

Chukat 5771

BS"D Parashat Chukat 5771

The parasha relates a grievous incident in the thirty-ninth year of our sojourn in the desert, just when the nation was about to enter the Promised Land. The people demanded water – a legitimate request, but it was performed in a most inappropriate manner for those who were under the influence of the Torah for 40 years. And Moshe responded in a very uncharacteristic fashion (Bamidbar 20:10):



*Moshe and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and He (Moshe) said to them, "Listen, you **Morim**, can we bring you water out of this rock?"*

Rashi suggests three meanings for the word "morim" which Moshe used when facing the unruly, ingratiated mob: refusniks, fools or disciples who seek to direct their teachers.

It appears to be quite out of character that Moshe, the great rabbi and mentor of the Jewish people whom Hashem called "the most humble of men", would "bad-mouth" his own people even when they acted or expressed themselves inappropriately.

So, I suggest that Moshe was not denigrating or defaming the people. He was simply pointing out to them that they had changed the rules. That by conducting themselves in such a non-Torah manner, they were extricating themselves from the category of dedicated and loyal Bnei Torah and entered into the category of "morim" – from the word "hora'ah" (to teach or to direct); that is people who self-instruct to lead their lives according to what is momentarily convenient, but not necessarily according to the dictates of the Torah.

(The categorization of people and objects is essential to the

way our minds function. It permits us to focus rationally when viewing the manifold, detailed world in which we live).

Moshe then hit the rock twice before water began to pour from it. Perhaps to demonstrate before the rebels the end of their life of total dedication to HaShem, and the beginning of their new misdirected, disloyal “kosher style” way of convenience under a thin veil of Judaism, which much later in history would be called Reform Judaism.

To depart from the requirements incumbent upon God’s chosen people; to depart from under the umbrella of sanctifying HaShem’s holy name through unwavering obedience to halacha, because of inconvenience or one’s desire to be accepted in gentile circles – all fall into the category of Reform Judaism.

HaShem appeared to Moshe and Aharon and announced that they would not enter the Promised Land. Not because of any wrongdoing on their part, for there was none; but because of the many reasons put forth by various commentaries of the Torah, which is beyond the scope of this week’s message.

There was an article in this week’s Jerusalem Post, that disclosed the numbers of olim to Israel from the United States over the past several years. It averages out to about 2000 olim a year from a potential Jewish pool of approximately 4 million people; that is 1 oleh for every 2000 Jews in the USA, or if there are 5 million Jews in the US it would be 1 oleh for every 2500 Jews. And according to the estimate that there are 1 million observant Jews in the USA, it is 1 oleh for every 500 religious Jews, or 10 olim for every 5000. Shame on the religious leadership in the United States!

There are 4 major categories that correspond to the Jews in the US. They range from the Orthodox – including a wide selection of diverse sects and sub-cultures from the major yeshivot down to homosexual orthodox synagogues – on one side

of the scale, to the totally unaffiliated JINOs (Jews in name only) on the other extreme. And between these two categories there are the Conservatives, who, I admit, I do not understand what they want, and Reform Jews who I described previously as “misdirected, disloyal, kosher style way of convenience under a thin veil of Judaism”.

But now the uncomfortable question arises:

The JINOs and the adherents of Reform Judaism reject the Torah, each for their pet reasons: *Halachic Shabbat is antiquated*. They say, “We rest on the week-end by driving to our boat docked at the marina, and sail in the calming waters of the sea. Kosher is inconvenient, so when after a Broadway show we feel life-threatening hunger pangs, and the smells from the nearby treif steak house becons, we head there. Or the all-consuming love towards a gentile woman, who is clearly our God-sent soul-mate”.

The “rejectionist” Jews claim that “Halachic” Judaism is domineering, even tyrannizing. They prefer a more friendly relationship with God. So they pick and choose from the shelves of the Judaic supermarket that which is convenient and not distasteful to their non-Jewish friends.

To pick and choose from out of the generous display of Torah mitzvot is to turn one’s back on the most basic and fundamental principle of Judaism – HaShem commands and we obey!

But Reform and Conservative Judaism are not without diversity. Some adherents observe a semblance of Shabbat but eat chazir, others eat kosher at home but choose to desecrate the Shabbat. Some recite kaddish for their deceased father, lest he appear in a frightening nightmare to them. Some even visit Israel when the price of the ticket is right.

Let’s take this idea to the next step. What about the Boro Park, Flatbush, Lakewood, Williamsburg, etc., Jew who observes

Shabbat and kashrut, but is enduring his bad luck to have been born after 2000 years of galut, when HaShem opened the gates of Eretz Yisrael for our return. Torah Shabbat – yes! Torah Kashrut – yes! Torah Eretz Yisrael which demands self-sacrifice (strange language, military issues, pushy Israelis) – NO!

In principle, there is little difference between the declared Reform Jew who observes few mitzvot while choosing to reject the many, or the “frum” Jew who observes many mitzvot but picks and chooses not to follow the one difficult, demanding mitzva of settling HaShem’s Holy Land.

In principle, the Jew who picks and chooses to direct his religious life according to his personal preferences, and receives rabbinic approval for his weakness, falls into the category of “Morim” – those who instruct themselves to do what is convenient. This was the category by which Moshe Rabbeinu distinguished the rebellious people who chose to lead their lives according to what is momentarily convenient, but not according to the dictates of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom,

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