

Session 232

Chukat – The Final Obstacles to Redemption

6 July 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvD72Ed8ujw>

Ari

Shalom everybody, good to see you. Ok, you can hear me? Give me a thumbs up if you can hear me, we're doing it again. I'm like, "We don't need to do this every time," but right now we actually do because Jeremy and I are broadcasting from a very special and unique location that I'm not sure we're able to fully disclose, but it is a July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration. We're hoping to have Ambassador Mike Huckabee here, which is very exciting. He's a man that I love and I have two goals in my interaction with him. One is to place my hands above his head and to bless him. And the other is to give him this hat, Mashiach hat, right off my head, because he's on the team.

Anyways, it's really, really good to see you, I want to express my gratitude to the Creator of Heaven and Earth for bringing us together. I want to express my gratitude to Tabitha who keeps us alive and keeps us going. Thank you, Tabitha. I want to express my gratitude to Ardelle for once again taking it upon herself to be the primary compiler and keeper of what has for me often become like a second prayer book. The prayer booklet that is filled with the requests and the needs shared by members of our Fellowship. And it inspires me every time that I go through it in prayer. It's a gift because prayer itself is one of the most profound and transcendent experiences we can have. And some say it might justify the purpose of creation in and of itself. But you know, praying for each other is an even greater privilege because nothing brings God more joy, I believe, than seeing His children loving each other and supporting each other and setting aside their own struggles and their own needs and their own worlds and their own lives. Even if only for a few moments and often much more than that, to intercede on behalf of someone else, on behalf of each other. And in our Fellowship, we're made up from the holy seekers, from such a rich, spiritual landscape, so diverse, I just feel that the beauty and the power of it is all the more poignant and powerful.

So I want to start with a prayer and I want to try to touch even briefly on everything and if I missed any of you, please forgive me, you should know that when I went through it, I didn't.

Avinu Malkeinu, HaShem, our Father, our King, we come before You as one family scattered across nations but united in faith with love for You and for Israel. We thank You for Your miracles and for all of Your mercy. For bringing Tammy's father through surgery, and Sister Christophora's sister healing, for Gary Elkin's smooth recovery, please strengthen them and complete their healing. We lift up Chana Tefilla Longworth, her family, and what's going on

with her daughter, Hadassah bat Chana. Grant wisdom for treatment decisions and bring Hadassah complete healing and strength. And Chana, I want you to know that I found myself really prayerfully reflecting on the painful situation that you as a family are facing with Hadassah and the decisions you need to make. And I'm really humbled by your strength and your faith and I want to share that with you and let you know we're praying for you and for her. We pray for Brigitte and Harald and all the orphans of Israel. Shelter them in Your love, ease their fears, and provide every need. Let hope and comfort surround them. And we pray for Mirela's family's health and for victory and peace for Israel. Please HaShem protect the Land its people. We ask for relief and healing for Colleen Mass's pain. Guidance for Rochelle's office search. I love that. That there's no prayer that's too trivial, it's not, everything is worth coming before God and to pray for each other. And blessings for Randy and Jacquelyn's mission and their new congregation. And Erin in Florida, for your physical healing and hope in her heart and clarity for the next steps and Diana Shelton and her family that they serve you with joy, even in the darkness. And that her light shines as a spark of Your light and of course, always on our minds and our hearts, Jessica and Aaron Burk and little Levi. Strengthen his lungs and grant him stability and sustain their family with hope and resilience. And Cal and Ardelle, there's something about Kyle, he was burned the other day with gasoline and I know how serious and painful that is, I've been there. And may he have a complete healing. And for the Gimpel family, for Chen's continued healing and for clarity from test results. Our home has been rather consumed with talk about Chen and praying for Chen. We sang this song as a family at the Shabbat family for Chen – El na refa na la, the five words that Moses used to pray for complete healing for his sister, Miriam. Anyways, there's so much to pray for. Bless this Fellowship, HaShem, that it may continue to be a light in the lives of so many. Pour out Your wisdom, Your love and Your protection over all who gather here. HaShem, hear our prayers. Let Your love and power be revealed in every life and through this very Fellowship. Amen.

Ok, my friends, if there's any Torah portion that really underscores the incredible power of speech and prayer, the transformative power of prayer, it's really this one, perhaps more than any other. And when I reflect on this portion and in many ways, on the core messages woven throughout the entire Torah, this episode stands out as perhaps one of the most central, pivotal around which so much of it turns. And I'm going to explain what I mean by all of that. I'm going to share it with all of you. But before we dive in, allow me to introduce Jeremy, who I know has something personal and heartfelt to share about the power and the cosmic consequences of Moshe's encounter with the rock.

Jeremy

Hey, everybody, shalom, can you hear me? Excellent, ok, it's true. Ari and I are here in Jerusalem. We're looking forward to meeting with Ambassador Mike Huckabee, and never

before has America sent such a representation of the nation of the United States to Israel to speak on behalf of the people of America. And he's been to the Arugot Farm. We've actually played music together, I'm really, really looking forward to meeting him and blessing him and encouraging him.

But let's kind of look at the Torah portion where we are now and realize that the leadership and the statements that the Ambassador has made is touching on a new era. It's touching on a new way of seeing Israel, a new way of speaking about Israel, a faith-based, bible-based, God-centered vision for Israel. And I think that's what this Torah portion really refers to.

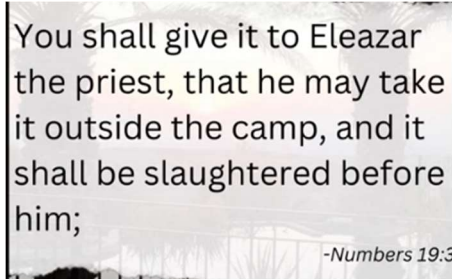
And in this week's Torah portion, we're introduced to one of the most mysterious and profound mitzvahs in the Torah, and then we're told about Moses not speaking to the rock, but hitting the rock. But first I really want to talk about the para adumah, the red heifer. There's so much to explore about this Divine decree. In the back of everyone's mind, there's that leaked Chamas document that revealed that the terrorist group was alarmed by reports that Israel had imported several red heifers, seeing that as a signal that the Jewish people were preparing to reinstate the Temple service and they claimed that this is a religious justification for their assault on October 7<sup>th</sup>. They called it the Al Aqsa Flood. That this was all about saving the Temple Mount from the Jews, and it's crazy to think that this devastating war was, at its root, perhaps triggered by the symbolic power of the red heifer.

And I think that if we pay close attention to that commandment because it seems that this ancient ritual, it still echoes today and perhaps even shaping our modern reality. So let's go on this journey and see where the Torah is guiding us today. The Torah describes the red heifer as completely red, so pure that even two non-red hair disqualifies. Now, ask yourself, where else in the Torah do we find a glowing, shiny cow? Anywhere?



That's right. That's the connection, the golden calf. And the answer becomes even clearer that the golden calf...I mean, the golden calf was gold, thrown into fire, and a radiant calf emerged. Rashi and other commentators draw a direct connection to the golden, shiny, red calf and the red heifer.

This connection becomes even more poignant where in Bemidbar, chapter 19, verse 3, at the very beginning of the portion:



It's like, why is Eleazar, the son of Aaron the High Priest, the one performing the ritual, and not Aaron the High Priest, himself? It seems to hint that Aaron was so involved in the sin of the golden calf, he simply wasn't chosen to perform the first sacrifice as the archetype sacrifice of the red heifer. Instead it was passed over, and it happened to go through his son, Eleazar.

But the connection goes even deeper. But let's ask two questions. Question number one is, what caused the people to build the golden calf and have that mistake to begin with? What was the trigger? And the second question is, could the red heifer be spiritually linked to the later episode in this week's Torah portion of Moses striking the rock? And if we can tie all that together, we can really have deep insight for our own lives, for what's happening in the world today, what's happening in Israel right now. And so, let's start.

What caused the sin of the golden calf? The golden calf came because the people panicked. Moses said the sin at Mount Sinai, they didn't see him return at the expected time, the people feared that he died, they cried out, "We need a new leader to stand between us and God." In desperation they fashioned a golden intermediary, a replacement for Moses. So in some ways, Moses had become a spiritual crutch and the people felt they couldn't survive without him. Their dependency revealed a national weakness, an inability to stand independently before God.

And now, fast forward 40 years later, they encounter another crisis – the waters of Meriva. God instructs Moses to speak to the rock, but instead he strikes it. And for this act he's told, he will not lead the people into the Land of Israel. And it's like, why such a harsh consequence? I mean until this point, Moses performed miracles through a lot of dramatic gestures, raising his staff, striking the Nile, parting the sea, raising the bronze serpent. And now, on the threshold of the Promised Land, something new is required. A new kind of leadership must emerge, not one based on miraculous interventions, but on speech, on literally personal prayer.

The people are being prepared for life in the Land where water is not going to flow out of rocks because a prophet commands it, but from heaven in response to heart-felt prayer. Each person will be called to pray for their own rain personally. God wanted Moses to teach the people a new model. To show them in the Land of Israel their connection to HaShem would be through speech, through prayer, through relationship and direct reliance on HaShem. He was being called, not to give lessons about the law, but to give over a national lesson about tefillah, to give over a national lesson about prayer.

But instead, Moshe struck the rock, using the old model. Not because of defiance, but perhaps because he was not the one meant to lead Israel to shift into this new phase. The punishment wasn't the punishment at all, it was just a natural consequence. He could not lead the people into the next chapter because he belonged to the one before.

And what does that say about us today? What's the lesson here? We stand between two chapters today as well. We are literally about to enter into the promise. We're living at the scene before a new era in history. The last chapter, the modern state of Israel was born from a really secular vision, to be a refuge for Jews, a safe haven, with a strong army. For decades it was enough. Survival, defense, strength, that's what Israel was, that's what it was meant to be.

But now, something new is being asked of Israel. Israel is being called to our destiny and our leaders today, they're simply not able to lead us that way. It's not enough to destroy the Chamas, or to delay Iran's nuclear ambitions with tactical strikes. Israel needs a new vision, a spiritual one. And now, our leaders are being called to speak before the nation, to literally teach us how to pray. The leader of communal prayer in Hebrew is called a chazan, which literally means "the one who gives people vision," chazone. The people of Israel need leaders to speak before them, to give them a new vision for Israel. Tactical victory is just not enough for this generation. We need to aim for an entirely new Middle East that will impact and change the entire world. Tactical victories and political positions alone are not going to bring a long-lasting peace or a real recognition of God. Only a transformational vision rooted in the Torah and the prophets can do that.

And I was hoping that maybe Israel's leaders would grow, they would mature, they would change with the times, but it seems like just like it was in the times of the Torah, it is for us now. And we literally now are praying for new leadership, for a new chapter that we're entering into. A leadership that teaches the nation to pray because it gives the nation a vision to strive for and to pray for. A leadership that sees our return to the Land of Israel, not as a political event, but a spiritual event. A leadership that doesn't settle for short-term military victories, but seeks complete redemptive transformation that will sanctify God's Name in the eyes of the entire world.

And so, as we read this time where the last leadership wasn't able to enter into this new leadership and we see that actually at the core, it was the leadership that caused the sin of the golden calf by making people too reliant on their leader, they need that personal responsibility, a personal relationship with God, the personal ability to speak to God. HaShem, may we merit leaders who lift us into a new chapter. And may our Fellowship be a model for a new chapter

for Israel and for the world to see. May Israel enter into a chapter of our purpose, prophecy and a true lasting peace.

And we're told that Israel was redeemed because of the righteous women of valor of that generation. And in our generation, Israel's women and the world's righteous women of valor will save the day. And so tonight, don't forget, one hour after tonight's Fellowship, at 8:00 p.m. Israel time, Tehila Gimpel will be hosting a live Women of Valor session. This is the time of the month and she would love to see all the women of the Fellowship there, of course. You do not want to miss it tonight at 8 p.m., Israel time. Be blessed everyone and may we see new godly leadership in the Land of Israel arrive soon. Amen.

Ari

Ok, shalom everybody. That was indeed very powerful and it just touches on that nerve, that sort of story that I have had for so long in my heart that we're on that cusp between the leadership of Saul and the leadership of David. You know, and then when Netanyahu sort of attacked Iran and went for the juggler and went for the head of the octopus, it was like, "Maybe I was wrong, maybe I was wrong, maybe he is something different and greater," but then of course, the Ayatollah and the regime was there on its knees and he let them survive. So we are really looking for that leadership and I think this Torah portion really does just touch on a lot of those themes about the leader that we're looking for and what that's all about.

But what I want to talk about a little bit more is what we were talking about before. We started off the Fellowship with a prayer, we talked about the power of words, and you know much of what I'm about to share comes from words inspired by the teaching of Rav Biederman on these verses. He explains that the renowned commentator Rashi, who I think many of you practically know on a first name basis by now, he's like the predominant commentator, teacher, Rashi. And he teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu's sin at Mei Meriva, the waters of strife, was that he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. We know that, as HaShem had commanded. HaShem's instructions to Moshe was clear. "Speak to the rock." Yet instead, Moshe struck it twice with his staff.

So there is two predominant reasons that Rashi gives for this reason. The first was the missed opportunity to sanctify HaShem's Name in the world. Particularly in the eyes of the nation of Israel. Speaking to the rock and seeing it miraculously produce water would have been an even greater, kiddush HaShem, a sanctification of God's Name than striking it. Because through the act of speaking alone and seeing that speech itself is able to bring about such salvation, the nation would have internalized two fundamental truths at once, two truths that are in fact I

think two sides of the same sword, the same coin. I don't know what the...I've been gone for too long.

On the one hand, had Moshe spoken to the rock, the nation would have learned that even an inanimate object like a rock, responds to the Word of HaShem. If a rock obeyed a mere spoken command, how much more should a human being listen to HaShem's Word? By striking the rock instead of that, Moshe missed the opportunity to convey this really powerful lesson.

And the flip side of that lesson is equally profound. Just as we learn that even a rock listens to God's Word, we must remember that HaShem listens to our words. HaShem really listens to everything that we say. And I'll admit that there are times that I struggle with this myself. As time goes on, the longer I'm living in the hills of Judea, the less I struggle with it, but it's been a big struggle for me in my life, I've shared this with you before. Honestly, I feel like many of you here in this Fellowship are gifted in this area. And I've drawn tremendous inspiration from you. I'm talking of course, about like the deep faith that really HaShem is listening to every single one of our words.

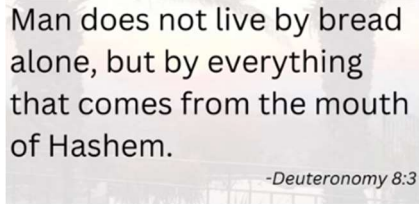
I think many Jews carry the same baggage around this issue that I do, largely because of our prayer experience in the exile, over centuries. Our prayers have become filled with beautiful and extensive liturgy, right? And while that liturgy is precious and deeply meaningful and tremendous depths of magnitude of meaning, it can sometimes, at least in my personal experience, come at the expense of kavanah, of focus and intention. Now don't get me wrong, I don't regret a single minute that I've ever spent in prayer, even those moments where my mind has wandered, even entire prayers...meaning all of the morning prayers, 45 minutes, where I may have not have had even one minute of focus. I don't regret a minute. Because I showed up and I did my best, I don't regret it. There's value in the discipline and in the words, themselves.

But internalizing the truth that HaShem listens to every word we speak and treasures every heart-felt thought we share with Him, that has been and it continues to be a journey for me. Beautiful journey, but a journey of growth for me. Perhaps the seeds of that struggle were planted all the way back here. I don't mean to blame Moses for my short-comings and my challenges, but it could have been that the seeds were planted all the way back there, in the episode where Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it.

Because when Moshe hit the rock, it suddenly shifted how the miracle was perceived. It made it appear as if the water came through physical force, or human intervention rather than through the sheer power of HaShem's Word alone in response to our words to Him. And that I believe is the cosmic consequence, the enduring lesson of this story. It was not a small matter.

This isn't just a little event that happened in Jewish history in the Bible that we just gloss over. You know one of the fundamental lessons HaShem sought to teach the children of Israel in the wilderness was that the true source of all sustenance and miracles is His Word alone.

Deuteronomy, chapter 8:



Man does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from the mouth of Hashem.

-Deuteronomy 8:3

By striking the rock instead of speaking to it, Moshe inadvertently shifted the focus away from the spiritual power of speech and of prophecy, turning instead to an act of physical force. The people might have concluded that it was Moshe's own might that brought forth the water. Or that miracles require human intervention rather than being purely the result of HaShem's Word. And such a misunderstanding risked diminishing their awe of HaShem, their awe of HaShem's miracles, and just as critically could have eroded, could have worn away their appreciation for the unique power of their own prayers. The realization that even the mere words that emerged from their mouths carry weight and the potential to bring about Divine intervention.

In essence, this incident threatened to obscure one of the core messages of the wilderness experience, that HaShem rules over all of nature, and that life, sustenance and miracles flow from His Word, alone. Am I the only one that struggles with really, really believing at all times that when we pray that God is really listening to it? Tell me if you struggle with it, raise your hand, don't be ashamed. Ok, well thank you, I don't know if you actually mean that, but Tar doesn't surprise me that you're not raising your hand because I know that about you. You do know that. You feel God's Presence in your prayers, that's interesting, yes.

Anyways, so I want to share with you, I want to delve a little bit deeper into the creative power of words. Because a lesson that struck me in a particularly deep and painful way as I was reflecting on it this Shabbat. And this teaching is from the Ohr HaChaim, and it's a teaching that I believe...I think I revisit this almost every single year when we reach this portion because it's so dear to my heart. Which makes it somewhat ironic and humbling that I personally failed in living up to this very teaching just this past week in a way that I'll share with you in just a moment.

The Ohr Chaim explains that Moshe's primary mistake was in three crucial words...who knows where I'm going with this? In Bemidbar, chapter 20, verse 10:



And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?"

-Numbers 20:10

According to the Ohr HaChaim, HaShem's grievance was that Moshe called the Jewish people hamorim, rebels. In that moment, he conflated their behavior with their very essence, something I've learned even more so as a father never to do. Never say, "Bad girl," say "You're a better girl than that. You're a wonderful girl that's acting in such a way." That's just

like 101, right?

So, the Ohr Chaim teaches that if Moshe had something instead like...he didn't say this, but I'm saying this, "Listen now oh nation, you're acting rebelliously before HaShem." It would have been acceptable, even potentially empowering, making a distinction between them and their behavior. Critiquing behavior is one thing, but labeling the people themselves as rebels is quite another. By calling the nation rebels, Moshe delivered words that were an affront. Not only to the people, but also to HaShem who loves His children and He sees the depths of our hearts. He sees our goodness, He sees the beauty of the essence of His people, a vision clearer and purer than even the eyes of Moshe Rabbeinu. As holy and lofty and radiant as his eyes were, he was still flesh and blood. He couldn't consistently, always maintain that absolute perfection of clarity and he fell at that moment.

So let me open a personal parenthesis for a moment. I'm not sure how many of you have been following this situation. Recently there's been a painful and unpleasant controversy in Israel involving a group of young Jews known as the Hilltop Youth. Have you been following this? Raise your hand if you've been following the stories in the Israeli news. Ok, a lot of you have been, most of you, most of you have been following this. Anyways, they've been accused of vandalism, violence against the IDF and the destruction of critical security equipment.

And you know, just reading the articles and all the condemnations of them, I'm still struggling... "Ok, we're about to wipe out Hagag, and redemption and now we're back to the internal squabbling and finger-pointing and baseless hatred," it just got me down. You know, it got me down. Like I said, they were accused of these things, destroying millions of shekels of security equipment. Now I don't want to dive into the details of all that right now, it's not the point I'm trying to make here, though I'd be more than happy to explore it at another time.

The reason I bring it up and I want to stay focused here, is because of my personal experiences and relationships with hundreds of these Hill-Top youth that have come through our Farm. And I got to see them and to see the beauty and the light coming from their souls. I strongly felt there was some sort of media hit job that was going on. Like this was being orchestrated. Like, ok, all of a sudden we're talking about the Abraham Accords, the two state solution, they need

to create a rift between Judea and Samaria and the country and how do they do that? Well the army is sort of beyond reproach and to have these kids that are fighting the army. I don't know, I don't know what it is. But it seemed like everyone was piling on, using these relatively defenseless kids...and I say defenseless because they're disconnected from the internet, from smart phones, from Facebook, from Twitter. They're just using them as convenient punching bags to hate on.

And sort of that papa bear in me got a little too emotional in retrospect and I ended up writing what I thought at the time was a beautiful, positive, and inspired article in their defense. Did any of you read it? I think I really was one of the lone voices on the matter and it spread pretty quickly and it went pretty viral. Many people loved it...you know who reached out to me? Jonathan Pollard, a real hero of Israel, prisoner of Zion. He even told me that he was super proud of me. Many reached out and said how grateful they were that I was able to articulate such an important message of positivity, while everyone was piling on. And there were also those who pushed back respectfully and thoughtfully, which I always appreciate.

But what I didn't expect...yes, it was a select few, maybe a little more than a few, but not that much. The level of hatred and anger and sheer rage that my article unleashed within them. People very close to me responded with deeply painful, personal attacks, that really left me reeling. By the way, if you want to read it, it's in the JNS website, [jns.org](http://jns.org), they are a great news provider. It's called "In Defense of Hill-Top Youth."

Anyways, there are some people who seem to thrive on stirring up controversy and provoking strong reactions, but not me. Maybe at one point in time I was into that a little, I don't think so, but definitely not now. I do not enjoy sowing division or conflict and knowing that such rage was caused by my words and directed at me personally was really unsettling. So I took it as an opportunity to look inward. And when I prayerfully revisited my article, I think I was able to identify the very individual sentences that may have triggered such a deep anger and back lash and reaction that really on some level I deserved. And I'm grateful it happened because it helped open my eyes to short-comings in my character, at least at that moment in time.

So again, without getting into the merits of the sentiments I was making, here are the words. I didn't know where exactly to start, so I'll just start where I'm starting.

They are the tip of the spear. They are the eyes and ears of Israel's frontier. They are the first to see suspicious movements. The first to sound the alarm. The first to rush to help when a neighbor's vineyard is set ablaze, when roads are ambushed, when terrorists stalk Jewish homes in the night.



And yet—rather than thanking them, or at the very least giving them the benefit of the doubt—they are maligned and castigated.

Politicians, journalists, and even fellow Jews are all too eager—sometimes almost gleeful—to slander these young people. To paint them as the problem. To throw them under the bus, sometimes it seems, to prove their own moral virtue.

It's a grotesque theater: "Look at us," they seem to say. "We condemn our own. We are the good Jews. We are not like them."

How convenient. How cowardly.

I was feeling emotional, and if you see within the context of the whole article, it's like just a few sentences. Here I'm just picking out the worst thing that I've done and laying it right out there. Do you see that? Do you see what I did there? I cast a shadow of doubt on the fundamental motivation and even the character of those criticizing these youths. I implied that they were gleeful, that they were virtue signaling, that they were cowardly, I was like so filled with righteous indignation over what I felt was the unfair vilification of these young, sweet, beautiful, idealistic kids that I fell into the very trap that I was condemning. Right? I vilified those who I perceived as premeditatively and maliciously vilifying these kids. You see that there?

In retrospect, I could have said something like this instead. I could have said, "Politicians, journalists, and even fellow Jews sometimes speak out strongly against them. Not out of malice, but most likely because they deeply care about Jewish values and ethical conduct and the image of our people. Many genuinely feared that certain actions might stray from the Torah's path or harm the broader community."

If I had done that, whether these people were really...that was their motivation or not, by saying that, it gives them something to hold onto. You know it's like offering them a pathway to align themselves with the more positive and loving narrative to hold onto. To say, "Yes, that's me." Instead of what I said which may have actually been what their motivation was – maybe yes, maybe no. But instead I was a hypocrite, calling on others to be charitable and give the benefit of the doubt to these Hill Top Youth in a way that I myself was not to them.

And it was this teaching from the Ohr HaChayim about the true nature of Moshe Rabbeinu's error that brought this realization crashing down on me. And it was painful, but I'm grateful that I at least saw it and was able to make sense of why this otherwise it felt like meaningless darkness was brought into the world. Now at least some light is coming through it. You know sometimes you need to actually make the mistake, to experience the pain of it for the lesson to truly pierce the barriers of your heart.

Ok, so let's circle back. So Rashi teaches that Moshe's mistake was in missing the opportunity to experientially show the people two fundamental lessons. First, that they should be at least as obedient to the will of God as a mere rock that responds to His Word. And second, that HaShem will be manifested in the world, not through might or force, but through heart-felt prayer and words. And words.

Then Ohr HaChayim adds another layer. Moshe's sin was inflating the people's rebellious behavior with the very identity, labeling them as outright rebels. But the Bat Ayin, weaves together these two ideas in a profound way. He teaches that at least, in that moment, Moshe Rabbeinu lost faith in the power of teshuva, in the power of repentance, particularly his own. Moshe thought to himself, how can the same mouth that just spoke harshly to the nation of Israel, now perform a miracle and draw water from the rock? My words have lost their power.

You know when I read that from the Bat Ayin, I was like...I can totally understand that. I identify with that so strongly. You know because of that lack of faith in his own worthiness and the power of his own teshuva, his own repentance, he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Moshe's mistake was underestimating the transformative power of repentance. He knew he shouldn't have spoken harshly to bnei Yisrael and regretted it. But he believed that his words were now permanently tainted. In truth, after sincere teshuva, after sincere repentance, his words would have regained their power. Had he spoken to the rock, it indeed would have brought forth water.

This is an eternal lesson for each and every one of us. Of course, we must be vigilant with our speech. If a person speaks lashon hara, or uses forbidden words, it damages the spiritual

potency of the mouth. One might feel like Moses did, how can I daven with the same mouth? How can I pray with the same mouth that spoke against HaShem's will? That slandered? That gossiped? That spoke curse words or vulgarities? How effective can my words possibly be? How many of you have ever felt like that? That after all of our failures and short-comings that we're unworthy to stand before HaShem? So interesting. Just the way we come from such different places, but our relationship feels so much on the same wavelength.

You know that for me, when I look back at my wavering faith when I was stuck in the U.S. after the war broke out. It wasn't that I thought HaShem couldn't bring me home. Obviously I knew that He could, I never doubted that for a moment. It was that I felt I didn't deserve it. You know my holy family deserved to be in the Land, but I felt like my sins had rendered me unworthy and that perhaps HaShem had vomited me out from the Land as the Torah says can be done. That was genuinely a thought that I wrestled with. Have I tried to repent for my sins in the past and yes, I tried, but in that moment I struggled to truly believe in the power of my own teshuva.

But, we can't ever give up, we can't ever stop praying and learning Torah. Teshuva can happen in an instant and it restores the power of our words and our prayers. We must believe in the incredible and the transformative potential of teshuva. Not only our own teshuva, but also in the teshuva of one another.

This issue, the challenge of truly believing in the power of repentance has come to light, not only in this week's Torah portion, not in my own journey, but also in the unfolding story of what is happening in Israel right now. I don't know if many of you have heard this, but in the wake of the recent attack on Iran, I've shared this with you, I think, the Prime Minister has been quoted giving credit to HaShem for the overwhelming and near miraculous, if not totally miraculous nature of the attack on Iran.



He was photographed wearing tefillin, the phylacteries, a mitzvah that all of you know is commanded by the Torah that we don during our prayers. Here's that picture of him. I don't know if this was from this time, or if it was one time before, but like many in the country, I was very moved by this image. For the first time in his entire career and leadership, it seemed like the Prime Minister might really be experiencing a foundational change of heart, that he witnessed, he experienced the miracles of God and he's having a moment of true teshuva, true return, a glimmer of real repentance.

This felt like an answer to the hopeful prayers of so many of us. And I was genuinely grateful to see what felt like a miracle in and of itself.

But then, I began to hear voices of condemnation with deeply rooted cynicism. Some people scoffed, insisting that a leopard doesn't change its spots. Especially in old age. People I respected were saying that. And if Bibi is merely a consummate politician posing with tefillin as a part of an election strategy. Like props, which by the way, if it were true, it does say something quite profound about the country that Bibi would correctly believe that expressing his faith in HaShem and putting on tefillin would help get him elected. Now that's something to celebrate right there, too. But nonetheless, it's a cynical and sad take on the Prime Minister as an individual and the authenticity of his spiritual journey of repentance, to think that the whole thing was just a political maneuver to do that.

And while I was cynical when I first heard it, it was from someone that I respected so much that the perspective really seemed logical to me. I could hear the point that was being made. But after even a moment of deeper reflection and spiritual digestion, my soul just rejected the entire approach, it just felt so wrong to me. Because we know that anyone can do teshuva, anyone. Anyone can repent, truly and profoundly, at any moment. Any moment in their life.

We see many examples of this throughout the Bible and throughout history. There's the example of King Menashe, I don't know if you guys thought of this, one of the most wicked kings of Judah, who filled Jerusalem with idolatry and bloodshed. Yet when he was exiled and imprisoned in chains, he humbled himself before HaShem. He prayed to HaShem and HaShem accepted his teshuva and restored him to his throne.

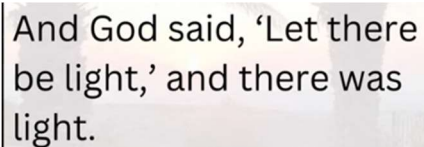
And then there's the famous story of Eleazar ben Josiah who was deeply immersed in sin, especially sexual immorality. And the Talmud recounts that in his last moment, he broke down in tears, placed his head between his knees and he wept bitterly until his soul departed his body, in a complete state of total repentance. And a heavenly voice proclaimed that he had earned a share in the world to come, despite his entire life up until that very moment. This illustrates that teshuva is possible until our very last breath.

And not only as individuals, there's the example of the entire people of the wicked city of Ninevah, who heeded the warning of the prophet, Jonah, and really repented causing HaShem to spare their city. The Rambam, Maimonides, makes it clear that a person spends his entire life and sincerely repents on the day of his death, all his sins are forgiven, provided of course that it's really sincere. Who am I? Or who is this guy? Who is anyone to cast doubt on the sincerity of another person's return to God? Particularly the Prime Minister of Israel.

So is it possible that his repentance is not sincere? Of course, it's possible, but it's not my place to decide that. It's my place to believe in it, to nurture it, to encourage it, and if I turn out to be wrong, so be it. But I deeply believe that in the eyes of HaShem, I will be judged far more favorably for believing in the sincerity of another Jew's teshuva and being wrong, than for doubting it and for being right. The reason I'm dedicating so much of this Fellowship to this point is because the stakes of this single action at the waters of strife, the choice to believe in another's teshuva could not be higher. They're cosmic, they're redemptive.

Rav Biederman goes on to teach something that is truly astonishing. That if Moshe Rabbeinu had spoken to the rock instead of striking it, the Beit HaMikdash, the Temple, itself would have never been destroyed. Now that might seem like quite a leap, but hang on tight because it actually really makes sense. We know that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple was destroyed primarily because of baseless hatred, much of what came from lashon hara, evil speech, gossip, slander, and the like.

The Chatam Sofer explains that the underlying reason people speak lashon hara, speak gossip and slander, I forgot the other words, but speaking lashon hara, evil tongue about others is because deep down they believe that words don't really matter. That speech has no true impact. But the truth is, that the creative power of words is beyond anything that we could imagine. If our eyes are open, we see this lesson right from the very first verses of the Torah.

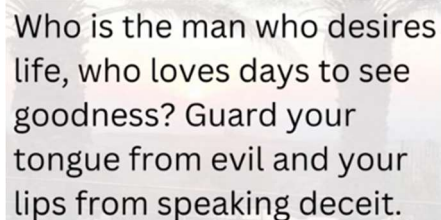


And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.

-Genesis 1:3

God said, creation itself unfolds through speech. Words have the power to create reality. HaShem didn't merely think the world into existence, He spoke it into being.

King David echoes this in Tehillim:



Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see goodness? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

-Psalms 34:13-14

Also Shlomo HaMelek, King Solomon says in Mishlei, in Proverbs:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue; Those who love it will eat its fruit.

-Proverbs 18:21

You can't overstate it.

Rav Biederman connects all these dots and teaches that had Moshe spoken to the rock and drawn water purely through words, the entire nation would have absorbed the lesson of how immense and transformative the power of speech truly is. And it's such a critical and crucial moment in their formative years as a nation, they would have come to the understanding of the potency and the danger of speech. How powerful speech is. And that awareness might have made them far more cautious about speaking lashon hara, even for generations to come. But instead Moshe hit the rock, instead that lesson was lost. The people did not witness the miraculous and creative power that lies in words alone.

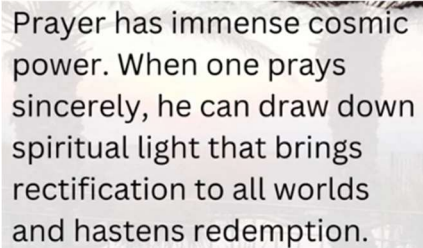
And so, the sins of lashon hara, gossip and slander and baseless hatred persisted, eventually leading to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, of the Temple. This story of Moshe Rabbeinu teaches us an eternal truth, that our words carry incredible weight. They can be creative, life-giving, good, or God-forbid they can be destructive and life ending and harmful. And even if we stumble and fall, which as human beings is inevitable, which is going to happen, through honest and sincere teshuva, we can always stand before HaShem and regain the power of holy, creative speech.

Now my friends, I'm speaking to myself even more than I'm speaking to any of you. I spent the last two Fellowships sharing how much I'm struggling with understand what HaShem is doing now at this point of redemption, that He's doing it wrong, that I know the best way to do it. And how I just can't get my mind to wrap around it all. And I found myself struggling with just the whole thing.

And then how does this portion start off? I don't know if you guys thought of this when you read the Torah portion, with the law of the red heifer. The quintessential commandment that nobody can understand. As if to say to me personally, that sometimes we're not meant to understand. That there are things that are beyond human logic and that the deepest purification and connection to HaShem often comes not from answers, but from faith. And it's precisely there, in the place of not knowing that prayer becomes the answer. Because when we can't figure it out with our minds, we can pour out our hearts. When we can't see the path, we can still speak to the One who leads us on it. It's as if HaShem is telling me, "My child, you don't have to understand everything. You just have to stay close to Me, talk to Me, trust Me." That's what I feel like is the message.



So I remind myself and all of us, prayer is how we hold on when nothing else makes sense. It's how we turn confusion into connection and how we turn pain into purpose. In his book, Nefesh HaChaim, Rav Chayim of Volozyn teaches:



Prayer has immense cosmic power. When one prays sincerely, he can draw down spiritual light that brings rectification to all worlds and hastens redemption.

-Nefesh HaChayim, Rav Chayim of Volozyn

Rebbe Nachman talks about this. The Torah talks about this. The power of prayer is what will be bringing redemption.

You know, so as we're sort of bringing the Fellowship to a close, I've been feeling lately, my heart has been filling up. It almost feels like, at least for me, that I'm coming to a greater source of clarity now. Sort of a game plan of sorts for the times ahead. Just looking back at the Fellowship right now, in our journey today in the Fellowship, we've traveled together through the story of Moshe on the rock, through the wisdom of Rashi, and the Ohr HaChaim, and the Bat Ayin, through the pain of mistakes and the hope of teshuva, through the firestorm of conflict within Israel today, as well as the quiet places of our own hearts where we wrestle with doubt and regret and the longing to speak words that build and to heal. We've seen how in a single moment, a single word can shape not only our lives, but the destiny of our people. How the power of speech and the faith that our words matter lies at the very core of the Torah's whole message because in the end of the day, prayer is how we keep speaking, even when we're speechless. It's how we stay close to HaShem, even when we feel far away. It's how we transform the chaos that feels like it's around us right now, the confusion within us, the chaos around us, into connection and meaning and light.

So let us take to heart the lesson that Moshe's story teaches us. That words can bring water from stone, that even when we've spoken wrongly, we can speak again. That HaShem listens to every cry, every whisper, every honest word that arises from the depths of our soul. May we choose our words carefully, may we believe in their power and may we never, ever stop praying. For ourselves, for each other, and for the redemption of all of Israel and the world. And with that, I want to end with this blessing. We started with a prayer and a blessing, we're ending with a prayer and a blessing, HaShem, in some way, the entire Fellowship is a prayer and a blessing.

HaShem, please help us guard our tongues and sanctify our speech. Let our words be vessels of truth and compassion. Strengthen our faith that our prayers reach you no matter how broken we feel. Pour your mercy upon all those who we've mentioned today and upon all Your people everywhere. May our prayers hasten the day when Your light fills the entire world. When peace reigns in Jerusalem, and when all of Israel returns to You with one heart. When all of

mankind returns before You with one heart. And may we merit to see the Beit HaMikdash rebuilt, speedily in our days. Amen.

Friends, thank you so much for being here, thank you for listening, not with just your ears, but with your hearts and may we go forward together speaking words of life. And with that I want to end with a blessing of the High Priest, of the Cohanim. And as you know, I'm not a Cohen, I'm not a descendant of Aaron, but the Torah teaches us that we are an am Cohanim v'goy kadosh, a nation of priests. And while the words of all of humanity matter, the words of blessing from the mouths of the children of Israel, when blessing emerges from within the depths of our souls, it can shift the course of history more than we can imagine. And I'm just so honored to be directing that blessing toward all of you.

Aaronic blessing (Hebrew)

May HaShem bless and protect you. May Hashem make His Face shine upon you and be gracious. May HaShem lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

Thank you so much, my friends. Shalom, I'll try to send you all a selfie with Pastor, Ambassador Huckabee on the Mashiach team. Love you all so much.