

חֻקָּה

CHUKAT/STATUTE Bemidbar/Numbers 19:1-22:2

Bemidbar 20 is one of the most perplexing chapters in all of the Torah. Moshe, the faithful leader of the Israelites for 40 years, is **told that he will not cross the Jordan and enter into the Promised Land.** At the **beginning** of the **40th year** of the Israelite's exodus journey, יהוה **judged Moshe and Aharon after striking the rock:**

***Bemidbar 20:11** Then Moshe lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.¹² Then יהוה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, "Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*

יהוה's judgment is very clear; however, the reason for the judgment has been debated for centuries. **Bemidbar 20:11** states that the brothers **"did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel."** What does it mean **"to sanctify"** Him? The error that was made was obviously very serious. Let's back up and take a closer look at the whole story:

***Bemidbar 20:2** Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moshe and Aharon.³ And the people contended with Moshe and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before יהוה!⁴ "Why have you brought up the assembly of יהוה into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?⁵ "And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."⁶ So Moshe and Aharon went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of יהוה appeared to them.⁷ Then יהוה spoke to Moshe, saying,⁸ "Take the staff; you and your brother Aharon gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."⁹ So Moshe took the staff from before יהוה as He commanded him.¹⁰ And Moshe and Aharon gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"¹¹ Then Moshe lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.¹² Then יהוה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, "Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."¹³ This was the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with יהוה, and He was sanctified among them.*

Because they had no water, the Israelites contended with Moshe and complained that Moshe should never have brought them to this place. יהוה responds with directions that can be divided into five distinct parts:

1. Take the stick
2. Moshe and Aharon must gather the congregation together

3. **Speak to the rock** so that it will yield **water**
4. **Bring forth water** from the rock
5. **Give water to the congregation and to the cattle**

The **first two** commands were followed **precisely**. But then, **instead** of “*speaking to the rock*”, Moshe **speaks to the people**, calling them “*rebels*”. **Speaking to the people, followed by “striking the rock”** clearly were **not part of יהוה’s commands**. It is significant that our story appears to be a **repeat** of an event that happened **nearly 40 years earlier** when the people were also **complaining about water**. This **helps explain Moshe’s angry reaction** towards the people. It **appears to be the same old complaint**. Had they **learned nothing** in the **desert?!!**

But it is in יהוה’s **words** that we notice a **difference** between the **two events**. In **Shemot**, יהוה simply **responds to the nation’s complaint for water** with **directions** for Moshe:

Shemot 17:5 And יהוה said to Moshe, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your staff with which you struck the river, and go. ⁶ "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink....."

Now **compare יהוה’s words of instruction to Moshe and Aharon in Bemidbar**. Instead of **simple directions** for Moshe, notice the **tone of endearment** when **He speaks of the people**:

Bemidbar 20:8 ... gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

In **His reaction** to the people’s **complaint**, the **Almighty appears very merciful** and **full of love**. But **why** does their **complaint stir Moshe to anger** and יהוה **to compassion**? To us it seems that **Moshe’s response was justified**, since they are **repeating a former complaint**. So then, **what explains יהוה’s empathetic response**?

The **key** to understanding the story is **timing**. This is **not the same generation** that **uttered the first complaint**. What we have now is a **generation** that has **never known slavery**. They have **grown up** in the **desert as free people**, and they are **looking towards the Promised Land**. They are in the beginning of the 40th year and they are **eager to enter!** They are in fact at **Kadesh**, a city **very close** to the **Promised Land** of Israel. Although the **words of the complaints of the 1st and 2nd generations** sound the **same**, the **intentions are not at all alike**. In **Shemot**, their **complaint ends with the question**:

Shemot 17:3 ... "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

What they are **implying** is that they would have **rather stayed in Egypt** then **followed their deliverer into the wilderness**. This **thought characterizes** nearly every **complaint** made by the **first generation**. On the other hand, the **complaint of the 2nd generation** can be seen in **two parts**:

Bemidbar 20:4 "Why have you brought up the assembly of **יְהוָה** into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here?"

There is **nothing** in this **first part** of the **complaint** that **expresses a desire to return to Egypt**. They simply want to know **why** they have been **brought into "this wilderness"** and **not into the Promised Land**. Now, the **second part** of the **complaint**:

Bemidbar 20:5 "And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink."

Again, they are **not expressing a desire to be in Egypt**, but **instead contrasting this desert location (this evil place) with the land of Israel**. They do **not even complain immediately about their thirst**; **first** they point to the **lack of grain, figs, vines, and pomegranates** (description of the Land of Israel). As an **afterthought**, they **mention the lack of water**. They **desire with all their heart to enter the Land**. They have become **very impatient**. Our gracious **Abba understands their feelings and therefore commands** that their **needs be taken care of**. **Moshe and Aharon**, however, **judge the nation based on the previous generation's attitude** and therefore see them as "**rebels**".

Are we a **generation** who is **eager to enter the Promised Land**? Do we find ourselves **perched** at the **location of Kadesh** (means "holy")? Have we **lost the slave mentality of Egypt**? Do we **trust** that the **Holy One of Israel** is actually **preparing to take us into the Land**? Do we **complain** every time we feel our **needs are not being provided for**? Do we **long** for the **simple life of Egypt** (this world) **over the Promised Land**?

Now let's **consider the seriousness of the sin of Moshe and Aharon...the sin that kept them from entering the Promised Land**. Part of our **answer** can be found in the **Hebrew**:

Bemidbar 20:8 "Take the staff; you and your brother Aharon gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water (v'hishikita - וְהִשְׁקִיתֶם) for them out of the rock, and **give drink to the congregation and their animals**."

יְהוָה commands Moshe and Aharon to "**v'hishikita**" (וְהִשְׁקִיתֶם), which **literally** means "**to water**," in the **sense** that a **shepherd waters his flock**. **Moshe** has **played the shepherd role** before when he **helped the daughters of Yitro** (Jethro) and **their sheep**:

Shemot 2:17 Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but **Moshe stood up and helped them, and watered** (וַיִּשְׁקֵם) their flock.

The **role** of a **shepherd taking care of the flock** was **usually understood** by **Moshe** to be **necessary** in **leading the children of Israel**. We see this **later** in **Moshe's request** to יְהוָה:

Bemidbar 27:15 Then Moshe spoke to **יְהוָה**, saying: ¹⁶ "Let **יְהוָה**, the Elohim of the spirits of all flesh, **set a man over the congregation**, ¹⁷ "who may go out before them and go in before them, **who**

may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of יְהוָה may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

So, now we can see that the **command** that יְהוָה made to **Moshe** in **Bemidbar** was intended for Moshe to **practice the leadership style that he knew so well...**that of a **shepherd who waters his flock from the rock**. The **problem** was, when יְהוָה specifically requested that Moshe should be the one to **"give drink to the congregation and their animals,"** it is instead reported that **"the congregation and their animals drank"** (as if they did it **independently** of Moshe).

Moshe's sin, then, is seen as a **failure in his role as a shepherd**. Now, the **Almighty repeatedly refers to Moshe's sin** as that of **"not sanctifying Him"** in the **"eyes of the children of Israel"**:

Bemidbar 20:12 Then יְהוָה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, "Because you did not trust Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

Bemidbar 27:14 "For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes...."

Devarim 32:51 "because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the children of Israel."

While יְהוָה sometimes lists **other reasons** such as **lacking "trust"** (Bemidbar 20:12), **"trespassing against Him"** (Devarim 32:51), and even labeling him as a **"rebel"** (Bemidbar 27:14), each of these are listed **within the context** of not **"sanctifying Him in the eyes of the children of Israel."** So...we see that **by not filling his role as a shepherd who waters His flock, Moshe has failed in "sanctifying" the Name of the Almighty**. We can also **turn that around** and say that **"to sanctify Him"** is to **fulfill the role of a shepherd**. This then explains the **fate of Moshe and Aharon**.

The **"staff"** that **"strikes the rock"** also provides us with **interesting insights**. This **"staff"** has already been labeled as a **"sign against the rebels"**:

Bemidbar 17:10 And יְהוָה said to Moshe, "Bring Aharon's staff back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die."

This could **explain** why when יְהוָה told Moshe to **"take the staff from before יְהוָה"** that he referred to the **Israelites as "rebels"** since the **staff** was to **"be kept as a sign against the rebels."** Moshe may have thought that the **Almighty's instruction** was **intended** to put an end to the **supposed rebellious complaining** of the people.

This **particular "staff"** was the **dry stick of Aharon** that had **sprung to life** after all the incidents following the **rebellion of Korach**:

Bemidbar 17:8 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moshe went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, **the staff of Aharon, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.**

This “**staff**,” which became a **flowering stick**, was to be a “**sign**” to the people that יהוה had **bestowed leadership through Moshe and Aharon**. It was **this “staff” representing life**, which Moshe was to **take from “before יהוה”** and **hold in his hand** while “**speaking to the rock.**”

Now, let’s take a look at the “**staff**” that was used in our **earlier story in Shemot** when the **rock** was **initially struck**:

Shemot 17:5 And יהוה said to Moshe, “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also **take in your hand your staff with which you struck the river**, and go.⁶ ... and you shall **strike the rock**, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink....

Notice that **this first “staff”** which was used to **strike the rock** was the “**staff**” which **struck the Nile River** in a **show of force** during the **plagues of Egypt**. Read how **this “staff” first demonstrated יהוה’s power**:

Shemot 7:8 Then יהוה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying,⁹ “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aharon, ‘**Take your staff and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent.**’ ”¹⁰ So Moshe and Aharon went in to Pharaoh, and they did so, just as יהוה commanded. And Aharon cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent.¹¹ But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.¹² For every man threw down his staff, and they became serpents. **But Aharon’s staff swallowed up their staff.**

Following this incident, the “**staff**” is used to **chastise Pharaoh** for his **disobedience** to יהוה’s word and **to inform him** that “**by this you will know that I am יהוה**”:

Shemot 7:15 “Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river’s bank to meet him; and the staff which was turned to a serpent you shall take in your hand.¹⁶ “And you shall say to him, ‘ יהוה Elohim of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness”; but indeed, until now you would not hear!¹⁷ Thus says יהוה: “**By this you shall know that I am יהוה. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the staff that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.**”

This “**staff**” symbolizes “**knowing**” the **Almighty**. It represents the **defeat of Pharaoh** and the **striking of the very life force of Egypt (this world)**. Apparently by **commanding Moshe to use this “staff”**, יהוה wanted the **demonstration of the water pouring from the rock in Shemot to link with the defeat of Pharaoh and his world system**. Centuries later, the **Rock (Yeshua)** was **struck** and **blood pours forth**, just as it did in **Egypt**. Then “**you shall know that I am יהוה!**”

Matthew 26:31 Then Yeshua said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd...'

John 19:34 But one of the soldiers **pierced His side with a spear**, and immediately **blood and water came out**.³⁵ And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he **knows** that he is **telling the truth**, so that you may believe.

The 1st generation coming out of Egypt needed to **understand redemption** and the **defeat of the evil forces**. This was **accomplished** through the **symbolism of the first "staff"**. Ultimately this **"staff"** was a **picture** that **pointed to Yeshua, our Messiah**, who was the **"Rock" struck that poured forth water and blood** that brought about our **salvation** and the means through which we can **"know"** Him.

The **event** at the **"rock"** in our parasha this week is intended to point to a **new stage** in the **people's spiritual development**. Previously, the 1st generation learned the importance of **"knowing Him"** through the miracle of **"striking the rock."**

1 Corinthians 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that **spiritual Rock** that followed them, and **that Rock was Messiah**.

Now, **in Bemidbar**, יהוה **intends** for the **people to understand words**, through the **example of Moshe and Aharon** as the **sprouting staff** is used in **combination** with **speaking (words) to the life giving rock**. This is, my friends, what it means to **"sanctify"** the **Almighty...to be sanctified through His Word**:

John 17:17 "**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**"

Without realizing it, Moshe undermines the lessons the new generation needed to learn. The 1st lesson, pictured through the **striking of the rock** in order to **receive the life giving water**, had **already been taught**. It was **time to move forward** and **understand the importance** of **living life according to the Word (Torah)**. Unfortunately, the **shepherd Moshe**, sent the **wrong message**. By **striking the rock** instead of **speaking words**, He **did not "sanctify"** the Name of יהוה.

יהוה wants to **strengthen our faith** through the **power of the Word**. The **Word** itself is much **more powerful than miracles** which one may witness. Our **Messiah** is the **Word made flesh**. He **lived the Word perfectly**:

John 1:14 **And the Word became flesh...**

Let's take another look at this **"just one more time."** What does it mean to **"speak to the rock before their eyes?"** (Bemidbar 20:8) It is **implied** here that **Moshe and Aharon** were to **"speak"** so that the people could **"see."** You would expect that if they were **"speaking,"** that it would be for the people to **"hear,"** not **"see."** This should point us back to another time when יהוה **"spoke"** in order **for the people to "see"**:

Shemot 20:18 Now all **the people** saw the voice, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.¹⁹ **Then they said to Moshe, "You speak with us, and we will hear (shema - שְׁמָע); but let not Elohim speak with us, lest we die."**

This was the **picture** יָהוָה wanted **Moshe and Aharon** to **exemplify** by using their “**voice**” to “**speak**” to the **people**. Notice the **parallel** that “**speaking**” is **what would cause the people to “see**” (Bemidbar 20:8). As **Shemot 20:18** indicates, the **people requested** that if **Moshe would “speak”** it would result in them “**hearing**” (shema). **THIS WAS THE REASON FOR THE INSTRUCTION יָהוָה GAVE MOSHE** in our parasha. If **Moshe would have “spoken,”** he would have **fulfilled Shemot 20:19 and given the people opportunity to “shema!”**

Yeshua came as a **prophet like Moshe**. He “**spoke**” to us these **words of Moshe/Torah**, because **He** is the **Good Shepherd** who brought “**life**” (symbolized by the **budding staff**), and who “**sanctifies**” **His people**, the **area where Moshe fell short**:

John 10:10 ... I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.¹¹ **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

John 17:19 **"And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.**

And now according to **our own request** on the Mountain (**Shemot 20:19**), we must “**hear**” (shema).

Mark 12:29 **Yeshua** answered him, **"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear (shema), O Israel, יָהוָה our Elohim, יָהוָה is one.³⁰ 'And you shall love יָהוָה your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.**

“**Speaking Words**” is still **important**. “**Words**” are the **food** the **shepherd offers the sheep**. The **Good Shepherd** asks us to **continue in His work**:

Romans 10:14 **How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"**

Shabbat Shalom!

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