

# STAFF REVIEW

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshat Chukat

### Staff Review

**Volume XVII, No. 39**

**2 Tammuz 5765**

**July 9, 2005**

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Today's Learning:  
Challah 1:8-9  
O.C.372:3-5  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shabbat 68  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sanhedrin 42

We read in this week's parashah that Hashem told Moshe to speak to the rock to bring out water, but Moshe hit the rock instead. As a consequence, Moshe was told that he would not enter Eretz Yisrael. How was this consequence middah k'negged middah, i.e., how did the punishment fit the crime? Moreover, what was wrong with hitting the rock? In fact, almost 40 years earlier Hashem had told Moshe to hit a rock to bring forth water! (See Shmot 17:6.)

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni answers the second question as follows: When a teacher is teaching young students, he may sometimes be justified in using corporal punishment. However, with older students, this is never appropriate. So, too, Hashem said to Moshe: "When the stone was young, you were right to hit it, but now the stone is older and you should have talked to it."

R' Mendel Bluming shlita (rabbi in Potomac, Maryland) explained the parable of the midrash as

follows: An entire generation had passed between the first time Moshe hit the rock and the second time. The "tough" leadership that the generation of the Exodus required was not the same type of leadership needed by the generation that would enter Eretz Yisrael. This is why it was wrong for Moshe to hit the rock. And, this is why Moshe could not enter Eretz Yisrael. Moshe's actions did not detract from his righteousness, and he was still the greatest prophet who ever lived. However, his actions marked him as not being the right leader for the new generation.

This midrash is a lesson for parents and teachers in general, R' Bluming added: Different children require different types of attention and different types of discipline. There is no "one-size-fits-all" method of child-rearing. [Note that this lesson does not require taking the midrash literally as advocating corporal punishment.] (Heard from R' Bluming, 27 Sivan 5765)

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*"When the entire assembly saw that Aharon had died, they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire House of Israel." (20:29)*

The Talmudic-era work, Avot De'Rabbi Natan, teaches:

Why did all of Israel-men and women--cry for Aharon, whereas when Moshe died it says only that "the Children of Israel" cried [but not the "entire" House of Israel]? Because Moshe used to judge people in accordance with the law and rebuke those who sinned. Not so Aharon; he never told a man or a woman, "You have done wrong."

Moreover, there were thousands of children named Aharon, for if not for Aharon, they would not have been born. Aharon used to make peace between husbands and wives, and when they had a child, they would name him for Aharon.

Some say: Why does it say that the entire House of Israel cried? For who could see Moshe crying [for Aharon] and not cry with him?! Some say: Who could see Elazar [Aharon's son] and Pinchas [Aharon's grandson] crying and not cry with them?!

At that moment, Moshe asked to die the way Aharon had died, for he saw Aharon's bier decked with great honor and throngs of angels eulogizing him. Did Moshe express this wish to anyone? Of course not! Nevertheless, Hashem answered him, as it is written (Devarim 32:50), "and die on the mountain where you will ascend, and be gathered to your people, as Aharon your brother died on Mount Hor, and was gathered to his people."

(Avot De'Rabbi Natan ch. 12)

R' Rachamim Yitzchak Falagi z"l (Turkey; 19th century) writes: The Avot De'Rabbi Natan is offering two conflicting reasons why the people mourned Aharon-either it was for Aharon's honor, because he was a great peace-maker, or it was for the honor of his surviving relatives, Moshe, Elazar and

Pinchas. (Commentaries write that Aharon's other son, Itamar, is not mentioned because he was less in the public eye.) The two views expressed above reflect the halachic debate whether eulogies are intended to honor the dead or the living. [Ed. note: A practical distinction between these views exists when the deceased leaves a will instructing that he not be eulogized. If the eulogy is for the deceased's honor, we would obey his instruction. However, if the eulogy is for the honor of the living, we would not necessarily obey the wishes of the deceased.]

In the verse following our pasuk we read that a Canaanite king attacked Bnei Yisrael and took prisoners. The Midrash says that this was possible because Aharon was not eulogized properly. R' Falagi observes that this Midrash apparently adopts the view that the people cried for Aharon because of his relatives' honor, not for his own honor. Thus, they failed to honor him properly and were punished.

(Quoted in Meorei Ohr)

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Aharon was a lover of peace. How so? One should desire that there be peace between every two Jews just as Aharon loved peace between every two Jews. Thus it is written (Malachi 2:6), "The Torah of truth was in his mouth and no injustice was found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and fairness, and he turned many away from sin."

(Avot De'Rabbi Natan ch. 12)

R' Chaim Chizkiyah Medini z"l (author of the halachic encyclopedia Sdei Chemed; died 1904) commented as follows regarding the application of the above verse to Aharon:

When we find a dispute in the Mishnah between the academy known as Bet Hillel and the one of Bet Shammai, the halachah is usually decided in accordance with the view of Bet Hillel. The Gemara (Eruvin 13b) asks: Why did Bet Hillel merit that the halachah usually is decided in accordance with its viewpoint? Because its members were humble and they behaved pleasantly toward each other.

How is the Gemara answering the question? What do these character traits of Bet Hillel have to do with whom the halachah should side with?

Commentaries state that a person who never tells a lie will merit to ascertain "the truth of Torah." Yet, the Gemara states that there are times when a person should bend the truth. For example, the Gemara (Ketubot 16b) records the following dispute between Bet Hillel and Bet Shammai:

How does one dance before a bride [i.e., how should one compliment a bride]? Bet Shammai says, "Each bride according to her individual qualities." Bet Hillel says, "A bride is beautiful and full of favor."

We see from this dispute that Bet Hillel was willing to bend the truth for the sake of peace, whereas

Bet Shammai adhered to truth at all costs, even when the competing value was peace. Therefore, the latter group asserted, only we (Bet Shammai) merited to ascertain the true meaning of Torah.

This is why the Gemara quoted above wondered how the halachah could have been decided according to Bet Hillel's view. The Gemara's answer? That humility trumps all other values, including telling the truth. Thus, the humble Bet Hillel, not the honest Bet Shammai, prevailed in their halachic disputes.

Says the verse in Malachi quoted above: "The Torah of truth was in [Aharon's] mouth." But, do not think that Aharon followed the ways of Bet Shammai. No! "He walked with Me in peace." Aharon was the great peace-maker.

(Drush B'maalat Middat Ha'anavah;  
reprinted in Ohr Ha'chamah p. 333)

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R' Yechezkel Mordechai Wiesel z"l Hy"d

R' Yechezkel Mordechai Wiesel, a direct descendant of R' David ben Shmuel Halevi (Poland, 1586-1667; author of Turei Zahav), was briefly known in the years preceding the Holocaust as the "Second Ba'al Shem Tov." [The Ba'al Shem Tov was R' Yisrael ben Eliezer (1698-1760), the founder of the chassidic movement.] Overnight, R' Wiesel went from being an obscure shochet in the tiny Hungarian village of Polyen-Kobletsy (today in Ukraine) to being recognized as a chassidic rebbe and miracle worker. Reportedly, tens of thousands of Jews, as well as a large number of non-Jews, came to him for blessings, and many wondrous tales were told about him. Numerous people were helped by his blessings, whether they suffered from physical ailments or other concerns.

R' Wiesel was particularly known as a master of the mitzvah of tzedakah. Virtually every penny that was given to him by his thousands of visitors was distributed to the poor, while R' Wiesel himself lived the life of a pauper.

Just as suddenly as he had become known as a miracle worker, he suddenly stopped performing miracles and visitors stopped arriving. His final years, before the Holocaust, were spent traveling throughout Europe, and he was known to have visited Frankfurt, Germany.

R' Wiesel was killed in the Holocaust in Szolles, Hungary in 1944. (Sources: Encyclopedia La'chassidut; Sefer Marmarosh)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics

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