

Parshas Chukas

In the third Aliyah of Parshas Chukas, we face the episode of Moshe hitting “The Rock”¹ to elicit water flow. After Miriam’s passing, the blessing of the water flowing for the Jews in the desert ceased (Taanis 9a), and when they came to this location on their travels, the water was no longer flowing. The Jews complained, and Hashem told Moshe to speak to the rock to bring forth the water. Unfortunately, the water didn’t flow right away, which the Jews pushed back on, ultimately resulting in Moshe hitting the rock twice, whenceforth water.

How did this happen? This point triggered the outcome for Moshe that he would no longer be allowed to lead the Jews to the Land of Israel, and he would leave his time on earth in the desert.

The answer draws on multiple ideas. In the Ten Commandments, we learn that the commandment to respect your parents is juxtaposed with the commandments of Shabbos to teach us that if a parent tells you to break Shabbos, you don’t have to listen. This further means that you don’t have to listen if a parent tells you to sin. When Hashem (our Father in Heaven) commanded Moshe to

talk to the rock, he commanded him to break a law of possible idol worship. Moshe-frustrated by the potential mutiny of the Jews, opted to hit the rock, and water flowed². Moshe showed that we must work and mine the great things that may lie under a rock.

Our lives as Jews are challenging, and we have the great benefit of being able to mine the greatness out of our stone shells. Moshe showed the Jews that path before they lost their patience. But this lesson wasn’t for the generation then, as we could challenge the idea that the Jews lost faith so quickly when multiple unbelievable miracles had delivered them in the previous few years, the greatest miracle being the giving of the Torah. It may be hard to comprehend that the Jews would lose patience and not believe in the miracle of the water flowing when Moshe spoke to the rock. Moshe took matters into his own hands and showed the Jews the truth that through hard work, ‘water will flow.’

Going back to my earlier point, it would be hard to believe that the Jews would lack such faith that Moshe had to commit an offence. The truth is answered, as stated earlier, that this message wasn’t for the generation at that time but instead for us,

them deviating from Hashem, or perhaps if the water flowed from the talking, that we would have in our tradition, some form of rock talk, which would seem counter to our laws against idol worship. Can we blame someone from a later generation for conflating the miracle by Hashem of water flow at that time to later speaking to a rock to get it to perform a miracle? So, Moshe took matters into his own hands and hit the rock, for which that action resulted in the flow of water.

¹ It is a specific rock, according to Rashi, that was from Yakov’s time, and this rock receded to blend into other rocks...so as opposed to it being any rock, this was a specific one.

² Although it is possible Moshe did begin by talking to the rock and not waiting until the water flowed, you can rationalize that if the Commander in Chief Himself tells you to break the law, you do it. The result was the Jews did not see the miracle that would take place. The Jews’s lack of patience had rumblings of a mutiny that would have resulted in

who, with hard work, can lead a life as servants of Hashem.

From previous Parshas, we know the Rebbe's explanations around the idea that since that generation was so holy, they couldn't fathom being swept into the mundane to serve Hashem. Their witnessing of the miracle of the flow of water, just because Moshe spoke to the rock, would have been a concretization of that already instilled existence, which couldn't themselves enter into the land, and a new generation had to be born that was able to fathom the challenges of the fact in the mundane.

Moshe lost his chance to lead the Jews into the Land because, as the Gemara explains, anything that Moshe did would be permanent. Therefore, if he had led the Jews into Israel and built the Beis Hamikdash, it could never have been destroyed, which would have led to other issues or perhaps the inability for the final Beis Hamikdash to arrive, which gives us a deeper insight into Moshe's actions. He needed to make a sacrifice, and he made his own decision to show the people that we must toil for the outcomes of our lives rather than think it will just come. What happens when you hit a rock? Water will flow.

More importantly, we are at the tail end of the Golus, which will result in Mashiach. This means Moshe's sacrifice was to bring us to this point so that we toiled for generations before arriving at this destination. The one where we usher Mashiach. This is the time when we can fulfill the outcome of the Prophets, who knew the Beis Hamikdash had to be destroyed in order to bring forth the Third

and final Beis Hamikdash. May the merit of all our rock-breaking bring forth the wellsprings of the blessing of Mashiach speedily in our days.

Good Shabbos!