

## Parshas Chukas

### TAKING ONE FOR THE TEAM

Towards the final stage of the journey in the desert, after Miriam's wellspring dried up upon her death, Moshe is instructed to provide a new source of water for Jews:

קח אֶת-הַמַּטֵּה, וְהִקְהַל אֶת-הָעֵדָה אֵתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִידְךָ, וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֶל-הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם, וְנָתַן מִיַּמּוֹ; וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן-הַסֵּלַע, וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה וְאֶת-בְּעִירָם – Take your staff, gather your brother Ahron, and the entire nation, and you should speak to the rock before their very eyes, and it will provide its water. Extract water from the rock for them, and make them drink, and their animals too. (20: 8)

But Moshe did not do this:

וַיִּרָם מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ, וַיִּדְּ אֶת-הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ–פַעַמַּיִם; וַיִּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים, וַתִּשְׁתְּ הָעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם הַסֵּלַע – Moshe raised his hand, and struck the rock with his staff, twice. Water gushed out, and the people and their animals drank. (20: 11)

Immediately after this, Hashem berates Moshe, and informs him that he will not be permitted to enter the land of Israel.

R' Shimon Schwab notes that the Mishna in Avos assures that someone who causes the public to improve and better themselves is saved from sin. Why was Moshe – “Rabbeinu”, ultimate teacher extraordinaire – not saved from stumbling?

R' Schwab explains that it was no mistake. It was a calculated decision.

There is something in Hashem's command that doesn't seem to fit – וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה – making them drink. If there was water, they would drink of their own accord; what was the role Moshe and Ahron played in “making them” drink?

Perhaps Moshe made an alarming connection between what he was told, and what he'd experienced earlier in their travels. Moshe knew had heard this sort of instruction before:

וְהִשְׁקָהּ, אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה, אֶת-מֵי הַמָּרִים, הַמְאָרְרִים – The woman is made to drink the bitter water... (5: 24)

ויקח את-העגל אשר עשו, וישרף באש, ויטחן, עד אשר-דק; ויזר על-פני המים, וישק את-בני ישראל they had made, burnt it, ground it finely. He scattered it in water, and made them drink (32: 20)

The sota – a woman suspected of adultery – is made to drink a concoction that would identify if she were guilty or not, resulting in her gruesome death if guilty. The Golden Calf water similarly clarified allegiance, causing a plague that resulted in tens of thousands of deaths too, as per the Gemara in Avoda Zara.

Moshe made a decision here. He identified what would happen if את-העדה והשקית were to take place, and wanted no part in it. They were on the cusp of entering Israel, and he did not want to see another plague take place. Another generation ripped apart! So he took the initiative, and engineered a way around את-העדה – which was ויזר ותשתה העדה. There was no making them drink, because ותשתה העדה. He had saved them.

In his farewell speech, he reminds them of the terrible price he paid for them:

גם-בי התאנף יהוה, בגללכם לאמר: גם-אתה, לא-תבא שם – Hashem was also furious with me, for you! He said, “Neither will you enter”. (1: 37)

Moshe did it בגללכם – for you! – he did what he felt to be right for the greater good, even though it violated what he was told, and bore a terrible price for it.

It takes a lot of knowledge to be able to weigh up the data to make this kind of decision, and should not be made lightly. The decision would still be legally wrong, and the perpetrator would be hounded and vilified; a vigilante. And the critics would be correct – the decision should not really have been made.

But a hero will sacrifice everything with no guarantee. That’s what sacrifice is; and what a hero does.

## MOSHE AS A REPRESENTATIVE

The Maharal explains that the reason Avraham, Yitzchak and Yakov did not and could not have received the Torah is because they had no “nation”. They were individuals, and individuals pass on. The Torah is eternal and cannot fade into obscurity; it must therefore be given to a nation.

Chazal understand that after the Golden Calf, Moshe argued in defence of the Jews that אלהיך was only said to Moshe, in the second person singular, so technically, the Jews had not violated אלהיך by engaging in idol worship.

But if the Torah is given to a nation, not an individual, how could Moshe, claim he received it alone?

The answer lies in understanding Moshe’s role.

After departing Egypt and being saved at the Red Sea, the Torah emphasises what Yisro heard had happened, to “Moshe and his people”. Rashi deduces that the Torah implies that Moshe was equal to the whole nation.

Much later, in the final stages of the journey through the desert, Moshe sent emissaries to Edom, requesting permission for the Jews to pass through on their way to Canaan, which was declined. Throughout the episode,

the Torah alternates between Moshe and the Jews as having sent them, from which Rashi deduces that the Torah illustrates that a national leader acts in the capacity as a proxy for the entire people.

The Maharal points out that these seem mutually exclusive. If Moshe was equal to the Jews, he achieved something greater than any other leader. How then, would his actions shed light on the authority of other leaders, that they act as agents of the people they represent?

R' Yehoshua Hartman explains that Moshe being equal to the Jewish people isn't necessarily literal. If he were to pray, it's not as though that would count as their prayer too.

A leader is an agent or representative of his people. Moshe was more than that; the "equality" meant his actions carried the same weight as the nation itself. Regular activity, such as diplomacy like sending emissaries, is an act of any leader as a representative, and it is from this aspect that we can extrapolate from Moshe to other leaders.

Moshe was a microcosm of Yisrael. There were the 600,000 people at Sinai, plus Moshe. Whatever made them into Yisrael at Sinai, Moshe already was. He could claim that only he heard אֱלֹהֵיךָ ה' אֵלֵינוּ because the qualities of Yisrael at Sinai that he represented were not guilty of the Golden Calf. This is the intent behind labelling him equal to the nation.

Moshe was the pinnacle of Yisrael and humanity. He represented all that was good in the people. The people he represented could not be the people who were guilty of the Golden Calf, and thus, the people arguably ought not to be held guilty at all.

## IN THE CLOUDS

The Clouds of Glory marked travel movements for the Jews in the desert, and according to Midrash, flattened obstacles, cleared wild beasts, and possibly cleaned their clothing too. The Chag of Succos is dedicated to commemorating them. There is no equivalent display of appreciation for the manna or Miriam's well, which are all along the same line of supernatural providence for the nation. Why are the Clouds remembered, and not the well or manna?

The Chida explains that food and water are the basic requirements for survival. Taking the Jews into the wilderness of the desert necessarily meant God would provide nourishment from somewhere; what could otherwise be expected? The Jews had their own shelter through tents and huts. But Clouds that protected the camp from the harsh sun, and according to Midrash even more, is far beyond what could have been expected – לפנים משורת הדין.

Secondly, they were a gift that showed God's love for the people. This is proven by the fact that people outside the camp – such as the Egyptian stragglers and people forced out due to tzaraas – did not benefit.

Thirdly, the Clouds were appreciated far more than the manna and the water. The Jews complained and gave orders regarding the food and drink on offer in the desert – but they never complained about the Clouds. The Clouds were the perfect gift.

The Chida notes that perhaps these are hinted to:

לְמַעַן יֵדְעוּ דִרְתֵיכֶם כִּי בַסִּכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – In order that your ensuing generations should know that I had the children of Israel live in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt.

I am the Lord, your God. (23: 43)

לָמַעַן יִדְעוּ דַרְתֵיכֶם כִּי בְסִכּוֹת הוֹשַׁבְתִּי – I gave it to you as a gift; and they were enjoyed perfectly

אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – I gave it to the Jews; not the Egyptian stragglers.

בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם – I took you out of Egypt; so I fed you, but didn't have to provide the Clouds.

The Clouds were an incredible, and totally unwarranted display of affection to the Jews. This is commemorated on Succos.

## WHEN THEY ASK WHY

When explaining the principle underlying the Red Heifer, Rashi states that parties may taunt the Jews about the Torah and its reasoning, to which the response is simply that God decreed it; we have no right to challenge it. It is chok. This indicates that there is no true reason for the Red Heifer; it is a microcosm of our faith and trust in God.

But Rashi goes on to quote R' Moshe HaDarshan that it atones for the sin the Golden Calf. Which is it?

The Bikurei Avraham and Kehilas Yitzchak teach that all explanations for the Red Heifer ultimately conclude that it atones for the Golden Calf; precisely because of the fact it has no essential reason.

The sin of the Golden Calf was that the Jews threw off the yoke of heaven and cast aside their duties. The equal and opposite would be to take on something unquestioningly. Thus, the explanations by Rashi operate together; we don't really know the reason for the Red Heifer, which is precisely why it atones for Golden Calf.

The Panim Yafos notes that the Gemara in Brachos states that recalling a previous sin draws new attention to it, and it comes under scrutiny again in Heaven to some degree. This is potentially why parties inquire what the Red Heifer is for. Since it is because of the Golden Calf; we answer that it is an unknowable chok.

R' Chaim of Alexander notes that the Torah says the word לֵאמֹר – “to say”, with regard to the Red Heifer, twice, because there are two things to say:

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר – Hashem said to Moshe and Ahron to say...

זֵאת חֻקֵּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר – These are the decrees of the Torah that Hashem commanded; to say...

It is not the same thing said each time, because there are two answers. If enemies and miscreants ask, its a chok. If R' Moshe HaDarshan asks, then there is a great reason! (edit)

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