

KOL MEVASSER

A Message from the Rabbi



Greetings to the Kahal Joseph family,

I am really looking forward to my arrival in the community a few weeks from now. Jessica, Penny, and I are bidding our last farewells to New York and gearing up to join you in time for Shabbat VaEt'hanan.

I also feel blessed to have the opportunity to begin studying the works of Haham Yosef Hayyim, which were recommended to me by many members of the kehillah. From time to time, I hope to share some insights from the Ben Ish Hai with you, and I will begin that tradition in this message.

The laws discussed in the Ben Ish Hai for Parashat Hukkat have to do with Birkat Hamazon, the grace after meals. One of the things the Haham emphasizes is that the precise language of each section reveals a distinct focus, which changes from one paragraph to the next. While we start by praising God, we move seamlessly into giving thanks to Him, and then we make requests from Him for our welfare and security. By the time we get to the end, we have done some of these more than once. This

reveals that the Birkat Hamazon seeks to encapsulate many of our goals and express them simultaneously in a single text.

In a way, this parallels what happens in a synagogue community, where we also balance several different principles in a single shared place.

Like Birkat Hamazon, our services interweave praises with thanksgiving and requests; but modern synagogues also balance worship with the needs of community-building, gemilut hasadim (acts of loving kindness), security, and welcoming. Some of this was put to the test by our unexpected visitor last week, and it may take a little time to work out the right calibration of each of these considerations for the future. I feel confident that we can do this together, and I look forward to maintaining a synagogue community that is both hospitable and safe.

In the meantime, I hope that the holy words of the Ben Ish Hai may help guide us to achieve a good outcome for our prayers, in all of their many dimensions.

With fond blessings,

Rabbi Raif Melhado

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach
Wishing you and your family a Peaceful & Joyful Shabbat

KJ Schedule Hukkat

Erev Shabbat

Friday, June 26th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer ... 6:30 am
Minha / Arvit..... 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:51 pm

Shabbat

Saturday, June 27th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer ... 8:30 am
Women's Tehillim Group 7:00 pm
Minha & Arbit..... 7:00 pm
Havdalla..... 8:58 pm

Weekdays

Sunday, June 28th

Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 7:30 am
Monday to Friday June 29 to July 3
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am

Erev Shabbat

Friday, July 3rd

Shaharit / Morning Prayer ... 6:30 am
Minha / Arvit..... 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:50 pm

17th of Tammuz Fast
will be observed in L.A. on Sunday July 5th from 4:17 am to 8:38 pm

Torah & Haftara Readings
Bamidbar / Numbers
Parashat Hukkat 652 to 664
Haftara /from Prophets
Shoftim / Judges 664-667

The Punishment for Inaction

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l

The focus of our *parasha* is the sin of Moshe and Aharon, which carries an exceedingly harsh punishment – Moshe and Aharon will not enter the Land of Israel. Reading the verses, one is struck by the seeming injustice. After all, just a few *parashot* earlier, we found ourselves identifying quite naturally with Moshe's honest and open acknowledgment of difficulty:

“Have I conceived all this nation? Have I begotten them, that You should say to me, Carry them in your bosom as a nursing father carries the sucking child, to the land which You have sworn to their fathers?” (*Bamidbar* 11:12)

Concerning Aharon, likewise, the punishment seems unfair. After so many years of trials and tribulations, ups and downs, in Egypt and in the wilderness, it is difficult to accept the verdict that these leaders will not enter the land.

In addition to the above, we must also keep in mind the origin of Moshe's mission. Standing before the burning bush, Moshe was reluctant to take on this calling. He had no desire to lead the nation, bring them out of Egypt and guide them to the mountain of God. He tried strenuously to extricate himself from this appointment – “Send, I pray You, by the hand of him whom You will send.” Eventually, however, Moshe is forced to take on this heavy responsibility. Is it fair that his mission, which he had not wanted in the first place, should end with such a harsh punishment?

We need to understand and internalize the significance of this punishment. The climax of Moshe's leadership, the ultimate realization of his personality, lay in that entry into the land. Preventing him from entering represents a resounding slap in the face: he may see the land, but not enter its gates. *Chazal* grapple with this

question: “Rabbi Acha taught: ... It is written, ‘It is very tempestuous round about Him’ – this teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, is exacting with those who are close to Him, even to a hair's breadth.” (*Bava Kama* 50a)

The teaching is well-known, but it fails to satisfy. “To a hair's breadth” – we understand strict justice, but to the extent of barring Moshe's entry into Eretz Yisrael?!

In order to understand the punishment that Moshe and Aharon suffer, we must first gain a better understanding of their sin. The commentators propose various interpretations. The Rambam in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, for example, explains that Moshe grew angry, and for this he was punished. This connects with the Rambam's emphasis on the very problematic and dangerous nature of anger, as set forth in the second chapter of his *Hilkhot De'ot*. The problem with his explanation is that the verses make no explicit mention of any anger. Other interpretations similarly explain the severity of the sin involved, while remaining vague as to its exact identification in the text. What exactly was the sin of Moshe and Aharon?

Let us try to answer the question by referring to the verses at the end of *Parashat Haazinu*: “Ascend this Mount Avarim, Mount Nevo, which is in the land of Moav, that is opposite Yericho, and behold the land of Kena'an which I give to Bnei Yisrael for a possession. And die in the mount into which you go up, and be gathered to your people, as Aharon your brother died in Hor ha-Har and was gathered to his people, because you transgressed against Me (*me'attem bi*) amongst Bnei Yisrael at the waters of Merivat-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Tzin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of Bnei Yisrael. You shall then see the land before you, but you

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Refuah Shlemah

Abe Abraham • Moselle Amron
Sylvia Cohen • Esther Duke
Sassoon Ezra • Tilda Levy
Maurice Ovadia

In Memoriam

We remember these *yahrzeit* anniversaries June 27 to July 3, 2015. It is customary to light a memorial candle, donate *zedaka*, & attend Shabbat services.

10 Tammuz / Shabbat, June 27th

Khanbaba Pouladian *Itzhak ben Avraham*
Hatoon bat Haviva

11 Tammuz / Sunday, June 28th

Joseph Bensabat *Yosef ben Simy Moryousef*
Moshe Sasson *Moshe ben Sasson*
Solomon Leo Sassoon *Shlomo Benyamin*
Esther Levy Solomon *Esther bat Leah Matana*

12 Tammuz / Monday, June 29th

Eshagh Sarraf *Eshagh ben Yehuda*

14 Tammuz / Wednesday, July 1st

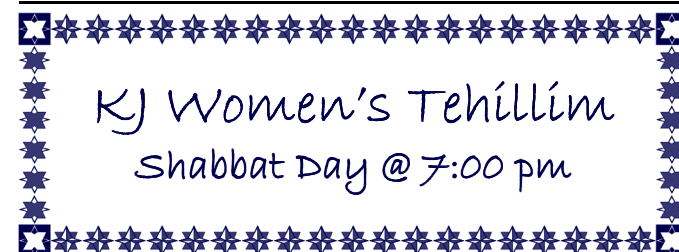
Rachel Meyer Judah *Rachel bat Aziza*

15 Tammuz / Thursday, July 2nd

Mazal Sawdayi *Mazal bat Rima Cohen*

17 Tammuz / Shabbat, July 4th

Abdallah Ezra *Abdallah ben Ezra Itzhak*



(Continued from page 2)

shall not go there into the land which I give to Bnei Yisrael.” (*Devarim* 32:49-52)

In these verses, the sin is described as “*me’ilah*” (misappropriation of *hekdesh*, that which belongs to the Temple or is set aside for God) – a transgression which Chazal equate with the gravest violations: prohibited sexual relations and idolatry. Whether the *me’ilah* involves stealing or whether it involves the use of and benefit from *hekdesh*, it is regarded as a most serious transgression.

The verse cited above presents an identical structure in describing the sin: “Because you transgressed against Me (*me’altem bi*)... because you did not sanctify Me (*lo kidashtem oti*).” Clearly, the *me’ilah* is equated with “failure to sanctify.” Contrary to our intuitive sense that there must be something wrong with what Moshe and Aharon *did*, the verse states simply and explicitly that the sin is grounded in what they *did not* do.

At the beginning of his *Hilkhot Teshuva* (1:1), the Rambam writes: “If a person transgresses any of the commandments of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command – whether willingly or inadvertently – when he repents and turns from his sin, he must confess before the blessed God, as it is written: ‘If a man or a woman commits... they must confess the sin that they committed.’ This refers to verbal confession.”

The Rambam is talking about positive as well as negative commands. Concerning both there is a need for repentance, and both require confession. Transgression of a prohibition (negative command) is on the same level as non-performance of an obligation (positive command).

Moshe and Aharon, it seems, are severely punished for *inaction*, for failure to sanctify God’s Name amongst Bnei Yisrael. We must understand the significance of this opportunity for *kiddush Hashem* (sanctifying God’s name) that was missed. Chazal teach about the importance of different times: “Rabbi wept and said: There are some who acquire their world [i.e., their portion in the World to Come] over many years [of hard work and devotion], and there are others who acquire their world in a single moment.” (*Avoda Zara* 17a)

It is possible to acquire one’s world in an instant – and it is possible to lose it in an instant, too. Not all moments are equal. There are fateful, auspicious times that set the stage for great and momentous events, and there are regular moments, the humdrum day-to-day routine.

What was so fateful... about that instant when Moshe struck the rock? The answer to this question has two parts to it. The first appears in the same verse in *Parashat Haazinu*: “...because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of Bnei Yisrael.” There are two aspects to this verse. The first is quantitative: the *kiddush Hashem* that can potentially happen here, whatever it may be, will take place before all of Bnei Yisrael. The entire nation would see Moshe approach the rock and quietly speak to it, and water would then emerge from the rock. This would be an open miracle, witnessed by the younger generation – the generation that will be entering the land.

The other aspect is qualitative – i.e., pertaining to the nature of the *kiddush Hashem*. Following immediately on from the description of the sin, there is God’s reaction (*Bamidbar* 20:12): “And God said to Moshe and to Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation in to the land which I have given them.” (*Bamidbar* 20:12)

A *kiddush Hashem* almost took place “in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael.” The popular aphorism asserts that “a picture is worth a thousand words” – or, as Chazal put it: “Hearing is not the same as seeing.” In contrast to views that maintain that seeing is too “physical” an interaction with the world and that “hearing” is therefore preferable from a spiritual point of view, we believe that seeing is better in the absolute sense.

In describing the Revelation at Sinai, the Torah records that “all the people saw the sounds” (*Shemot* 20:15). The moment was so great, so elevated and so utterly removed from the ordinary that Bnei Yisrael saw sounds. Of course, they also heard the sounds, but the emphasis is on the seeing, which exerts far greater impact and is more important. ...

It was this potential for *kiddush Hashem* that faced Moshe and Aharon at the time: a miracle performed before the entire nation, that they would see with their own eyes. And the greatness of the hour...meant that the absence of such a *kiddush Hashem* was a great failure.

The Gemara lists the questions that a person is asked when he comes before the Heavenly Court: “Rabba said: When a person is brought for judgment, they say to him: Did you conduct your affairs with integrity? Did you set times for Torah? Did you engage in procreation? Did you anticipate the redemption? Did you engage in the intricacies of wisdom? Did you infer one thing from another?” (*Shabbat* 31a) A person is not questioned as to whether or not he ate pork. The questions are not about actions that he should not have taken. The person who finds himself in trouble before the Heavenly Court – as depicted here – is not one who has violated prohibitions and committed transgressions. Rather, it is the person who failed to do what he should have done ... Sometimes, failure to act is far more serious than negative action.

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