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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Chukas  Rabbi Shimon Zehnwirth

Patience Under Pressure

“ ‘Can we bring forth water from this rock?’ ” (Bamidbar 20:10)

This week's parsha tells of Moshe's tragic error of hitting the rock. Rashi, as interpreted by the Taz, explains the scenario that occurred at this pivotal event in Jewish history: During Miriam's lifetime, a rock followed B'nei Yisroel throughout their years in the desert, miraculously providing them with water in this harsh environment. After Miriam's passing, this unique stone "left" and sat among the regular rocks nearby. Moshe and Aharon went to search for the rock. B'nei Yisroel mockingly questioned them, "What difference does it make which rock you use?" Moshe responded, "You insolent ones! Do you think we can bring forth water from a rock regarding which we were not commanded?" At that moment, an ever so slight degree of annoyance entered Moshe's being and caused him to make two errors: Firstly, he mistook another rock for the one he was seeking. Naturally, when Moshe spoke to this wrong rock, no water came out. This error, however, was not his most serious mistake.

Faced with the prospect of a public debacle, Moshe assumed that Hashem's command must have been to first speak "peacefully," and if that failed, he was to use physical force and hit the rock. Moshe hit a rock (this time the correct one) twice and it produced water. This decision to hit the rock, without having been commanded to do so, was the second, more serious mistake. The Taz tells us that Moshe should either have realized that he was speaking to the wrong stone, or at least waited for further instructions from Hashem.

Put yourself in Moshe's position: A thirsty B'nei Yisroel grow increasingly restless as you search for the rock that has disappeared. They question you. The pressure and criticism provoke you to reply with an infinitesimal trace of anger. It is not your personal honor at stake here; you represent Hashem.

Every second of delay is more chilul Hashem, a seeming lack of ability to deliver on the Divine promise of water. You finally select the rock you think is correct and speak to it, to no avail. The pressure now is almost unbearable; the people demand action, results. Can you be blamed for thinking that the command meant to include hitting the rock? What other choice do you have?

There is another, more correct choice: Do nothing. Wait. Hashem will provide you with some sort of indication how to proceed. His command was to speak to, and not to hit the rock. No matter how much stress you feel, you are never forced to violate Hashem's word. Despite all the complaints, all the criticism and all the eyes focused on you in that uncomfortable glare of the public spotlight, you have the ability to stand tall and resist the pressure. Hashem can take care of the chilul Hashem -it isn't your responsibility to the extent that you must transgress His instructions.

In most cases, our challenge is to take action that is necessary. Laziness and a host of other negative traits tend to prevent us from acting with zeal. But sometimes, our challenge is quite the opposite. Under pressure, we sometimes cross the fine line of impropriety because we feel we must do something. We have, however, the capacity to resist this pressure. By fortifying ourselves with the knowledge that we are merely the soldiers of Hashem, and our job is only to follow the orders of our Commander in Chief, we will be strong and unwavering in our loyalty, and bring only honor and glory to Hashem's Name.

Rabbi Zehnwirth learns daily at the kollel.

Muktzah Part 1

Rabbi Shlomo Francis

The Chachamim forbade the moving of muktzah items on Shabbos. There are various opinions in the rishonim as to the reason for this prohibition. Rashi explains that they were concerned that one may inadvertently carry from a private to a public domain and thereby transgress the prohibition of Hotzah. To prevent this, the chachamim limited the items that one may carry even within a private domain. The Rambam explains that the chachamim were concerned that one might overexert himself carrying stones and other items, and therefore he will not rest from physical labor. In addition, the carrying of items that are used primarily for a forbidden use may lead one to such forbidden use. (See Rambam Hil. Shabbos 24:13 for an additional reason.)

The Chayei Adam (66:1) writes that regardless of the various reasons for enacting the prohibition of muktza, the underlying rules of muktzah are based on the concept that for an item to be permitted for Shabbos use it must be prepared before Shabbos. The word “muktzah” means set apart. Items that are set apart from being used on Shabbos are muktzah. Various factors may render an item unprepared. Accordingly, there are different categories of muktzah varying in their extent and status of being unprepared.

Muktzah Machmas Chisoron Kis

This category relates to items which the owner withholds from use due to his concern for monetary loss. Whether an item is classified in this category of muktzah would depend on the owner's attitude toward it. If for example, the owner of a delicate or expensive electronic device would never allow this device to be used for anything other than its intended purpose (i.e. he would not use it as a paperweight out of fear that it may be damaged in the process), the item is “muktzah machmas chisoron kis”. Otherwise, it may be classified in a less stringent category of muktzah. A shechita knife, mohel's scalpel, delicate musical instruments, and merchandise in a storekeeper's inventory are generally considered muktzah machmas chisoron kis. Important papers such as contracts, important sales receipts, and postage stamps also fall into this category of muktzah. Muktzah machmas chisoron kis may not be moved under any circumstance. (All types of muktzah may be touched provided that they do not move when being touched.)

Muktzah Machmas Gufo- Inherently Muktzah

This category relates to an item which is neither a utensil nor a food. Thus, by its very nature, it is less functional and unprepared for use. For example firewood and lighters are both used for creating fire. A lighter is a utensil with a specific function, al-

beit a prohibited one, and would therefore fall into the more lenient category of a kli shemalchto l'issur (explained below). The firewood, however, is not a utensil and would therefore be categorized as machmas gufo. The prohibition of muktza is a result of the item being unprepared. Utensils by their very nature are more functional and prepared, and they therefore merit a more lenient categorization of muktzah. Stones, logs, bricks, most building material, toothpaste, deodorant sticks, and bar soap are all prohibited for Shabbos use. They also lack the status of a utensil and are therefore considered muktzah machmas gufo. Years ago, writing paper was considered an expensive commodity and therefore earlier poskim considered paper to be muktzah machmas chisoron kis. Nowadays, despite paper's decreased value, some poskim still consider paper muktzah machmas chisoron kis (See igr'm O'ch 4:72). Even according to the dissenting opinion, paper may still be prohibited under the category of muktzah machmas gufo as many poskim hold that it lacks the status of a utensil. (See Shalmei Yehuda 12:3 and Shvus Yitzchok 5:5.)

Kli shemilachto l'issur

This category relates to items which are considered functional utensils and are therefore designated for common use. They are considered muktza only because their primary function is one which is prohibited on Shabbos. Due to their status of a functional utensil, kelim that are melachtom l'issur are subject to certain leniencies. For example, they can be moved litsorech gufom, meaning that they may be moved for a secondary permissible function, or mekomam, meaning they may be removed if their place is needed. A hammer, for example is a kli shemilachto l'issur as its' primary function is prohibited on Shabbos. Nevertheless, one may use a hammer to crack open nuts provided that a nutcracker is not easily accessible. Blenders, percolators, writing instruments, and most electric appliances fall in to this category. An oven is a kli shemilachto l'issur. One may open the oven door to remove food, and one may use the oven to store dirty dishes if a comparable non muktza storage area is not readily available. Hagoan Rav Elyashiv considers most **empty** metal pots to be keilim shemilachtom l'issur as their primary use is for cooking which is forbidden on shabbos. The fact that food is often served from the pot is considered secondary as this is usually done only to save one the bother of transferring the food to an alternative serving dish. Cookware that is often used to serve or store food is not muktza. A fan is a kli shemilachto l'issur. Accordingly, one may move it to benefit from the blowing air as this is litsorech gufo use. If the blowing air would prevent one from using a section of the room or would make it's use uncomfortable it may be moved as this would be a litsorech mikomo function.

Rabbi Francis learns full-time at the kollel.