



Parshas Chukas 2021, between a rock and a hard place

This week's Parsha Perspective is in memory of Shlomo Ben Edward and Edward Ben Efraim. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing & in honor of the Refuah Shlema of Shaul Ben Berta, Sasson Bezalel Ben Batia, Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Tova Basha. May they have a complete and speedy recovery.

Our Parsha picks up in the final years of the Jewish nation's journey in the desert. We begin with Moshe teaching the intricate laws of the Parah Adumah.

The Parah Adumah is a red cow that was never used and is slaughtered as an offering. Then, it is burnt, and its ashes were used to rectify the most severe of ritual impurities, Tum'as Mes, an impurity contracted through interacting with a human corpse.

When a person touches a human corpse, they must use the Parah Adumah ritual to become pure again. This process takes seven days, on which the third and seventh days they must be sprinkled with the ashes of the Parah Adumah.

We learn about the death of Miryam, Moshe's sister and the wife of one of the spies who spoke virtuously about Israel, Calev Ben Yefuneh. The rock that would miraculously provide water to the nation in her merit dried up with her passing. The Jewish people then began to complain of thirst to Moshe and Aaron, who turned to G-d for guidance.

What Moshe did next caused G-d to ban him from leading the Jewish nation into the land of Israel. The simple and conventional explanation is that G-d told Moshe to speak to the rock.

But when that did not work, Moshe hit the rock, and it began to produce water once again. However, G-d saw that action as a violation of Moshe's trust in Him and His ability to keep the Jewish nation alive in the desert.

However, a question comes to mind: After trying unsuccessfully to speak to the rock, Moshe hit it and the stone began to produce water for the nation. As the Pasuk (20:11) "*Moshe raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his stick, and out came water for community and their animals to drink.*" But why did Moshe need to hit the rock two times? What changed between the first and second hit?!

Rashi (*Rabbeinu Shlomo Yitzchaki, the most well-known commentary on the Torah*) on this Pasuk answers this question by clarifying that water did seep out after Moshe's first strike. But it was just a small amount, so he struck the rock a second time, and it began to give enough water for the entire nation.

Rashi explains that the second strike was done with far more strength and force. As Moshe was told in Parshas Beshalach (*Shemos 17:6*) to vigorously hit the rock to get water for the nation before their war Amalek. So Moshe used the same method to hopefully achieve a similar result.

However, the Rabbeinu Bachya (*Rav Bachya ben Asher, a Spanish commentary*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He agrees with Rashi that only a drop of water seeped out of the rock after Moshe's first strike. But after his second hit, the water began to pour out and flow freely.

The Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Moshe had to hit the rock twice because G-d was trying to give him a way out. For Moshe was told to speak to the rock, and yet he hit the rock one time.

Therefore, G-d let only a few drops of water seep out after the first strike, so Moshe would have an obvious choice to make. Would he follow the command that G-d clearly told him? Or would he try again and hit the rock in the hopes of quenching the thirst of his people?!

To make this decisive decision even harder, his choice would have to be made in front of the entire Jewish nation. As the previous Pasuk writes (20:10) *“Moshe and Aaron gathered the congregation in front of the rock; and said to them, listen rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?”*

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ibn Attar, a Moroccan Kabbalist*) adds that this decision came easy to Moshe Rabbeinu. Because Moshe is known as ***“the faithful shepherd,”*** for he **ALWAYS** looked after his flock **even to his own detriment.**

As we see countless times during their travels, Moshe took the Jewish people’s side whenever speaking with G-d. Even when G-d wanted to destroy the nation and create a new people from him, Moshe begged for mercy. He told to G-d, *“erase me from your book if you wish to destroy the Jewish people.”* Moshe was the ultimate and ideal leader because he put his people first, even to his own disadvantage.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we understand that when facing a tough decision, we must use our values and principles as our guiding light. Whether deciding on a career or picking whom to marry, taking a chance, or staying safe, keep your beliefs and morals at the forefront of your mind. For they will guide you on your path to achieving success and happiness!

***“Between the rock and a hard place,
there lies a space full of choice.”***

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*