

STORY

Fire in Amram's house!



The city of Nehardea once ransomed a group of girls who had been kidnaped. The women were temporarily

housed in Rav Amram's attic until they could return home safely. In the interim, in order to avoid *yichud*, the heavy ladder that provided the only means of access to the attic was removed. However, there was one open area through which one could see from the lower floor into the attic. Rav Amram passed that opening just as a particularly attractive woman was standing there. His *yetzer hara* urged him to do an *aveirah*, so he grabbed the ladder and began climbing up the rungs toward her. Halfway up, Rav Amram got hold of himself and realized what he was about to do, but he did not trust himself to overcome his desire.

So he cried out, "There's a fire in Amram's house!"

There were many *talmidei chachamim* in the area who heard his call and came running to the rescue.

When they saw Rav Amram and realized what was actually happening, they were mortified. "Amram, you are embarrassing us!" Rav Amram responded, "Far better that you should be ashamed of me now in this world than to be ashamed of me forever in the World to Come."

There are several lessons to be gleaned from this incident.

First, how quickly the *yetzer hara* for *tumah* operates. There was no gradual process here. Rav Amram Chasidah was a recognized *talmid chacham* at the time of his *nisayon* (as is clear from the reaction of the other *talmidei chachamim*). Yet, the *ta'avah* to perform a most serious sin involving *arayos* almost got the better of him.

Second, it is clear from this story that no one, not even an *Amora*, is immune from *ta'avah*.

Thirdly, the story drives home the point that at times the *yetzer hara* can be so strong that one may simply be incapable of escaping the *nisayon* on his own accord and he must seek help from outsiders. There is absolutely nothing wrong, and in fact, everything right, for one to seek the assistance of others when needed.

Fourthly, the story conveys that fear of embarrassment should not prevent one from seeking help. In this story, a significant Rabbinic leader sought help for his problem and was not afraid to admit his weakness.

And lastly, Rav Amram used the power of embarrassment as a means of preventing him from sinning. He knew that upon the arrival of other *talmidei chachamim*, their presence would break the spell he was under. The same principle is operative with the Internet-reporting devices. The very fact that one knows that he is being "seen" by the "*shomer*" acts as a deterrent to sin.

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## SMILE!

### IT'S CONTAGIOUS



Life is like a game of chess. I don't know how to play chess...



So let me get this straight, there's no cure for the virus that can be KILLED by sanitizer and hand soap?



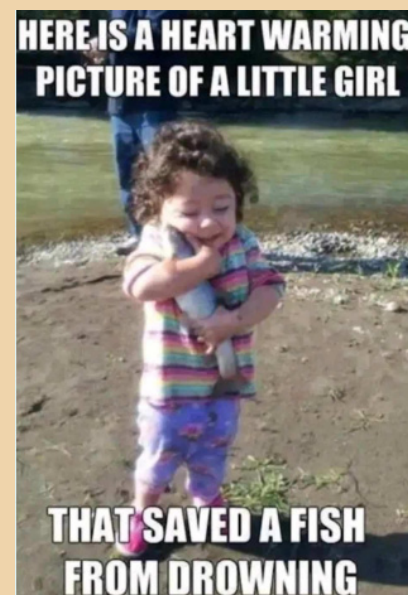
I am done with my 90-Day Trial of 2020. How do I Cancel My Membership?



How LONG is this social distancing thing supposed to last? My husband keeps trying to come into the house.



Is it too early to clean for Pesach? I have run out of things to do.



## Speaking to the 'Rock'

By Yaakov Nadel, Co-Founder GYE



Three questions on the Parsha of **מי מריבה**, (Chukas: 20):

1. When the Yidden complained that they didn't have water, they said things like "Halevai

we would have died with our brothers... and why did you take us out of Mitzrayim to die, etc...". This is the same way of speaking that caused them to get in trouble so many times before (and after). So why is it that this time Hashem didn't get angry at them for speaking this way, but simply told Moshe and Aharon to gather them and speak to the rock to give water?

2. What was the sin of Moshe Rabeinu at **מי מריבה**? Some say the fact that he got angry at the Yidden was the sin, others say that the sin was hitting the rock instead of talking to it. But the Pasuk says "Because you did not trust/believe in me to be mekadesh me in the eyes of the Yidden". How does "believing in me" tie in to getting angry or hitting the rock?

3. Could it be that Moshe didn't believe that speaking to the rock would be enough if that's what Hashem said to do?

To answer these questions, I would like to try and offer an original explanation as to what the 'sin' of Moshe may have been.

When a person speaks out against Hashem or has complaints on Tzadikim, it is not always considered a sin by Hashem if the cry is coming from a place of real pain and/or legitimate physical needs that aren't being met. As the Berditchever Rebbi once said, "You can be for God, or you can be against God; you just can't be without God!"

The Gemara in Bobo Basra 16b, Rava says - from here we learn that "Ain Odom Nitpas b'Shaas Tzaaro". Rashi explains, "a person is not held responsible for that which he speaks harshly [against Hashem] as a result of his being subjected to pain and torment. The expression of what otherwise would be considered as blasphemous, if it is expressed out of the pain of suffering, it is completely disregarded by Hashem as if it just didn't happen.

The Yidden may have spoken in the same way that got them in trouble by the Meraglim and by the **נחשים השרפים**, but in those cases they spoke out of lack of faith. In this case though, they spoke that way out of real pain and a real need for life-giving water, which was taken away from them after Miriam passed away. Perhaps that is why Hashem did not get angry at them for speaking this way, and simply told Moshe to gather them

and give them water in a miraculous way.

A stone is a parable to the Yetzer Hara, which causes us to question Hashem (as the Gemara refers to the Yetzer Hara - *Im even hu, nimuach* - If it is a rock, it will melt". The Yidden's hearts were like stones, but Hashem understood their needs and told Moshe to SPEAK with the Yidden kindly, for He saw into their hearts that their talk was coming from a place of pain. But perhaps Moshe felt that the way the Yidden had spoken warranted rebuke. Hitting the 'stone' instead of speaking to it, is a physical manifestation of rebuke. Moshe hit the stone instead of speaking nicely to it. Perhaps Moshe wanted to protect the Yidden by rebuking them, as we know the rule "When there is judgement below, there is no judgement above". Perhaps by rebuking them, Moshe hoped to save them from the divine wrath that he was sure would follow. But Hashem considered this a sin on Moshe's part, saying that "you didn't trust me". Moshe should have seen that Hashem did not get upset at the Yidden when He told him to gather them and give them water. When a person speaks out of legitimate pain, anything said that could make them feel guilty of their emotions may fall under *Onoas Dvorim* (The Torah prohibition of verbally antagonizing another, as per the last Mishna in the 4th Perek of Bovo Metziah.)

When a Jewish leader rebukes unnecessarily, it causes a *chilul Kavod Shamayim*, because the Yidden feel in their hearts that they don't deserve to be rebuked.

Perhaps this explains how someone as great as Moshe could have failed in this test. It is an extremely subtle distinction to be able to understand when the same words spoken by the people are coming from real pain or simply from a lack of trust. But Hashem expects a leader to understand this distinction and speak differently to a people who are in pain.

This explanation ties together both *p'shatim* in Moshe's sin, whether it was getting angry at the Yidden or hitting the rock, because both are **מרמה** on the same idea. It also explains what the "lack of trust" was. It wasn't a lack of belief, but rather that Moshe should have taken the cue from Hashem's own response to the Yidden's request and seen that Hashem did NOT get angry at them for speaking this way.

What we can learn from this is that when we feel the rock of the Yetzer Hara is just too strong for us to deal with, it's Ok for us to cry out to Hashem and "demand", as the Pasuk says: **ההופכי מים הצור לאגם מים**, that He turn the ROCK into a spring of water". Hashem will not judge us harshly for complaining to Him and demanding He help us - if we truly feel that it's a matter of life and death!

## Balak: The enemy within

By Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski



The evil sorcerer, Bilam, tried his utmost to destroy Israel with curses, but Hashem foiled his plans, and so twisted his tongue that his words came out as blessings rather than curses.

Seeing that his efforts were fruitless, Bilam resorted to another maneuver. Knowing that Hashem despises debauchery, he arranged that the Midianites seduce the Israelites to commit harlotry. This indeed angered Hashem, and twenty-four thousand Israelites died in a plague.

Bilam was a bitter enemy, but he could not harm Israel. However, when the Israelites surrendered to licentiousness, they became their own worst enemy. We can defend ourselves against external enemies, but we are vulnerable to harm ourselves by inappropriate behavior.

## The Final Test



Chazal say, מעשה אבות סימן לבנים – “the deeds of our Fathers are a sign for the children”. There are so many parallels between the Yidden’s sojourn in the desert and our journey through Galus until the ultimate redemption.

It is interesting to note that the LAST downfall of the Yidden in the desert before they entered Eretz Yisrael was the test of the “daughters of Midyan” - of z’nus and promiscuity. As a result of these sins, 24,000 Yidden died in a plague. After this happened, Hashem commanded Moshe to go to war and take revenge on Midyan (“and after this, you shall pass on”).

The parallel to our times is striking. Once again, the last great test of galus before Moshiach finally comes is in the

arena of licentious and promiscuity. We can see today with our own eyes the huge damage and havoc that technology is having on the kedusha of our people.

Perhaps this is what Bilam meant when he said to Balak: לָכֵּן אֵינְעָרָךְ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה הָעָם הַזֶּה לְעַמְךָ בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים - Let me advise you what this nation will do (to yours) at the end of days. Rashi explains: “Let me advise you” is referring to Bilam’s advice to Balak to cause the Yidden to sin with the daughters of Midyan. He said to Balak: “The G-d of these people hates promiscuity... if you can get them to sin in this area, their G-d will be angry at them and destroy them.” It’s interesting that Bilam mentions “the end of days” in the same breath of his advice to Balak. Perhaps he was hinting through prophecy, that at the end of days – i.e. in our times, the final test will once again be the same as Bilam’s advice back then: Promiscuity.

And what was Hashem’s final Mitzva to Moshe? What was the last great battle the Yidden needed to wage in the desert before entering the Promised Land? צַרּוּר אֶת הַמְּדִינִים! Gather 1,000 men from each of the 12 tribes and wage battle against the promiscuity!

In our times as well, we are waging the final battle before Moshiach comes. And who are the warriors? All of your reading this now! We are on the front lines, fighting this last battle of the final great test - on behalf of the entire Jewish people!

## INSPIRATIONAL IMAGE OF THE WEEK





The Beis Avraham (R' Avraham Weinberg, the former Slonimer Rebbe) visited Eretz Yisrael some 80 years ago. He addressed his chassidim while in Tiberias and said:

If in present times, with the prevailing immodesty, we guard our eyes when walking the streets, we may be almost

as great as the tzaddikim of the previous generation. We can apply the verse in Koheles: "Do not say, 'How is it that the earlier days were better than these?' For it is not with wisdom that you ask this."

The Rebbe added, "Don't say that the previous generations were much greater than ours. Perhaps we can be almost as great."

He then paused and changed his mind. "No! If we guard our eyes we are definitely as great as they were!" And he again invoked that verse. "Do not say, 'How is it that the earlier days were better than these?' We certainly can be just as great."

He paused again and then rose from his chair and roared, "No! If we walk the streets nowadays and maintain our kedushah we are much greater than the previous generations."

And for a third time he repeated this verse: "Do not say, 'How is it that the earlier days were better than these?' On the contrary, if we act with kedushah in our much more challenging situation, we are much greater than them!"

Dear friends, bear in mind now that this story happened some 80 years ago. Can you just imagine how great is someone who guards his eyes in today's times with all of its great nisyonos?! Hashem certainly turns to him and says:

There is no one, aside from Me, who sees what you are doing. There is no one to demean your failures and no one to celebrate your victories. Yet in the privacy of your home and heart you have dedicated yourself to Me.

תָּנָה בְּנֵי לִבְךָ לִי - "You have given Me your heart and eyes. I now know that you are truly Mine".

## DESIRES ARE AN ILLUSION

### Which end of the bar is darker?

Would you believe the bar is exactly the same color throughout?

Our eyes are a tremendous blessing that allow us to perceive the world around us. However our eyes can trick us as well, making us believe that we need things that in reality it may be very bad for us. Let's train ourselves to use our eyes for good and not let them trick us to turn after our hearts desires!

