

7-13-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion: Numbers 19:1 – 22:1 *Chukat* (ordinance of)
Haftarah: Judges 11:1-33
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Eph 4:29-32

Under the Law Part 10 - Anger and Divisiveness

Central question of this message: Are you allowing an offense, and unforgiveness, to damage your relationship with G-d, and with another person?

We are in parasha *Chukat*, which means “ordinances of.” It takes its name from the ninth word of the Hebrew, and the thirteenth word of the English translation.

Num 19:1-4

19 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 2
"This is the statute of the law which the Lord has
commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel that
they bring you an unblemished red heifer in which is no
defect and on which a yoke has never been placed. 3
'You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be

brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence.

19:1

וַיִּדְבֹר	יְהוָה	אֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	וְאֶל־	אַהֲרֹן	לֵאמֹר:
And spake	the Lord	unto	Moses	and unto	Aaron,	saying,
1696	3068	413	4872	413	175	559

2

זֹאת	חֻקָּה	הַחֹרָה	אֲשֶׁר־	צִוָּה	יְהוָה	לֵאמֹר
This	the ordinance of	the law	which	hath commanded,	the Lord	saying,
2063	2708	8451	834	6680	3068	559

אֶל־	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַיָּבִיאוּ	אֵלֶיךָ	בָּרָה	אֲדָמָה	אֲשֶׁר
unto	the children of	Israel,	that they bring	thee	a heifer	red	wherein
413	1121	3478	3947	413	6510	122	834

אֵין־	בָּהּ	מִום	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא־	עָלָה	עָלֶיהָ	עַל:
is no	wherein	blemish,	which	never	came	and	yoke:
369	871a	3971	834	3808	5927	9999	5923

3

וַתִּתְּנֶם	אֹתָהּ	אֶל־	אֶלְעָזָר	הַכֹּהֵן	וְהוֹצִיא	אֹתָהּ
And ye shall give	her	unto	Eleazar	the priest,	that he may bring forth	her
5414	853	413	499	3548	3318	853

לַמַּחֲנֶה	וְשָׂחַטָהּ	אֹתָהּ	לְפָנָיו:
the camp,	and one shall slay	her	before his face:
4264	7819	853	6440

We find in this parasha some amazing things. We find the ordinances regarding the red heifer sacrifice, and how its ashes mixed with water are to be sprinkled upon one who was in a tent when someone died there, or who touched a dead body, and has become “unclean.” We find in this parasha the time when Moses struck the Rock (twice) and it produced water for the people.

Today I wish to focus on something that seems to plague the body of faith worldwide, and that is how the people improperly deal with

an offense between brothers and sisters in faith. That plague is the tendency of people to react to an offense with anger, and to substitute arguments for conversations. When that happens, people often divide from one another and lose the unity of the faith. When that happens, Satan has a great victory and the body of faith is further weakened. In unity we have strength. In division, we are weaker.

If you are engaged in the work of the kingdom, as a leader or as a congregation member, you will face an attack. I believe that sometimes you can gauge the importance of your efforts for the kingdom by the levels of opposition you will face in accomplishing that task. Satan knows better than we do, on many occasions, how important our work is, to advancing the kingdom in this world. Satan does not oppose that which does not threaten him.

Moses was attacked more than once. In today's parasha, we see an attack I wish to discuss in some detail. We can see how Moses handled this attack, and draw some important lessons from it.

Num 20:2-5

2 And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. 3 The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! 4 "Why then have **you** brought the Lord's assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? 5 "And why have **you** made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink."

It is difficult to understand why the strong lesson of justice carried out by G-d as a result of the rebellion of Korach, as featured in last week's parasha was so quickly forgotten. We see in this week's parasha that once again, "the people assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron."

Without question, the attitude of the people was one of hostility toward Moses and Aaron. They lacked water, and they blamed Moses and Aaron for that lack.

The people were not relying upon G-d to provide for them. They were relying upon Moses and Aaron to provide for them. This

misplaced trust caused them to cry out to Moses and Aaron, and not to G-d. That was a grievous error. It is not a new thing, and we see this same thing even reflected in the Psalms.

Ps 118:8-9

8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in
princes.

So, how did Moses and Aaron react to this offense against them?

Num 20:6-8

6 Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting, and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to them; 7 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and **speak to the rock** before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink."

Moses and Aaron did the right thing. They asked G-d what should be done. G-d gave them some instructions. So far, so good. What do Moses and Aaron do to carry out these instructions?

Num 20:9-8

9 So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; 10 and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; **shall we** bring forth water for you out of this rock?" **11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod;** and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.

Our sages have rightly noticed that in verse 10 Moses changes the one bringing forth the water from the Rock from G-d... to himself. They saw that as sinful. I agree. Why did Moses do this?

The people were making a *personal attack* against Moses and Aaron. And Moses took it *personally*. He allowed them to frame

the discussion with their choice of language. He adopted their argument and phraseology of the complaint.

The people engaged in a personal attack with an angry outburst, and Moses responded in a personal way with an equally angry outburst.

It was clear that Moses had simply “had enough” of the rebellion and distrust by the people. But was that a justification for what he did?

Why did Moses strike the Rock? He knew it was Yeshua. This Rock had been following them, giving water. Moses also knew that G-d was the one who had brought them out into this place with miracles, and a strong hand. Moses also knew that all the people knew this as well. They saw everything that happened, just as did Moses.

Was Moses also angry at G-d? Did he think he could express his anger against G-d for letting this circumstance occur? After all, G-d could have been producing the water from Himself all this time, but for some reason chose to allow the water to stop, and the people and their herds grew thirsty.

I believe the seminal failing here on both sides of the discussion is simply stated in a single word - anger.

Let's begin our discussion of anger with a foundational cornerstone. Anger doesn't help you in any manner achieve G-d's righteousness.

James 1:19-22

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 **for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.** 21 Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

When I came across this verse in my early days of being a believer in Yeshua, I was dismayed. I was certain that there was such a thing as "righteous anger" in humans. I had seen passages indicating that the "anger of G-d was kindled," and I figured that I could have that type of anger too.

I read the account of Yeshua driving out the money changers from the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple, and I figured if He could be angry, then I could be angry just the same.

But I didn't read it closely enough at that time. There are several accounts of the event, but I think the most detailed one is found in the gospel of John.

John 2:13-18

13 And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me."

No matter how you read this passage, you can't convince me that Yeshua was angry. Certainly, He was zealous for the Temple's holiness. Certainly, He was focused, deliberate, and intentional in His actions. But angry? I tend to think He was not, because of the messianic prophecy which describes Yeshua.

Isa 42:1-3

42 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice.

Yeshua brought forth justice in the courts of the Temple, but He did not need to be angry to do that. He could be profoundly disappointed, and still be deliberate in carrying out the will of G-d in carrying out harsh justice.

It is said that if you look deeply into Torah, you will find your life there. I saw in this passage some things that I had personally

experienced as well. My efforts to follow G-d have led to a number of personal attacks against me.

I began to examine in some detail some events which led to me begin angry with other believers, and I began to notice a pattern.

I began to determine that what was causing anger in me wasn't that I saw an offense against G-d... I considered it to be an offense against me, *personally*.

My reaction to the attack was in doing what I thought I needed to in order to defend *my* honor. It was all about *me*, and my pride was huge. I had left G-d's honor completely out of the mix. And in every case, my witness was diminished.

I believe what is true with me is also true with most of us. I think I'm probably not alone in this affliction.

And although angry outbursts against the people of the world are harmful to our witness, angry outbursts *against others in the body* do even more harm.

When we do this, we stand with those who were angry with Moses and Aaron without cause. That is a very bad place to be standing.

Because we are all short of perfection, and because we congregate together to worship, there will inevitably be a time when we rub one another the wrong way.

Those can lead to a conflict, or they can lead to a conversation. Robert Quillen, a journalist who lived between 1887 and 1948, said, “Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; an argument an exchange of ignorance.” I would correct that last statement to read, “An argument is an exchange of anger and pride.”

But we, even as believers, are still somewhat prone to sin, and prone to anger, because it is part of our “human nature”. Some modern authors have excused that part of our nature, claiming it cannot be bridled. Others have said anger is a good thing, and leads to good things. I believe that G-d disagrees with these latter positions.

Paul speaks in his letter to the congregation at Galatia regarding many different ways that we can be in sin. One of those includes anger.

Gal 5:16-24

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please [clearly, we are to do the things that please G-d, and those things are found in Torah, and in other Scriptures]. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law [Hebraic idiom which can only reasonably mean that you are not under the penalty of the Law, because to argue you are not under Torah at all makes you disagree with Paul, Yeshua, and the remainder of Scripture]. 19 **Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these** [note these are ALL prohibitions found in Torah], of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience,**

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Notice the list of things that are sinful are all found in Torah's lessons. Notice that all the things that are laudable are also found in Torah's lessons. Consequently, this passage cannot legitimately be interpreted to do away with Torah's instructions, for its very heart is a listing and recap of Torah's instructions.

Notice in this passage that the second grouping sets out opposites of the first. What is the opposite of "outbursts of anger"? It is "self-control".

Paul writes in his letter to the congregation at Ephesus to discuss the offense that G-d takes to our strife with one another, and gives us an antidote to that conduct.

Eph 4:29-32

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according

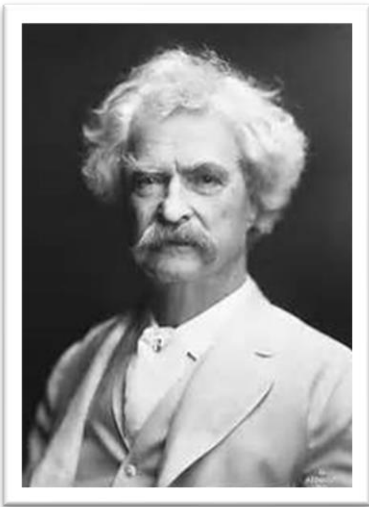
to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 **Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**

Do you see it? How do you put away “bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” from yourself? Certainly, it is important that you train yourself to react with kindness, tenderness, but that will take time and repetition.

In the moment you are offended, you must immediately be quick to forgive. Forgiveness keeps the poison of anger from entering your own heart.

If you believe that you must receive the other person’s expression of regret and repentance before you offer forgiveness, then you are inevitably going to hold onto far too much anger or injury in your heart. It will destroy you.

But forgiveness can be offered to the offender well before the offense is acknowledged, talked-through, or justice accomplished. Also, restoration of fellowship and trust does not need to be applied to that other person before he has proved himself trustworthy. A healthy believer knows how to forgive (removing the poison from his heart) well before the matter is resolved, or trust restored.



Samuel Clemens, the iconic author of the late 1800s wrote under the pen name “Mark Twain”. He authored two American classics entitled, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Clemens said, “Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.”

In reality, unless you take that important step of forgiveness, it really doesn’t matter what other steps you take, or how good you get at being kind and tenderhearted. You will always carry with you a black spot in your heart for the one who has sinned. And trust me, that black spot will be a cancer that will grow with time.

Over the centuries, our people have identified and classified a number of categories of harmful speech.

Evil Speech - *Loshan Hara*

Improper speech, as a general over-arching descriptor, is best known by its Hebrew name, *loshan hara*. It literally means “evil tongue.” In today’s English it might be best called “evil speech.”

Evil speech is speech about a person or persons that is negative or harmful to them. Even a true report can be evil speech, for it also can be harmful to another. The damage caused by evil speech can be emotional or financial, or merely a lowering of others’ respect for the victim.

Within this overarching category, there are several other subcategories as well.

Gossip - *Rekhilut*

The Hebrew concept of *rekhilut* literally means “peddling” as if one is selling a bill of goods. This idea is most often rendered in English as “gossip.” It has also been called, “maligining.”

The Scriptural prohibition is found in Leviticus 19:16, “You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people.” The presumption contained in this verse makes it clear that the “tale”

being “borne” among the people is not a tale calculated to increase the honor of the one being spoken of. There is no prohibition against reciting the praises of someone else, although that recitation should be truthful. Speaking falsehoods, even flattering ones, are prohibited.

Malicious Maligning - *Motzi Shem Ra*

The Hebrew concept of *Motzi shem ra* means, “bringing forth a bad name.” It has also been known as *hotzaat shem ra* (“spreading a bad name”). This concept is most often rendered into English as “malicious maligning,” or “slander.”

This is differentiated from the other categories by the presence of willfulness in the spreading of lies about another. With malicious maligning, there is an added element of hostile intent or malice. It is for this reason that malicious maligning cannot be committed by accident, nor innocently. The intentional aspect of this category of evil speech can be committed by someone who is not careful, or precise, in speaking. Even if strict malice is lacking, a person can be unconcerned about the truthfulness of what is being spoken. In this case, his negligence then provides the “willfulness” element for inclusion into this category of offensive speech.

Consequently, if we were to rank in severity these various categories of improper speech, malicious maligning is by far the most severe because it is propelled by the most unrighteous heart.

This is what we see done against Moses and Aaron in today's parasha.

Mean Words - Onaas Devarim

The Hebrew concept of onaas devarim means "injurious words." This category includes the use of unnecessarily harsh, angry, or insensitive words. Some hearers of such words might react by the accusation, "That was mean!" These kinds of hurtful words are characterized by not only the words chosen, but also how those words were spoken. Mean words are often described as being "over the top." This is because most recognize that better words should have been chosen, or the delivery of those words should have been gentler, or both. Those who use mean words speak them not merely to convey information, but also to injure someone.

We can learn by examining examples.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik tells a story of his father Rabbi Yosef Dov. The story begins as Chaim and his father were sitting in the yeshiva.

One of the town butchers bursts into the yeshiva and begins yelling at Rabbi Yoseph. He accuses the Rabbi of accepting a bribe from the opposing party in a judgment he had rendered on the previous day, and insisted that although he was innocent, the Rabbi had found him guilty.

The irate butcher continued to yell and accuse, and Rabbi Yoseph stood to his feet, put on his hat and jacket, and just stood there, looking at the ground. The butcher sensed victory, and simply increased his accusations.

He ended by accusing the Rabbi of being a dishonest person, and even raised his hand as if he would strike the Rabbi. The Rabbi did not react, but stood in silence. The butcher stormed out, still yelling curses.

What did Rabbi Yoseph do? He followed him from the house of study and kept saying, “I forgive you... I forgive you...”.

Rabbi Chaim continues the story by saying that the same butcher the next day bought several bulls, and was leading them to his shop. Suddenly, one of them turned and attacked the butcher, killing him.

When Rabbi Yoseph heard the news, he was heartbroken and reported to his son, “I am afraid that I caused his death because of my animosity.”

When I heard this story, my mind immediately went to the story of Yeshua, who was silent before His accusers as well (See Isa 53:7, and Mat 26:62).

I have often wondered in years past whether I might be able to remain silent when faced with wrongful accusations being shouted at me.

I have had another member of the body do precisely that, in the presence of maybe ten witnesses. Some of the people in our congregation were there, and watched it happen.

I dropped my head, and looked at the floor. I did not respond with my own accusations, but repented to that man. G-d gave me grace and strength to act in the example of Yeshua, and that of Rabbi Yoseph.

I tell you that in my flesh, I did not have that strength. It would have been easy for me to stand upright, confront him with the falsehoods he was telling, enumerate the sins he was committing in the presence of other believers, and humiliate him even more than he had humiliated me.

In my heart I granted him forgiveness, because his pain was so great, and the cancerous black spot in his heart had grown so large, that the acid of unforgiveness had consumed most of his heart.

My dear friends, Moses allowed anger and unforgiveness to damage his relationship with G-d, and with men. This is one of his life-choices that you must not follow.

It doesn't matter whether that offense is small or large. Today is the day for curing that spiritual cancer. Today is the day for forgiveness.

It doesn't matter whether you are the one who is the offender, or the one who was offended. Take the first step. Talk to the other person in private. Do it today.

But remember to listen more than you talk. And remember that unity of the saints is far more important than being "right".