

Chukat 5775

BS"D Parashat Chukat 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Torah records the tragic episode of the "Waters of Strife" (מַי הַמִּלְחָמָה) which caused Moshe and Aharon to forfeit the great merit of entering the Holy Land.

The Torah relates (20,7-13)

:וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל מֹשֶׁה (ו)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵבִיא מַי מִן הַצֵּדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְאַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן תִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי הָאֲסֵפָה וְיָצֵאתָ וְאַהֲרֹן מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה :וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה

:וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אַהֲרֹן (ו)

וְיָצֵאתָ וְאַהֲרֹן מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה :וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אַהֲרֹן

וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה בְּקוֹל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵבִיא מַי מִן הַצֵּדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְאַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן תִּשְׁתַּבְּחוּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפָנֵי הָאֲסֵפָה וְיָצֵאתָ וְאַהֲרֹן מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה וְשָׁבְתָה מִן הַצֵּדָה :וַיִּשְׁמַע יְהוָה

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7) The Lord said to Moses, 8) "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

9) So Moses took the staff as he was commanded by HaShem. 10) He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you disobedient

uncompliant people, do you believe that we can bring you water out of this rock?" 11) Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the people and their livestock drank.

12) But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land I give them."

The tragic episode as it is presented in these verses is problematic:

1- Why was the punishment for hitting the rock instead of speaking to it, the barring of Moshe and Aaron from Eretz Yisrael?

2- How would have HaShem's glory been more enhanced had they spoken to the rock rather than hitting it?

3- The miracle of extracting water from a rock was performed once before by Moshe (Shemot chap. 17) when he was commanded by HaShem to hit the rock, so why in our parasha is it considered so sinful?

4- Previously Moshe alone was commanded to extract water from a rock; so why this time was Aaron included in the miracle and in the punishment?

In the light of these difficulties I would suggest the following:

Hitting rather than speaking to the rock was not the core issue here; this deviation from HaShem's command would not have disparaged HaShem's honor requiring such dire consequence for Moshe and Aaron.

The serious transgression of desecrating HaShem's glory which brought about Moshe and Aaron's exclusion from the Land was Moshe's reproach of the people when he called them " ׀׀׀׀׀ " – disobedient, uncompliant, rebellious.

But even this is problematic.

The prophet Hoshea informs the northern tribes which comprised the majority of the Jewish nation at the time, that HaShem had informed him in prophecy (4,17):

:׀׀ ׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀

Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him be

The northern tribes are so hopelessly joined to idolatry, both religiously, and ideologically that words of reproof, reprimand, ethics or morality no longer have an effect on them. Therefore, refrain from even attempting to improve them. They are totally lost.

Question: When Moshe called the Jewish people ׀׀׀׀׀ – disobedient, uncompliant and rebellious, he and Aaron, who acknowledged Moshe's assessment by his silence, were both severely punished. Why was Moshe's assessment of his generation so different from that of the Creator Himself at the time of Hoshea? HaShem informed Hoshea that the majority of the Jewish nation was so far gone that there was no remedy for their iniquitous lives, and Moshe saw that the generation who owed so much to HaShem was ungrateful and uncommitted, and he felt his responsibility to tell them as much?

However there is a basic difference. Moshe by his desperate and hopeless expressions of failure so early in our history cast a tacit doubt on HaShem's selection of the Jewish people as His chosen ones. This was a serious desecration of HaShem's glory. It was also Moshe's personal statement that the nation

was beyond rectification, which necessitated the appointment of different leaders to guide the nation when they would enter Eretz Yisrael.

The situation at the time of Hoshea was very different. There was no doubt that HaShem had chosen well when He selected the Jewish people. Six hundred years had passed since the Exodus, and we had proven again and again that we were unique, spiritual and wished to be HaShem's chosen ones. However, there are individual generations, as with the northern tribes at that time, which crossed the red-line of Jewish rationality and their future would become a slippery slope to oblivion.

It occurs when the community feels antipathy, dislike, distaste to the point of abhorrence when faced with things which are "too Jewish"; with the "coup de grace" being intermarriage.

There are Jewish communities in our present world which the words of the Hoshea:

אֵפְרַיִם יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְעֹלֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְבָנִים וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְעֹלֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him be

Could easily apply, for those communities are beyond correction.

In a "broad brush" generality, the prophet's expressions of despair could be directed to the Jews who chose to remain in Europe after what the descendants of Aisav did to us and are not beyond repeating their murderous acts. One example is the London Jewish community.

Why?

On Shabbat of July 4th, Neo Nazis are planning to stage a

rally in Golders Green, London, where they intend to publicly burn volumes of the Talmud and the Israeli flag. It is no coincidence that the Nazi rally is taking place on the 17th of Tammuz, a day of fasting that commemorates the day of publicly burning a Torah scroll by Apostomus.

Rabbi Jonny Roodyn is a rabbi in London and he wrote in reaction to this planned desecration: "These fast days are not times to get angry; they are times to focus inwardly and resolve to make a change for the better".

Obviously, the antidote to anti-Semitism is to remain where you are and just "focus inwardly" and blame yourselves for the fires of Auschwitz.

Nothing short of a pending holocaust could move these people to consider coming home to Eretz Yisrael. Before coming on aliya they would first join their former chief rabbi, who after leaving his post chose to live in New York, the Jerusalem of the New World!

Would there be an authentic prophet among us today who would be espousing the return to our Holy Land in preparation for the final geula, HaShem would most likely command him regarding the Jews of London and many other places in the world, as He did to Hoshea, "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him be".

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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