

זכור אתיום השבת לקדשו.  
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כלמלאכתך,  
ויום השביעי שבת לה'

# SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK

## PARASHAT CHUKKAT-BALAK

12<sup>TH</sup> TAMMUZ 5783

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בס"ד



### THE RIGHT LEADER

YOSEF BESSO-COWAN  
SHEVET MORASHA

*Parashat Chukkat* contains the story of Moshe hitting the rock to get water for the complaining

Jewish people. Hashem commands Moshe to speak to the rock rather than to hit it, like he had in the past, and Moshe's wrongdoings resulted in the serious punishment of Moshe not being allowed into Eretz Yisrael with the Jewish people. This is certainly a very harsh punishment for a seemingly minor mistake. Often, we explain this puzzling reaction by saying that any mistake made by a person who is on such a high level is considered a serious offence. Moshe was on the highest level that a person could reach, to the extent that he spoke to Hashem, on a higher level than any other prophet.

This answer begs the question: What was the mistake itself? The answer is satisfactory so long as we can understand the difference between speaking to the rock and hitting it. Perhaps the disobedience was in and of itself enough of an offence, but the Kli Yakar offers a deeper answer. He explains that Hashem commanded Moshe to take the staff – very strange if Hashem didn't intend for Moshe to use it to hit the rock. By this point in their journey through the desert, the Jewish people had left Egypt over 40 years ago and so the generation who were alive were, on the whole, not the same as those who left Egypt. The generation that left Egypt had experienced the most astounding open miracles and saw Hashem's hand, so to speak. This was a serious shortcoming in their relationship with Hashem and Moshe therefore had to illustrate Hashem's greatness and make it clear that the miracles which occurred were only from God. The purpose of taking the staff was exactly not to use it, and thereby to show that it wasn't Moshe's staff making the miracle, but instead Moshe just had to speak to the rock and Hashem provided the water. There was no magic wand or spell

which Moshe performed, and this would have been evident had Moshe **held** the staff in front of the people and **spoken** to the rock.

Moshe's mistake was very significant, as he failed to show the Jewish people that Hashem is the source of everything, especially miracles. The Jewish people were already complaining, which is a sign of their lack of belief in God and it was therefore an appropriate time for them to be reminded of God's infinite power, that He was really in control of everything. This also explains why Moshe was punished by not being able to enter the Land of Israel. The Jewish people needed a new leader who could take them to the next stage in their journey. The generation who entered Israel had to have a real understanding of the role that Hashem plays in the world, both in miracles and in what we call nature. The Jewish people would experience fewer open miracles after they enter Israel and they would have to learn to become more independent. This runs the risk of forgetting that God is in control when seemingly all of our own actions result in our success and safety. Therefore, Moshe could not continue to be the leader. He missed an opportunity to show the Jewish people that God is present in everything when they needed it most.

Moshe is known until today as the greatest Jewish leader to have lived and constantly praised in the Torah as the most humble individual. Nevertheless, this episode teaches us that a change in leadership is necessary when the leader no longer suits the needs of the people. Moshe was undoubtedly a brilliant leader, but it was time for his successor to take over and take the Jewish people from the wilderness into the Land of Israel. We must also learn the significance of seeing God in everything from Moshe's mistake. Whilst we haven't experienced open miracles in our lives, we must nevertheless appreciate everything that we have and thank God for all the miracles which occur daily to sustain our existence.

**YOSEF IS IN SHEVET MORASHA AND IS A MADRICH ON TORANI 5783**

# POST-MODERNISM IN THE EYES OF RAV KOOK

## PART 4: 'SO DOES A LITTLE FOLLY OUTWEIGH WISDOM AND HONOUR'



We live in this world within boundaries of all kinds. The most basic boundaries are those in our minds. We understand the world as working in one way, and our minds won't let us even imagine the world working according to any different method. For example, we all know that, due to gravity, objects fall down in a straight line. Why don't they fall down in a circular manoeuvre? Such questions don't usually occur to us. Our minds are used to the way the world 'goes round', and blocks our ability to ask questions that are beyond that.

In *Orot Hakodesh* (1:61) Rav Kook says the following:  
בתוך כל הדברים שנקראו יקרים נחשבת גם הסכלות

Meaning, among all things that are important and precious in Judaism, foolishness also has its place. This is based on the *pasuk* in *Kohelet* (10:1) that states: 'So does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour.' The ability to be foolish is to ask the questions that are ostensibly nonsensical; those questions that challenge the established order of the world as we know it.

Rav Kook goes on to describe this folly as something that contains within it all prior wisdom. In order to understand deeply why things are the way they are, we need to let our minds be totally free. Only then can we ask, 'Why don't objects float upwards?'. Only then can we deepen our understanding regarding all creation. It was only after Albert Einstein questioned the basic pillars of physics that he developed the Theory of Relativity.

Foolishness and humour are what enables all progression in the world, as Rav Kook goes on:

נקדה זו של סכלות המעט היקרה, היא הנושאת עליה ברוחו של אדם וכך חזיו את הדחיפה הטבעית לכל המפעלים וההנעות

Only through questioning the most basic pillars can we hope to change the world and take that next step. Post-modernism is doing exactly that. What Albert Einstein did with physics, Steve Jobs with computers and Elon Musk with cars and space travel, the 'woke' movement is doing with all foundations of our spiritual and social beliefs. This can't be something

random. Something like this, spread worldwide, must be part of a plan. Part of **the** plan of the One Who created everything.

Of course, the answers that the 'woke' movement is giving aren't ones that we can accept. Our Torah sets our values and beliefs, and nothing in the world can overrule those red lines. But what we can gain from these questions is the willingness to ask the questions that are 'out of this world'. We must get used to thinking out of the box about how things work in this world, how our connection to Hashem works in contrast to how it could be. What this world currently looks like, in contrast to how it will look with the *Beit HaMikdash* rebuilt on top of the mountain.

**"IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND DEEPLY WHY THINGS ARE THE WAY THEY ARE, WE NEED TO LET OUR MINDS BE TOTALLY FREE. ONLY THEN CAN WE ASK, 'WHY DON'T OBJECTS FLOAT UPWARDS?'. ONLY THEN CAN WE DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING REGARDING ALL CREATION."**

We don't know how things will unfold in the future, but if I had to make an educated guess, I would say it is going in one obvious direction. Post-modernism, and now wokeness, is taking the place of Philosophy as the leading epistemological theory and method of thinking in this world. Philosophy is what set the boundaries on our thoughts over the last few thousand years, and right now it is losing its place to wokeness. Philosophy did the same thing to *nevua* (prophecy). The fact that Hashem would reach out from the heavens and talk to man is one of those 'out of this world' things, and with the way our minds are structured

today, it is almost impossible for us to accept that such a thing is possible. Philosophy had raised the status of wisdom and thoughts to be the crown jewel of mankind.

And it is time for the personal relationship with Hashem to return to its proper place, as the only crown jewel of our lives. We have to free ourselves from the chains wrapped around our minds and get ready for *nevua* to return to be a great part of reality.

אמנם השכל הנולא שהוא ראוי לכונן את אשורי הדמיון על דרך החיים, הוא השכל הא-להי, שמכוננו באה הפועת הנבואה בהתגלות התורה ואור רוח הקודש

(*Orot HaKodesh* 1:234)

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# TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## MORI YOSEF QAFIH | NAHALA 18<sup>TH</sup> TAMMUZ



I didn't really think this through. I should have done all Yemenite Jews at once, given that it's so difficult to get there at the moment, due to the war and all. Assuming that we can hire a private plane again, like last time, and go in under the radar, we'll make our way to Sana'a.

Mori Yosef Qafih (pronounced in Modern Hebrew as Kapach) was born in 1917 in Sana'a, Yemen. In order to understand his character, it is imperative that we first encounter his grandfather, Mori Yihya Qafih. After the famed *Iggeret Teiman*, or *Epistle to Yemen* of Maimonides (written to the son of Netan'el ibn Fayyumi, whom we met in *Shabbat Lashem Parashat Vayeitzei*), the Jews of Yemen were so grateful to Rambam that they essentially agreed to follow his teachings and *halakha* as set forth in *Mishne Torah*. However, all that changed with the advent of *kabbala* and the *Shulchan Arukh*. Many basically colonising European Jews arrived in Yemen, preaching the 'universal acceptance' of the 'updated' *halakha* of *Shulchan Arukh*, the new advances in kabbalistic thought and encouraging the Jews of Yemen to abandon their 'outdated' Maimonidean *halakha*. This caused several rifts in the community, with new sects of Yemenite Jewry forming, and the popular pervading Jewish culture shifted from one of philosophy to one of superstition and *kabbala*. (Side rant: this prejudiced attitude still persists today. Regarding eating meat in the 'nine days', which Rambam and Yemenites do not regard as forbidden, Rabbi Avraham Yosef went on Israeli radio last year saying that Yemenite Jews were of 'diminished intelligence' and need to get with the programme, or they can go back to Yemen where they came from.) Then, towards the end of the 19th century, Yihya Qafih instigated a reformation – a reversion to the classical, philosophically-oriented Judaism of their ancestors and to the *halakha* of Maimonides. This caused much uproar, especially as he directly challenged the Zohar and *kabbala* in their entirety as completely heretical and *avoda zara*. But whilst we could continue to discuss the fascinating machinations of the Yemenite Jewish community around this time, we shall have to content ourselves with this one final piece of information: the adherents of the movement started by Yihya Qafih were known as '*dardaim*', derived from *dor deah*, 'generation of knowledge'.

By age 5, Yosef Qafih's parents had both died, and so he was raised by his grandfather. At 14, his grandfather died and a member of the opposition to the *dardaim* informed on him to the Islamic government, as the law was that any Jewish orphan in Yemen must be raised Muslim. To stop this, the 14-year-old was married off to his 11-year-old cousin, named *Berakha*. Free to return to his life, Qafih trained as a silversmith, and would later become the foremost expert on identifying Yemenite artefacts for the Israel Antiquities Authority. In 1943 he made aliyah and studied at *Merkaz Harav*, where he became close to Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook and the Nazir, and quickly became recognised as an eminent Torah scholar. He, Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (known by his *magnum opus* the *Tzitz Eliezer*) were appointed as the *beit din* of Jerusalem, and he

was eventually promoted to the supreme *beit din*.

Mori Qafih continued in his grandfather's Maimonidean footsteps. Until this point, all translations of Judeo-Arabic works had been carried out by various people in the Middle Ages, most prominently the family of ibn Tibbon. However, many of these translators did not speak Arabic as a first language and frequently misunderstood the subtle nuances of the original texts. Mori Qafih essentially rendered obsolete the entire Tibbonide dynasty of translations, by procuring some of the most accurate manuscripts in existence and painstakingly translating them with copious footnotes to render the meaning absolutely clear. He translated all of Maimonides' works, including the *Dalālat al-hā'irīn* (*Guide for the Perplexed*), *Kitāb al-Siraj* (*Commentary on the Mishnah*), and *Kitāb al-Farai'd* (*Sefer HaMitzvot*), noting where different manuscripts presented alternative readings and further explicating Judeo-Arabic terms that did not have a direct translation into Hebrew. He translated other philosophical works, such as the *Kitāb al-amānāt wa-al-i'atīqādāt* (*Eminot VeDeot*) of Sa'adia Gaon and the *Kitāb al-hidaya 'ila Farayid al-qlub* (*Chovot HaLevavot*) of Bahya ibn Paquda. One such example where Mori Qafih provides essential commentary to his translations is in the rendering of Maimonides' so-called 'Principles of Faith'. The word used in Judeo-Arabic is *i'itqad*, which does not mean 'faith' in the sense of belief without understanding. Rather, Qafih explains that this term means 'to allow the understanding of the matter to penetrate into the mind'. Thus Rambam's Principles of Faith are not to be taken blindly, but rather to be investigated and contemplated until one understands the matter fully. This accords with the *dardaim's* shift away from superstition and mindless action towards a philosophical Judaism.

Mori Qafih continued to fight against superstition but became less vocal about his opposition to *kabbala* – possibly due to the wide influence it holds. When questioned, however, he stated his opinion in unambiguous terms. He observed that, on the one hand, people pray for the dead and attempt to provide an '*aliyah* for the *neshamah*' by reciting *Tehillim*, *inter alia*, and yet also ask the dead to intercede on their behalf and pray for us, that they should be a '*meilitz yosher*' for the living! Surely this is contradictory; either the dead are so weak that we need to pray for them, or they are so strong that they can intercede on our behalf! When asked what he did to mark a *nahala* (or *yahrtzeit*), he replied 'I do exactly what the Rambam says to do.' The questioner replied, 'But the Rambam does not say to do anything!' Mori Qafih responded, 'Exactly.' A bit ironic, then, that we should be printing this piece to mark his *nahala*...



# WHAT'S GOING ON?

- **Veida motions** are now open! To **submit a motion** or **apply for a position** within Bnei Akiva, and for more details, please visit **bauk.org/veida**.

- We will be making a **siyum Tanakh** on pre-camp in memory of former mazkir **Marc Weinberg z"l**. To sign up, please visit **tinyurl.com/siyum-5783**.

- Applications have reopened for **Israel & Communities worker**, please email **mazkir@bauk.org** or visit **bauk.org/vacancies** for more information.

- **Summer Machane** applications are still open! Visit **bauk.org/camps** to sign up.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit **bauk.org/feedback**.

- To keep up-to-date with all our latest events and announcements, make sure you're following us on **Facebook** and **Instagram!**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG**

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in memory of former Mazkir Marc Weinberg z"l

The graphic at the bottom shows a stylized representation of books or scrolls, with various colored blocks (purple, yellow, black) arranged in a row, suggesting the structure of the Tanakh.

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