



**RABBI AARON**

Editor, Torah Tidbits

**GOLDSCHIEDER**

## Dynamic Connectivity

Much debate surrounds the issue of Moshe's sin at *Mei Meriva*. Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zt"l discovered a new explanation which combines two existing ones. The beloved Berditchever suggested that the variant explanations of Rashi and Ramban are actually one. Based on his premise he advances a profound idea hidden in this dramatic episode.

Rashi says that the sin was that Moshe hit the rock. He was never meant to use his staff, he should have only spoken to the rock. Ramban, quoting the opinion of the Rambam, says the sin was that he addressed the people of Israel using a scornful term; he called them 'rebels'. Although these explanations seem quite different, the Rebbe of Berditchev explains that there is really no dispute between them - just that each is starting from a different point of reference.

The Rebbe writes that there are two ways in which we can reprimand our fellow man. One approach is to take a positive approach; exalting the people by reminding them of their illustrious

lineage, their ability to come closer to the Divine. "He tells the other how great he is, and speaks of the place from which his soul was hewn - for actually the souls of Israel are hewn out from a place above the Throne of Glory," (*Kedushat Levi, Chukat p. 225*).

The other style of offering rebuke spotlights the person's fault and makes clear to the sinner the dreadful effects of their transgressions. "There are those who admonish Israel with severe words, using phrases calculated to shame them into doing God's will. There is a great difference between these two groups." (*Ibid*)

With this backdrop in mind, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak explained Moshe Rabbeinu's flawed expression. He failed to rebuke his flock in a way that would have uplifted them. This is the contention of the Rambam (cited by the Ramban) that Moshe used an abrasive language and tone.

The Rebbe now offered a profound insight: What would have happened if Moshe had offered his words in an uplifting way that would have empowered the nation of Israel? Had Moshe spoken positively and uplifted the nation, all of nature would have been elevated. When the Jew follows the will of God, nature itself is responsive to the conduct of the nation of Israel. Therefore, it would have

been sufficient for Moshe to only to speak to the rock and water would have flown freely.

In other words, when *Klal Yisrael* is on a high level, the whole world, so to speak, takes pride in its job. The world provides the people of Israel with their needs. Apparently, this notion is alluded to in the very first word in the Torah. Rashi explains that the word *Be'reshit* suggests the following: The *BET* of *Bereshit* should be read as “for” the beginning, not “in” the beginning. *Reishit*, means first, which is a reference to Israel. The opening word of the Torah should be understood to say: “For Israel, God created the heavens and the earth.

Creation - which Moshe's rock was a part of - did not respond properly because of the people's spiritual deficiency. Therefore Moshe had to hit it in order to get it to respond. When *Klal Yisrael* does not perform as it should, it takes an extra measure to get nature to do its task - even force to have to respond properly. That is why Moshe had to strike the rock to make it responsive and provide for the nation.

A striking example of this notion appears in parshat Kedoshim. The *pasuk* describes what will result if there is prostitution in the land. “Profane not thy daughter to make her into a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution, and the land become full of lewdness.” Rashi reads the verse literally - the land itself, the soil, will prostitute itself as a result of your actions. The soil will be unresponsive and need to find other lands to provide its vegetables and fruit, “If you

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do so the land will prostitute its fruit, to produce them elsewhere, but not in your land..." (*Rashi Vayikra 19:29*).

Along these same lines the great teacher of the Torah, Nechama Leibowitz, a"h, highlights the link between the Hebrew nouns for man and soil, *adam* and *adamah* respectively. Evidently, man is closely linked to the soil by the very act of the Divine creation ('Studies in Vayikra', Nechama Leibowitz p. 202)

Moshe failed during the episode of *Mei Meriva* to impart to the people the lofty lesson of man's connectivity with the natural world. In this context, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak also focuses upon the word *le'eineihem* (20:8), 'before their eyes.' Who does this refer to? The Rebbe answered that it refers not only to those known as 'the eyes of the people', the leaders and teachers, but to the entire nation. It was meant to be a moment of profound enlightenment for all. Hashem wanted every Jew to grasp a transcendent idea that there exists a confluence between the nation and nature. Nature is responsive to our actions and conduct.

Sadly, this lesson never materialized since Moshe spoke harshly, he was then compelled to strike the rock. The perception that Hashem sought for them was unfortunately undermined.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l (1865-1945) explained in his commentary on the *Siddur*, (*Olat Re'iya Vol. 1*) that the blessing about the rooster that we say each morning is really a blessing about the interconnection between the natural environment

and the human being. The rooster crows at dawn, waking the individual from his sleep, to engage in his workday. The first manifestation of that connectivity is being woken for the day's work and for the service of God. But how are we woken up? By an animal, by a rooster. The rooster crows, we might say, in order to wake us and that is just the tip of the iceberg of the incredible and vast interaction between the human and the environment. In the words of Rabbi Kook, "In truth there is one spirit of life that unites all that is in this world and an inherent unity that links everything together; both in obvious and hidden ways." This is a profound notion. "When a person elevates himself, is productive with his days, fulfilling his higher task, then all of time and creation are elevated through him."

As a young man Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906-1988), who would later become the famed Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin in New York, traveled to Palestine. He became a devoted student of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l. One clearly detects echoes of Rabbi Kook's thought in his student's writings. For example, when analyzing experiencing the joy (*oneg*) of Shabbat, Rabbi Hutner makes a point of the unity which is found in all of existence.

Rabbi Hutner taught (*Pachad Yitzchak, Shabbat, 5*) that as six days of creation were completed the Torah says, "And Elokim saw *et kol* (all) that He had made and behold it was very good." *Kol* does not refer to all the many things He had created, but is rather the language of completion, *klila*. Elokim saw how the entire creation

fit together in one seamless whole, and that was the *tov meod*.

Thus, in the blessing *Yotzer Or* during the week, we say, *ma rabu ma'asecha* - how manifold are Your works," but on Shabbat, we say *ma gadlu ma'asecha* - how great are Your works." "Manifold" refers to the multitude of infinite detail, which appear as disparate from one another; "great" refers to the way in which all those details fit together in one perfect tapestry.

On Shabbat, when we see the world from a more elevated and spiritual perspective we contemplate the world as if it were complete. Rabbi Hutner quotes an ancient teaching from *Rav Hai Gaon* (939-1038) who instructs us to view ourselves

on Shabbat like someone who has finished all the work of building a beautiful house, just as the world was complete in Hashem's eyes. The act of completing a home and having a place to dwell not only brings one safety and satisfaction, but rather, something much deeper. This Rabbi Hutner calls, *harchavat hada'at* : feeling a sense of serenity and wholeness; rootedness and tranquility of the mind.

Viewing the world through this lens injects in us feelings of belonging; we sense that we are a part of something greater. In this vast and seemingly disparate world in which we live, in actual fact, we are inextricably linked together. Indeed, one can easily feel a sense of despair when we interact with a world that often appears



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## Male urinary problems?

BPH ("enlarged prostate") affects most men over age 50

PAE ("prostate artery embolization") is a minimally invasive alternative to surgery with rapid recovery and immediate return to normal activities

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## Painful veins in the female pelvic area?

PCS ("pelvic congestion syndrome") causes painful bulging veins in the pelvic region and upper thighs, especially during pregnancy

PCS may also cause chronic pelvic pain while standing, and around intimacy

Pelvic vein embolization is a minimally invasive procedure for PCS with excellent clinical results and immediate return to normal activities

fragmented and broken, however, this truth, knowing that an underlying unity is present and can therefore be actualized, is uplifting; it fortifies us with strength and hope.

Three predominant lessons emerge from Rebbe Levi Yitzchak's erudite insight into the *Mei Meriva* incident.

The first lesson, very simply, enjoins us when offering criticism or rebuke that it be said softly and gently. This was the way of Rebbe Levi Yitzchak. His love for his fellow Jew was boundless. Countless stories celebrate the sensitivity he showed even to those who blatantly transgressed the law.

One example: When Rebbe Levi Yitzchak was once walking home from Shul on Tisha Be'Av afternoon, he encountered a water carrier who was busy eating while filling his pail. He approached him, and said, "Surely you have forgotten that today is a fast day." The water carrier said that he had not forgotten. Then the Rebbe reminded him that this was not an ordinary fast day but a most important one. The water carrier again reassured the Rebbe that he was well aware of the date and its significance. Finally, the Rebbe said, "You must have felt faint, otherwise I am sure that you would not have broken your fast." The water carrier assured the Rebbe that he had not felt faint at all. Thereupon, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak raised his hands to the direction of heaven and called out: "Dear God, see what a truth-loving nation You have. Even when they commit a sin, they do not deny it or lie about it!" ("Torah Commentary Kedushat Levi", Eliyahu

Munk Vol. 3, p.855)

A second lesson. Our words and actions, even our mere thoughts, have mighty reverberations. The eminent founder of the Mussar movement, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) was known to say, "If a Jew in Lithuania is lax in learning, a Jew in Paris will forsake his religion." He was highlighting the effect every act has on others - even those on the other side of the globe. Our thoughts, words, and actions do not remain within a vacuum - they not only affect others in our orbit, but even resound throughout our ecosystem and the environment.

A third lesson relates to the particular and powerful role that *Am Yisrael* has in impacting our surroundings. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "*Am Yisrael*, the one nation in the land, cannot bear division. She feels the separation of physicality and spirituality as a deep, strong pain, and she strives to find a way to return to unity" (*Ma'amrei HaRiyah*, p.234).

This notion can be viewed from a mystical perspective; but should also be grasped pragmatically. Being the beneficiaries of the eternal wisdom of the Torah, the nation of Israel has been bestowed with the tools needed to be the healers of the world. We must lead in fashioning and impacting our own communities, and well beyond, so that the Divine presence can dwell among us all. God has given us tremendous power and responsibility. We have the ability to create and to unify. Our thoughts, words and actions remarkably resound in ways that are incalculable. ■