

Parshas Chuas 5781 – Mordy Schlachter

This divrei Torah is dedicated to my late grandfather, Avraham Menachem ben Eliyahu Meir, z'l, Adam Goodman, who passed on 6<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz 5781.

Numbers: 20:12

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן יַעַן לֹא־אֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי  
לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקֶּהֶל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:

“And HaShem said to Moshe and to Aaron, as a result of you not believing in Me to Sanctify me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, so therefore you both will not bring these People to the Land that I will give them.”

The Israelites complained to Moshe about not having food and water. Aharon, like he was wont to do, joined his brother in fleeing (Passuk 6 according to the Ibin Ezra) and put themselves at HaShem’s mercy. HaShem responded that they should, both, take the staff (with almonds, the staff that would be used to quell or quarrels) and gather the people and then in front of the People they, both, would talk to the rock that has given them water, and the water will come forth from the rock.

As a result they both died in the desert and lost their place in Eretz Yisrael. Focusing on Moshe, because he was the leader and the responsible party dealing with the complaints, we ask the following:

What was the terrible sin that Moshe committed? Was it this sin alone that caused him not to go to Eretz Yisrael? Didn’t Moshe repent and ask for forgiveness? If so, why was he not forgiven? Or, was he forgiven but there is a different reason he died?

The Gemara in Yoma 87a: says ““Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me” (Numbers 20:12). The Gemara analyzes this: Had you believed in Me, your time still would not have come to depart the world.” The gemara is concluding that this failure in belief was the reason for his (somewhat) shortened life and not going to Eretz Yisrael. However, Moshe repented from his sin and asked for forgiveness (like we learn later on in Parshas V’eschanun.). Moshe still died for this sin.

When looking at this lapse in belief we can ask that previously Moshe said worse. The Midrish Bamidbar Rabbah 19:10 says on our passuk (Numb. 20:12) “Because you did not trust in Me”: Did not Moshe say something worse than this? As he said (11:22), “Are there [enough] flocks and herds to slaughter for them; are there enough fish in the sea to gather for them?” There also trust was lacking, and [that lack of trust] was greater than this one. So why did the HKBH not decree death for him there? We also say that he lacked trust several other times. Moshe clearly stated that the Bnei Yisrael will not listen to him (Exodus 4:1) and that who is he to take the Bnei Yisrael out? (ibid 10), and someone else should be the agent (ibid 13). Moshe comes to HaShem and complains that after his first meeting with Pharaoh the work was harder. “Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people.” (ibid 22-23). The Chasam Sofer paraphrasing the Midrish quotes the next passuk (ibid 24) “Then the Lord said to Moshe, “You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.” Chasam Sofer learns from the Midrish that this prophesy now came true. HaShem said Moshe will see what happens to Pharaoh, but not to the kings of Canaan. Chasam Sofer learns this as a promise of punishment for Moshe’s lack of faith.

Similarly, the Bartenura on the Torah learns that Moshe could have gone *into* Eretz Yisrael and dies shortly after; going in but not seeing the destruction. However, he lost that privilege in our passuk. The Chizkuni further teaches that “לכן” “therefore you will not bring, etc.” is a term used here because whenever the expression לכן, appears, it indicates that the speaker is saying something in the nature of an oath. Thus, he may have lost the privilege of entering Eretz Yisrael 37 years earlier. So, both incidents combine, because our passuk clearly states that now is the punishment complete. (It may be that in Shemos it was a prophetic hint).

The reason Moshe lost his life and privilege is because of a continued lack of faith. If he did not lost it earlier for lack of faith, why now?

The Gemara in Shabbat 97a: connects the non-belief of Moshe now to the non-belief of Moshe from the start. The gemara says: ‘They are believers, as it is written: “And the people believed [once they heard that Lord had remembered the children of Israel, and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed and they prostrated”] (Exodus 4:31). The children of believers, [as it says with regard to Abraham our Patriarch:] “And he believed in HaShem.” (Genesis 15:6).’ Then the gemara points out that Moshe and Aharon did not believe here because Moshe hit the rock instead of talking to it. Moshe also did not believe when he first talked to HaShem at the sne (burning bush) “And HaShem said to him further: Bring your hand to your bosom, and he brought his hand to his bosom and he took it out and behold, his hand was leprous like snow” (Exodus 4:6).

We can also say the Bnei Yisrael did believe because it says when they crossed the Yam Suf (Red Sea) that they believe in HaShem and Moshe His servant. “And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the Lord had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord; they had faith in the HaShem and His servant Moshe.” (Exodus 14:31).

The Midrish says: The matter is comparable to a king who had a friend. Now when in private he displayed arrogance towards the king with harsh words, the king did not become angry with him. [When, however,] he arose one day and was arrogant in front of the legions, he decreed death for him. So also did the HKBH, say to Moshe, “When you acted privately with Me, I did not become angry, but now [that you have acted] in public, it is impossible [to overlook your action].” Thus it is stated (in Numb. 20:12), “to sanctify Me in the sight of the Children of Israel.”

Clearly, there is some importance to the public aspect of Moshe’s lack of faith. Also, if the People believed in HaShem and in Moshe, there must be some connection between Moshe’s faith in HaShem and their belief. A shake in Moshe’s faith, in public, is what destroys that connection.

Throughout the wanderings the Bnei Yisrael always believed in HaShem, albeit, in a noisy way. They never deny the existence of Hashem (Korach denied what HaShem told Moshe). The Bnei Yisrael complained to Moshe about food, water, wandering, and discomfort. They clearly believed HaShem could provide them these things but they did not know or believe there was a reason that HaShem withheld it. In previous quarrels the people complained against Moshe because there was a direct connection between him as HaShem’s servant (see Exodus 15:24 thirst; *ibid* 16:2 wanting food; Numbers 14:2 the spies incident; and our incident in Numbers 20:3 where they complained about thirst). Contrast that with the every next complaint: “And the people spoke against Lord and against Moshe, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food.” (Exodus 21:5). Now the complaint was against Moshe *and* HaShem. That connection was

broken. The people could no longer be maaminim in Hashem and Moshe His servant; now it was in HaShem, and Moshe was there mere leader.

As it says in Sanhedrin 110a: that “Rabbi Hanina bar Pappa says: Anyone who expresses resentment against his teacher, it is as though he is expressing resentment against the Divine Presence, as it is stated: “Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord” (Exodus 16:8). Rabbi Abbahu says: Anyone who suspects his teacher of wrongdoing, it is as though he suspects the Divine Presence, as it is stated: “And the people spoke against Lord, and against Moshe” (Numbers 21:5).” Meaning, the complaints against Moshe were really against HaShem because the people knew that HaShem was the real cause of their success, sustenance, and comfort. The People merely rallied against Moshe because he was their leader, accessible, and they believed he was the undoubted conduit. However, when that trust was broken by the public display of lack of faith, then the Bnei Yisrael complained directly to Hashem. That was the missing kiddush HaShem by hitting the rock instead of commanding it.

Ohr HaChaim points out that why was the term “וַיֹּאמֶר” used here when giving out the punishment, but when calling to Moshe and Aharon it used the harsher “vayidaber.” The Bamidbar Rabbah 19:12 (Numb. 20:12) says that Moshe was afraid of being lumped into the punishment that faced the generation of the spies. They were told they would die in the desert because of their sin, and now that Moshe was about to die in the desert then future generations would say Moshe died because of the same sin. Therefore, it says “וַיֹּאמֶר” the reason is this sin, here, lack of sanctifying HaShem’s name. Ohr Chaim says, the softer term of וַיֹּאמֶר is used to teach us that HaShem accepted Moshe’s arguments and the future generations would know why he died in the desert. This softer term is used to differentiate Moshe from the spies.

We can ask, though, that the spies seemed to lack faith and Moshe lacked faith. What is the difference? The spies did not necessarily lack faith. They had already made up their mind to bring a bad report *before* they left. It was not lack of emunah in HaShem. It was loss of leadership once entering the land and each family would have their own land and possessions. Moshe never sought power. Contrarily, he begged HaShem not to make him his servant (in Shemos as we quoted earlier). It was simply a lifelong lack of 100% full betochon in HaShem. Despite his humility and talking to HaShem face to face, there was a lacking aspect of knowing and believing that HaShem can do anything and everything.

It's mind boggling to think. However, the lesson is, if Moshe had missing betochon, how much more so must we work on ourselves to have that belief, when we do not talk to HaShem 'face to face' nor see open miracles daily.

Finally, we see why Aharon also sinned here. It says in Shemos when Moshe was complaining to HaShem that he should not be the one chosen for the task, HaShem says: "The Lord became angry with Moshe, and He said, 'There is your brother Aaron the Levite. He, I know, speaks readily. Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you.'" (Exodus 4:14). Aharon was supposed to be the guide for Moshe. However, he let Moshe take the lead and he failed himself and Moshe and the People in not making sure, after Moshe's 37 years of connection to HaShem that there should not be anything missing. He also had to die and not enter the land. The people lost their trust in him so he could no longer lead them there.

The death was not the punishment. It was not entering Eretz Yisrael. That privilege was given to others, who were not connected to the spies, to the quarreling, the Golden Calf. Yehoshua was the moon compared to the sun of Moshe but he had his faith firm in HaShem and the people would have faith in him.

When Aharon died the whole nation cried for 30 days. (Numbers 20:39). Even though he was 120 years old, it was a great national tragedy due to his qualities as leader, Kohen, and peacemaker.

My grandfather passed away this week on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz. He was the greatest man of the greatest generation. He survived Hitler and the Nazis in 3 camps, he survived antisemitism in 1949 Israel, 1950s Paris, and 1960s Newark. He settled in Boro Park and raised 4 families of shomrei Torah U'Mitzvos. May his נשמה have a quick ascent. His tragedies in his life include starting over two times after the war, and losing a pre-school aged, oldest, child. His tragedies did not define him. He was not simply “a holocaust survivor.” He was far greater than any term or any one moment of his life. He lived to 92 but the long life did not soften the blow. He could have lived to 120 years and we still would mourn greatly.

My grandfather was born and raised to 15 years old in Debrecen, Hungary. 70% of Hungarian Jews were murdered between January 1944 and January 1945; most in Auschwitz. He was lucky in many ways. He and his parents and six siblings survived the Holocaust and reunited after the war. He soon went his separate way but eventually he reunited with his parents and two sisters in New York. His sisters' family was his family. He danced at every simcha, from a nephew/niece to a great nephew/niece. He taught us the importance of family and joining in the simchas of cousins, even distance cousins.

Some who survived the Holocaust questioned “why me?” However, my Zeidy knew it was much harder to survive than to have died to sanctify Hashem's name. 6 million died to sanctify HaShem's name. They died and their sacrifice lives on forever and shall not be minimized. My grandfather had to *earn* his sanctifying Hashem's name. He spent the next 76 years sanctifying HaShem's name. He did it in the way he raised his family, he sent his children

to Yeshivas, he practiced strict Orthodox Judaism, his connection to Hassidic Judaism even though he stopped practicing it fully after the war, his love of Rabbis and Rabbinical leadership, his helping establish a shul, his humbleness in front of the younger generation, the way he dealt with his friends and neighbors, his honesty in business, and his shalom bayis for 67 years.

Personally, he taught me the power of being understated, a lesson I still struggle with. He was never the tallest, loudest, or richest in the room. However, he was always the most important, and everyone knew it. He never spoke long but his words were inspiring. He earned his honor because he honored everyone else. When he used his sweet voice to lead the prayers in shul he did it to inspire and to please. He did not look for “shkoich” but always gave “shkoich” to everyone else.

When I would visit him for a shabbos he always made sure I said shalom aleichem to his friends in shul (i.e. Mr. Kanner, Mr. Feldman, Mr. Stern) and the Rabbi. I did not understand what they would ask me in Yiddish, and I did not like shaking the Rav’s hand who suffered from psoriasis. However, my Zeidy taught me the importance of honoring the previous generation and elders. He was always part of the first 10 to shul for every minyan and when he retired he was a faithful daily at a gemara shiur for retirees. He helped a budding Rabbi (Rabbi Leizer Duvid Rappaport) build up a shul, first in Boro Park and then become Rav in a Kehilla in Flatbush.

Zeidy Goodman did not have any badge of courage or honor on him; no numbers. Only survivors from Auschwitz and Teblinka had tattooed numbers. However, in his simple and humble way, he was a badge of courage and honor. He was funny, and thoughtful, and giving. He personified the understated but overachiever. He appreciated his mesorah and made sure we appreciated it, too. A divrei torah is not the time for funny or personal anecdotes so I will end off here.



May we all learn from the emuna peshuta of Zeidy, who never questioned or complained to HaShem. He just did and perpetuated the tutelage of mesorah down to the next generations. He made others happy by showing up and joining in. He danced at 90 like he was 20. There was nothing lacking in his faith. He was zoche to lead the next 3 generations and it is up to us to learn his lessons and keep them going. We easily believe in HaShem because we believed in Zeidy. He was HaShem's servant, without question.

May his neshama be a meieltz yosher for the entire family and klal yisrael.