



Parashat Chukat - Balak

7 Tamuz 5784 – July 13, 2024

Leaders are measured on a different scale than “normal people.” I have often wondered why this is so. A good leader best leads by example. Moses, it could easily be said, is among the greatest of leaders. He leads with pure faith and humility. He most often follows G-d’s directions, however, at this juncture he “hits” the rock that G-d has instructed him to speak to. Because Moses hit the rock, not once but twice, G-d tells him that he will not enter the land of Israel.

Why does G-d punish Moses so severely? G-d’s reply was, “because you have not displayed faith in Me to publicly sanctify My Name.” Rashi says; that while G-d told Moses to speak to the rock, Moses instead hit it. There are other sages who disagree with Rashi’s assessment saying that G-d didn’t tell Moses to speak to the rock but rather speak “about” the rock. Ibn Ezra expresses that Moses had the right to hit the rock once but not twice. Rambam (Maimonides) and Ramban (Nachmanides) see Moses’s mistake not in his actions, but in the words he speaks moments before striking the rock. Rambam says; Moses refers to the people as rebels. This reference to the people shows anger in Moses and thereby causing the people to respond negatively. Ramban sees it differently. Moses says, “We will bring forth...” meaning that he and Aaron would bring forth water. This statement gives the impression that the water flowing from the rock was from Moses and Aaron and not from G-d. This was a grave mistake. It was enough of a problem that the people often put Moses in an awkward position with G-d, essentially equivocating Moses to G-d. Unintentionally. Moses’ statement: “We will bring forth...” sends a confusing statement to the people.

What is the message here? With leadership comes great power and with great power comes great responsibility. “Lo Kam B’Yisrael K’Moshe ad Navi u’mabeet et temunato.” “There did not arise in Israel anyone like Moses ever again, a prophet who gazes at G-d’s image.” Moses’ power and responsibility put him in a different category for judgement.

His collective wrongs of: 1) Not wanting to lead, when G-d commanded him to. 2) Killing the Egyptian rather than restraining him and 3) striking rather than speaking to the rock. This cumulatively denies Moses entry into the Land of Israel.

Moses was “one of a kind” the “greatest of prophets” however he was also a human being with limits. It was time for him to recognize his limits. Lead with humility, strength of moral character, curb one’s anger and let the Torah be your guide.

Good Shabbos!

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