutes into the flight they notice that the oil temperature in one of the engines looks a bit dodgy. Since they have three other engines, this is not exactly a show-stopper, but they can't simply shut the engine down. They have to open the manual and locate the listing for such a scenario. This can take quite a while, since there are thousands of potential problems listed, and the oil temperature is creeping upwards. If the oil temperature goes past 160 degrees, the engine might detonate.

They radio the control tower who patches them through to technical support who in turn search frantically for the appropriate page. Whilst all this is going on, the pilots, the controllers in the tower and the ground crew are all stressed out because this is an in-flight problem that can escalate dramatically. No-one wants an engine fire at 30,000 feet with a planeload of passengers. That sort of thing can affect your insurance premium.

The pilots have two choices: panic and die, or try to save the situation. Their training kicks in and despite being thoroughly stressed out with their and the passenger's lives on the line, they stay calm, with one of them reading the indicators out to tech support and the other pilot searching for the relevant page.

Finally they find the right page, and all of a sudden everyone is calm again, since the instructions are quite simple: switch the engine to manual control, turn off the fuel pump to that engine, cut the power and continue to fly on three engines. They do so, and turn the aircraft around and cancel the flight. Crisis over.

So, let's try to project ourselves into the situation Moshe was in at Kodesh. His sister Miriam had just died, and he might have just started the shivah and already there was a crisis – there was no water! But he is used to crises. He is the leader. He does not have the luxury of pausing to contemplate the death of his sister.

The people outside his tent are livid but they are panicking as well. They cry "לו נָּגַעְנוּ בְּגִזְעֵי אֶחָיוּנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ ה' - if only we would have died with the death of our brothers before Hashem!" This is very carefully phrased. They are not saying "we wish we would have died", but they are wishing they would

לעלו נשמת דוב יצחק ב"ר אפרים אלחנן ז"ל

Hold On To The Torah

You have been honoured with an Aliya. While saying the Brocha, hold onto the Torah scroll, with your right hand holding onto the right handle (etz chayim), and your left hand onto the left handle. After the Brocha, remove your left hand from the Torah but continue holding the Torah with your right hand. Continue holding onto the Torah with your right hand throughout the reading of the Torah. Grasp both handles and close the Torah before making the Brocha after your Aliya.

have died "before Hashem". That is to say, if they were going to die at least do so by being מקדש שם שמים in the process, as opposed to simply dying from thirst.

In addition, they did have a legitimate complaint. The original premise of entering the desert was in order to eventually arrive in the promised land and here they were wandering around the desert with not a field in sight, and now they had run out of water!

Again they stressed their longing to stay connected to Hashem, but without the privations of the desert: וְלָמָּה הִבַּאתֶם אֶת קִהְלֵךְ אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לְמוֹת שָׁם – why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this desert to die. Note how they stress that they are the Khal Hashem. Essentially they were saying: "We could have served Hashem in Mitzrayim!"

So Moshe is hugely stressed out here. This time it's not the nochshleppers giving him grief, it's the Bnei Yisroel, who were genuinely upset and nervous and were getting very worked up - so worked up that Moshe and Aharon decided that their safest bet would be to move to the Ohel Moed, where they stood a chance of keeping the now rather unruly and angry mob at bay. They fell on their faces – perhaps to daven to Hashem, or maybe to show the crowd that they were not going to try to fight them like Moshe did with Korach.

Hashem appeared to Moshe with the famous instructions: "Take your stick, and you and Aharon should gather the people and before their eyes you should speak to the rock."

This is a high-stress situation, and given the circumstances who can fault Moshe for doing what he did last time he had to provide emergency water (Shmos 17:6): וְהָיְתָה בְּצוּר וְיִצְאֹוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מַיִם, וְשָׁתָה הָעָם – there Hashem told him

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת חקת

Mincha	7.30pm
Candle Lighting	7.56pm - 8.00pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	8.55am
1st Mincha	2.00pm
2nd Mincha	6.00pm
3rd Mincha	9.55pm
Shiur	Following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	11.00pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	7.45pm
Late Maariv	10.50pm

explicitly to strike the rock.

Now here Moshe is surrounded by the baying mob, and he panics and strikes the rock. Nu, what should he do? It's not like he can open a manual and find the checklist for "thirst-crazed baying mob: rock relief solution". There is no control tower to call to. No ground crew or tech support. He was on his own, with just his brother for support.

I think he did a magnificent job. He should have gotten a gold medal for drawing out water from a rock, because as far as tricks go, that one's pretty impressive. What's more, he elevated Hashem's glory considerably, since he says quite clearly that he, Moshe, cannot extract water from a stone even if he tried! "Only Hashem can do that," said Moshe. **הַמֶּן הַסֹּלֶעַ הַזֶּה - נוֹצִיאַ לָכֶם מַיִם** - Do you honestly expect I can somehow or another conjure forth the millions of litres of water we need right now for you and your cattle? Anything that happens now is Hashem's doing! Not mine."

Yet we know he got punished for this incident. Why? What did he do wrong? Maybe he should have spoken to the rock and not hit it. Really? How come in Chorev he was told to hit the rock? What's the difference between the two occasions? If he wasn't supposed to hit the rock, then why did Hashem tell him to take his staff with him?

It would be a bit like me saying to my son: "Take the chainsaw and get rid of the tree." When he cuts the tree down instead of digging it up, I get all upset. "Why did you cut it down? I never told you to cut it down!" I shout. My son will put on his puppy-dog-eyes look and ask: "Why did you tell me to take the chainsaw then, if not to cut the tree down with it?"

Anyway, how is speaking to the rock somehow dramatically more impressive than hitting a rock and getting water? I think either one is pretty cool.

The Abravanel quotes a plethora of opinions and dismisses almost all of them out of hand.

One could argue that the hitting was not the issue. What was really the problem was that Moshe spoke them in a very derogatory fashion: **שְׁמַעוּ - נָא הַמְּרִים** - listen up you rebels". Today of course if we called someone a rebel they would start a new brand by that name and try to get a few ASBOs as well to prove their coolness is genuine. But then, in those times, that was no way for Moshe to talk to Bnei Yisroel who were genuinely fearful due to the water shortage.

Well, that seems implausible, since in Devorim (31:27), Moshe gets a bit sharper than that and says: **כִּי אֲנֹכִי יֹדְעֵתִי אֶת-מִרְדְּךָ, וְאֶת-עֲרִפְךָ הַקֹּשֶׁה; הִן בְּעוֹדֵנִי - I know your rebelliousness and your stubbornness; even while I am alive you are rebelling against Hashem, surely you will after my death!**" So the Bnei Yisroel get an earful then, and Moshe does not get punished for that. So it's implausible he would get punished for yelling at them here either.

One could take the Rambam's approach and say that Moshe got punished for getting angry. Anger, as the Rambam points out, is tantamount to Avodoh Zoroh. When the father of all the prophets - Moshe - gets angry, this is a terrible thing since it looks like he serving Avodoh Zoroh! The Ramban, however shoots this one down since the Torah itself explains why they were being punished: **וַיַּעַן אֶל הַמַּעֲמֻתָּם בִּי הַקְּדוֹשִׁים לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** - since you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisroel". So whatever that means, it certainly does not refer to Moshe getting annoyed.

The Ramban offers the explanation of Rabbeinu Chananel, that their sin was in the way Moshe phrased things: **הַמֶּן הַסֹּלֶעַ הַזֶּה נוֹצִיאַ לָכֶם מַיִם** - are WE supposed to draw water for you from this stone?" What Moshe should have said was "Is HASHEM supposed to draw water for you from this stone?" Emphasis on Hashem.

This is a little difficult to swallow (apologies for the pun), since it is clear that Moshe was trying to explain that neither he nor his brother Aharon could somehow or another draw water from a stone, and only Hashem could.

The Ibn Ezra quotes a pshat that Moshe was asked by the Bnei Yisroel to draw water from a stone that they had chosen (presumably a committee had been formed to determine the criterion of a suitable committee member for choosing a stone-chooser some three committees down the line) but Moshe went and hit the stone that Hashem commanded him to. Since Moshe did not hit the stone that the Beni Yisroel asked him to, he failed to sanctify Hashem's name.

This seems a little implausible, because how could he be punished for following Hashem's instructions? As it is, Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon (30:27): **אֲשֶׁר מִרְיָתָם אֶת פִּי** - because you defied my word!" Now, doing exactly what Hashem tells you to do is hardly defiance.

The Ibn Ezra blends various sources and claims that when Moshe became

angry he sinned (as the Rambam explains), and because of that he lost his connection to Hashem that allowed him to produce miracles. He struck the rock once, realised nothing was happening and decided to strike twice. He should have really paused to calm down. Again, this lacks any support from the verses that follow.

Rav Yosef Albo, who was the author of Sefer Halkkarim - a pivotal work on Judaic philosophy - argues that Moshe should have talked to the rock as opposed to hitting it.

When Eliyohu gave Achov an earful he said (Melochim I 17:1): **אִם-יִהְיֶה - רִי וְיִמְטֹר כִּי אִם לֹא יִמְטֹר - תִּהְיֶה הָאָרֶץ טַל וְיִמְטֹר כִּי אִם לֹא יִמְטֹר** - there will be no rain in these years except by my word." So, to get rain, all that needed to happen was for Eliyohu to say: "Let it rain". This was a major kiddush Hashem. Moshe should have done likewise.

If this argument were true, it fails to explain the incident with the water in Chorev. How come at Chorev hitting the rock was a kiddush Hashem, and now only speaking is a kiddush Hashem?

The pshat my rebbe favoured in school was that Moshe chas vesholom never did an aveiroh. Chas vesholom. Moshe was perfect. What are these pesukim talking about then? They are saying that Moshe and Aharon suffered as a result of the aveiros of the generation, but they themselves were blame free, and to say that either of them did an aveiroh is out-and-out apikorsus, loshon horah and rechilus, and anyone who says such a thing will burn in hell for eternity with coals in their mouths and regret the very day they were born.

Yup, well, as it happens there are numerous pesukim in this very sedroh that contradict this opinion flatly, and the Torah is full of pesukim that blow this one out of the water, and the overwhelming majority of the rishonim are of the opinion that Moshe in fact did sin. And made mistakes.

Even if we are quite happy to settle for Moshe being punished, what did Aharon do? He just tagged along like he was told to do. What could he say if the Great Leader decided to hit the rock instead of talk to it? Hashem didn't even talk to Aharon about this anyway, so he had no idea what the instructions were beyond what Moshe told him. So how exactly could he be blamed? OK, so Moshe said they were supposed to talk to the rock, and all of a sudden Moshe is hitting the rock. By the time Aharon has realised what has happened, it's too late to stop Moshe. Nu, poor fellow! How can he be blamed for anything?

So the Abravanel concludes that given all these arguments it is implausible to argue that Moshe and Aharon were being punished so severely for what is a minor infraction, if it was an infraction altogether. We have to study the verse very carefully in order to understand what is happening.

In 20:12 we read: **לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי הַקְּדוֹשִׁים לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תְבִיאֻן אֶת - הַקְּדוֹשִׁים הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם** - you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them.

This is not very specific in that we have no idea in which way they have lacked faith in Hashem. From the story of the water here, the opposite seems true.

Then in 20:24 we read: **כִּי לֹא יָבֵא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל אֲשֶׁר מִרְיָתָם - אֶת פִּי לְמִי מִרְיָתָם** - for he shall not come to the Land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you defied My word at the waters of dispute.

The translation is inaccurate, however. The second to last word is **לְמִי** and not **בְּמִי**. This means something quite different, the former meaning "to" and the latter meaning "in" or "at"; so the verse really reads: "because you defied My word TO the waters of dispute". Whatever that means, it does not imply that the May Merivoh were the issue at all!

So what was the issue here; why were Moshe and Aharon being punished? Moshe was being punished for the incident with the spies. He set them up for failure. Hashem simply said: **שְׁלַח לָךְ אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן** - send for yourself some men and they should scout out the land." But to that Moshe adds a long list of instructions (13:18 to 13:20).

Who asked him to add all that? Moshe put these ideas into the spies heads, and set them up for a whopping failure and the denial of entry for an entire generation of over 600,000 people; for that Moshe was being punished.

And Aharon? Although he intended to try to defuse the situation, at the end of the day he actually built an avodah zoroh with his own hands. Yes, he meant it all for the good but the outcome was terrible, and 3,000 people lost their lives as a result.

So why now; why here? That's because Hashem was unwilling to punish them at the time of the golden calf and the spies; he held off their punishment until the last possible moment. Once Miriam had died, it was not long after that her brothers joined her.