

Indeed, why? If Moses was innocent of his generation's sin, why was it decreed that he share their fate? There is a poignant Midrash that offers the following parable:

A shepherd was given the king's flock to feed and care for, but the flock was lost. When the shepherd sought to enter the royal palace, the king refused him entry. "When the flock that was entrusted to you is recovered, you, too, will be admitted."

The original plan was that the 600,000 whom Moses took out of Egypt should enter the Land. But that generation remained in the desert. You are their leader, said G-d to Moses. Their fate is your fate.

This message is implicit in G-d's words to Moses immediately following his striking of the rock: "... therefore, you will not bring this congregation into the land I have given them." From this the Midrash deduces: "This congregation" you will not bring in; that congregation you will. "This congregation"—the generation whom Moses confronted at the rock—was not Moses' generation. His generation were buried in the desert.

When they will enter the Land, G-d is saying to Moses—and they will, when the final redemption will redeem all generations of history—you will lead them in.

### Live & Laugh

"What am I supposed to do with this?" grumbled a motorist as the policeman handed him a speeding ticket. "Keep it," the cop said, "when you collect four of them you get a bicycle."

- ◆ The **Scottish Leader Signature** whiskey at Shul is sponsored by **Distell** & available for purchase at **Norman Goodfellows**.
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## Calendar

- ◆ Shacharis 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Shul Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Social Shabbos**
- ◆ Mincha: 4:50 pm
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 5
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 6:01pm
- ◆ Mincha next week 5:20 pm

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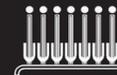
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Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee - 75th Year of Sydenham Shul



# Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

Published by the Sydenham Highlands North Hebrew Congregation Johannesburg, South Africa



1 Jul 2017

Parshas Chukas

7 Tammuz 5777

## Where There's a Will There's a Why

by: *Rabbi Yossy Goldman*

Why do certain people find satisfaction in Judaism while others are bored stiff? Why is faith exciting for some and irrelevant for others, a joy for one guy and an absolute burden for the next? One fellow cannot imagine going to work without first putting on his Tefillin and the other hasn't seen his Tefillin since his Bar Mitzvah 40 years ago. This woman can't wait to get to Shul and the other can't wait to get out. Why?

This week we read a special Maftir called Parah all about the ultimate *mitzvah* of faith, the Red Heifer. It is a statutory commandment whose reason still remains a mystery. I must admit, to take the ashes of a red heifer and sprinkle them on a person so he may attain spiritual purification is, indeed, rather mind-boggling.

According to the Midrash, the Almighty promised Moses that to him He would reveal the secret meaning of this mitzvah; but, only after Moses would initially accept it as a Divine decree. If he would first take it on faith, thereafter rational understanding would follow.

The truth is that there are answers to virtually every question people may have about Judaism. Intelligent skeptics I meet are often amazed that what they had long written off as empty ritual is actually philosophically profound with rich symbolic meaning. But the skeptic has to be ready to listen. You can hear the most eloquent, intellectual explanation but if you are not mentally prepared to accept

that this may in fact be a worthwhile exercise, chances are you won't be impressed. Once we stop resisting and accept that there really is inherent validity, suddenly Judaism makes all the sense in the world.

It is a psychological fact that we can grasp that which we sincerely desire to understand. But if there is a subject which we have no interest in, we will walk into mental blockades regularly. The previous Rebbe, Rabbi JI Schneerson, says this explains why some very astute businessmen may sit at a Talmud class and find themselves struggling to grasp basic principles of rabbinic reasoning. Why is it that the same person who can concoct brilliant schemes in the boardroom fails to follow straightforward logic in the Talmud class? The answer, he says, is that this businessman is really not that interested in the subject. But if it was half as important to him as making money, he might well become a Rosh Yeshiva!

So, in the same way that G-d told Moshe that he could come to comprehend the meaning of the red heifer but only after he accepted it, similarly today, those who genuinely wish to understand Judaism will succeed, but only if they buy-in to the product on some level first.

When I was studying in Yeshiva, I would always try to attend the annual Encounter with Chabad weekends for university students. These were organized to expose unaffiliated Jewish students to Judaism over a Shabbat and there were lectures by leading Rabbis and religious academics. Once a young man shouted back at the lecturer, "How can you expect me to put on Tefillin if I don't believe

in G-d?!” Very calmly, the speaker replied, “First put on Tefillin and I promise you will see that you really do believe in G-d.”

Throughout his many volumes of correspondence the Rebbe reiterated this idea. Faith needs fuel. Mitzvahs are the food of faith. When we observe a mitzvah we unconsciously tap into the wellsprings of faith we all possess. We develop and nurture our innate *emunah* and *bitochon*, our faith and trust in Hashem. And we will be pleasantly surprised at the powerful faith we each really do have after all.

We all have a G-dly faith inside us. It just needs to be revealed. As illogical as it may sound, if we start by observing a *mitzvah* we find that our faith will follow through and begin to blossom. It has been shown to be true time and again. If we are genuinely searching for truth and we are objective, there are ample answers. If we are not interested, no answer will be good enough. As they say in the classics, *try it, you'll like it*.

## Parsha Pointers

*Chukas: Artscroll Chumash pg 838;  
Living Torah pg 757*

Moses is taught the laws of the red heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body. After forty years of journeying through the desert, Miriam dies and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land. Aaron dies at Hor Hagar and is succeeded in the high priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people “speak against G-d and Moses”; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole, and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honour of the miraculous well that provided the water in the desert. Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og and conquers their lands, which lie east of

the Jordan.

## The Waters of Strife

### *The Price of Leadership*

*By Rabbi Yanki Tauber*

One of the most puzzling passages in the Torah is the story of the Waters of Strife, in the wake of which G-d decreed that Moses would die in the desert and would not enter the Land of Israel.

A hundred generations of Torah scholars, beginning with Moses himself and continuing with the sages of the Midrash, the biblical commentaries and the chassidic masters, struggle with this enigmatic chapter. As we speak, someone is writing a “Parshah piece” that searches for some explanation of the event, or at least a lesson to be derived from it.

But first the facts (as related in Numbers 20:1–13): After traveling for forty years in the wilderness, the people of Israel arrive in Kadesh in the Zin Desert, on the border of the Holy Land. There is no water, the people are thirsty, and as they are wont to do in similar circumstances, they complain to Moses. It is not a pretty sight. “If only we had died,” they rage, “when our brethren died before G-d! Why have you brought the congregation of G-d to this desert, to die there, we and our cattle? Why have you taken us out of Egypt—to bring us to this evil place . . . ?”

Moses calls on G-d, who instructs him to “take the staff, and gather the people, you and Aaron your brother. You shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will give its water.” When all are assembled before the rock, Moses addresses the people: “Listen, rebellious ones! Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” Moses raises his hand and strikes the rock twice with his staff. Water gushes forth, and the people and their cattle drink.

Whereupon G-d says to Moses and Aaron: “Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation into

the land I have given them.”

What did Moses do wrong? What was the sin that warranted such a devastating punishment?

The commentaries search the text for clues. **Rashi** (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105) points out that G-d instructed Moses to *speak* to the rock, while Moses *struck* it. Thus, he failed to “sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel” (extracting water by speaking would have been a greater miracle).

**Maimonides** (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135–1204) has a different explanation: Moses’ failing was that he got angry and spoke harshly to the people (his “Listen, you troublemakers!” speech).

(The chassidic master **Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev** (1740–1810) has an interesting insight here: Rashi’s and Maimonides’ explanations, says the Berditchever, are two sides of the same coin. A *tzaddik* is not only a leader of his people, but also the master of his environment. These two roles are intertwined, the latter deriving from the former. If a leader’s relationship with his people is loving and harmonious, then the physical world, too, willingly yields its resources to the furtherance of their goals. But if his influence is achieved through harsh words of rebuke, then he will find it necessary to do battle with nature at every turn, and forcefully impose his will on the physical world.)

**Nachmanides** (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–1270) finds difficulty with both explanations. If Moses wasn’t supposed to strike the rock, he argues, why did G-d tell him to take along his staff? The Torah repeats this fact, further emphasizing that “Moses took along the staff from the presence of G-d, as He had commanded him.” In light of G-d’s instructions to Moses on a previous occasion to extract water from a rock by striking it (see Exodus 17:6), was it not reasonable for Moses to assume that the staff was to serve a similar function in this case? (Unless G-d was setting him up for this—but more on that later.) As for Maimonides’ explanation, there were other instances in which the Torah tells us (more explicitly than in this case) that Moses got angry, and for apparently less justification. If no punishment was decreed in those cases, why now?

Nachmanides offers his explanation: Moses erred

in saying to the people, “Shall *we* then bring forth water for you from this rock?”—words that can be seen as implying that extracting water from a rock is something that Moses, rather than G-d, does. The moment a leader assumes an identity of his own, and his accomplishments are attributed to him personally—the moment he comes to embody anything other than his people’s collective identity and their relationship with G-d—he has failed in his role. (Nachmanides finds support for his explanation in G-d’s opening words to Moses, “Because you did not believe in Me . . .”—implying that this was a failure of faith rather than a lapse of obedience or a surrender to anger.)

But there is one common denominator in these and the numerous other explanations offered by the commentaries: the implication that whatever the problem was, it wasn’t really the problem. Basically, G-d is getting Moses on a technicality. In his arguments with G-d, Moses senses this, in effect saying to G-d: “You set me up!”

The text supports his complaint. Forty years earlier there occurred the incident of the spies, in which the generation that came out of Egypt and received the Torah at Sinai revealed themselves to be unwilling and unable to progress to the next stage of G-d’s plan—to enter and take possession of the Holy Land. At that time, the Torah recounts, G-d decreed that the entire generation (all males above the age of 20) would die out in the desert. With the sole exception of two men. “Except for Caleb the son of Yefuneh and Joshua the son of Nun,” the two spies who resisted the plot of their ten colleagues (Numbers 14:30).

Moses, who craved to enter the Holy Land with every fibre of his being, was not guilty of the sin of the spies, so some other pretext had to be found. Since “with the righteous, G-d is exacting to a hairsbreadth,” it wasn’t impossible to find a pretext. But G-d had already determined 40 years earlier that the entire generation—Moses and Aaron included—would not enter the Land. “This is a plot that you contrived against me,” the Midrash quotes Moses saying to the Almighty.

Sydenham Shul 24 Main Street, Rouxville, 2192.

Telephone: 640-5021, Fax: 485-2810

E-mail: [sydshul@sydshul.co.za](mailto:sydshul@sydshul.co.za)

Website: [www.sydshul.co.za](http://www.sydshul.co.za)

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