

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Faiga bas Rav Nachum z"l.

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"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

10 TAMMUZ

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS CHUKAS

Use Your Words

Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon, "Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the eyes of Bnei Yisroel, therefore you will not bring this congregation into the land that I have given them (20:12).

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah relates that after the death of Miriam the miraculous well that had provided water for Bnei Yisroel throughout their sojourns in the desert ran dry. The people complained about the lack of water and Hashem ordered Moshe to take his staff and speak to "the rock." However, rather (at least according to Rashi's interpretation) than speak to it, Moshe struck the rock with the staff. Although this act was effective in producing water, Hashem declared that they (both Moshe and Aharon) had sinned (*ibid*).

In other words, they defied Hashem by hitting instead of speaking to the rock. The resulting punishment was calamitous to Moshe and Aharon; they were forbidden from entering the land of Israel. How is this an appropriate punishment for their sin?

The harsh condemnation for hitting a rock is also difficult to understand. While it is true that Hashem had asked them to speak to the rock, not to strike it, they aren't castigated for not following Hashem's directive; they are scolded for not "sanctifying" Hashem's name. How did their action contribute to this issue? It is certainly a tremendous miracle for water to emerge from a rock, even if Moshe brought it forth through a strike. Why

isn't that considered a sufficient *kiddush Hashem*?

Chazal lists this incident as one of the ten times when Bnei Yisroel tested Hashem. But why are they blamed for being concerned about their lack of a water source in the desert? Additionally, in *Sefer Shemos*, prior to the creation of the well of Miriam, Moshe was commanded to strike a rock and water would flow for Bnei Yisroel. Why is he punished for doing the same here?

In *Sefer Shemos*, the people stumbled into the desert with no water and were actually thirsty. Hashem thus instructs Moshe to hit the rock to create a water source for them. In our *parsha*, they still had water (Chazal discuss the rivers of water between the different encampments in the desert), they merely lacked a continuing source for the water. They weren't thirsty; they were worried about their future as the source of their water had dried up.

Hashem then instructed Moshe to speak to the rock. The purpose of speaking to the rock was to teach the people that the land responds to the needs of Bnei Yisroel. By speaking to the rock, Moshe would have demonstrated that there is no need to force it to provide water, but rather that Hashem had created an entity that would respond to their needs.



The rock was meant to represent the attribute of Eretz Yisrael. Just as the rock was sensitive to their needs, they were to understand that Eretz Yisrael is unlike any other land. Eretz Yisrael has a symbiotic relationship with Bnei Yisroel – they take care of it and it takes care of them by responding to their every need. Because of this, Bnei Yisroel are later ousted from the land of Israel for not keeping *shemittah*; they didn't keep their end of the bargain and the land literally vomited them out.

This is also why Moshe and Aharon are punished by being banished from Eretz Yisroel: they failed to show the greatness of Hashem and his care for them in creating a land that responds to their needs, not one that has to be forced to submit to their will.

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Family Support

The entire congregation saw that Aharon had perished, and they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire House of Israel (20:29).

This week's *parsha* records events that took place in the fortieth (and final) year of the Bnei Yisroel's desert sojourns. One of these unfortunate episodes is the death of Moshe Rabbeinu's brother – Aharon.

Chazal are puzzled by the Torah's curious comment that Aharon was mourned by the "entire House of Israel." Rashi (ad loc) explains that Aharon was mourned by even the women because Aharon's personality is described as one who pursues peace – "he would instill a love between quarreling parties and between a man and his wife."

The commentators (Mizrachi, Sifsei Chachamim) contrast the depiction of the mourning for Aharon to the mourning that took place when Moshe died: "*Bnei Yisroel wept for Moshe...*" (*Devarim* 34:8). Rashi (ad loc) explains that when Moshe died he was only mourned by the men, but when Aharon died he was mourned by both the men and the women. In other words, the women also felt the loss when Aharon died because Aharon contributed to their *shalom bayis* – maintaining a harmonious marriage.

Yet this disparity in the mourning is difficult to understand. The Gemara (*Taanis* 9a) explains that it was in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu that Bnei Yisroel received the miraculous *manna* bread for the forty years in the desert. Surely, the women could appreciate the benefit of the *manna* that Moshe Rabbeinu's merit brought directly to their lives as well. Why is it that they felt the death of Aharon so much more acutely that they openly mourned for him?

There is a great lesson here, one that is either lost or simply ignored by many in

today's generation of Jews. The reason that they mourned Aharon was because he directly contributed to their *shalom bayis*, an ideal that they have a **shared** responsibility to maintain. In other words, real *shalom bayis* is only achieved when both the husband and wife take responsibility for the health of their relationship.

By contrast, the obligation of being a breadwinner falls solely on the shoulders of the husband. It is his responsibility to make sure that his family is provided for. The burden of supporting the family is a not a wife's obligation. While many women work to help support their families, the key word is "help" – they are helping their husband meet his obligations.

Many young men feel entitled and expect their wives to work to support the family. However, this isn't the Jewish view of marriage, and it should be obvious to every groom because the *kesuvah* (which is a unilaterally binding contract – only describing the obligations that the husband is accepting upon himself) outlines very clearly that he is the one responsible to support his wife; there is no *quid pro quo*.

Thus, when Moshe died the women weren't as sensitive to feeling a personal loss which would cause them to grieve. The *manna* that came on behalf of Moshe was a kindness directly to the men of the family whose responsibility it is to support their household. On the other hand, Aharon's death was a personal loss as it related to their shared responsibility of *shalom bayis*.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, after Sichon, King of Emorites, attacks and is defeated by Bnei Yisroel, Og, the King of Bashan, does the same exact thing – and, of course, he is soundly defeated as well. But what's interesting to note is the manner in which he died: The Gemara (*Berachos* 54b) says that Moshe was ten *amos* tall, his staff (or his ax, as Artscroll defines it) was ten *amos* tall, he jumped ten *amos* high, and only hit his ankle. If this is to be understood literally (and Rashi there confirms that Moshe was 10 *amos*), this would make his ankle 60 feet high (according to the *Chazon Ish* that an *amah* is two feet).

But exactly how tall was Og? All we need to do is compare him to a regular sized person, with bigger numbers. A normal six foot person is 72 inches with about three inch ankle space. So a person's height is 24 times three inches, or 72 inches. Therefore, Og's (minimum) height is 24 times 60, or 1,440 feet tall!

To put this in perspective; this is taller than the Empire State Building and 240 times the size of a person. Even at his height, he had plenty of space to breathe, as humans can live at an altitude of almost 20,000 feet. At 240 times the size of a normal person he would "only" have to eat about an entire cow a day, as it contains a little over 500,000 calories. In addition, if a six foot person were standing next to Og he would be almost exactly this big: [←→]. His body, being that huge (and we imagine, pretty impossible to move), should be found somewhere around the Golan Heights, because Josephus (*Antiquities* 4:5:3) identifies Bashan as being somewhere near the Golan Heights.



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