# Parashat Hukkat/Balak: Don't Lose Your Head

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### 1. Shall We Get Water from a Rock?

| **Bemidbar 20:10-12** | |
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| וַיַּקְהִלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקָּהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֶּלַע וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם שִׁמְעוּ־נָא הַמֹּרִים הֲמִן־הַסֶּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מָיִם...וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן יַעַן לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֻׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקָּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם: | Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?"...And GOD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them." |

### 2. Sending Mixed Messages

| **Bavli Shabbat 55b** | |
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| הוּא דְּאָמַר כִּי הַאי תַּנָּא, דְּתַנְיָא, רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר: אַף מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּחֶטְאָם מֵתוּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: ״לָכֵן לֹא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי״. הָא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי — עֲדַיִן לֹא הִגִּיעַ זְמַנְּכֶם לִיפָּטֵר מִן הָעוֹלָם. | The Gemara answers: Rav Ami **stated** his position **in accordance with this *tanna*, as it was taught** in a *baraita*: **Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: Even Moses and Aaron died due to their sin, as it is stated:** "And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: **Because you did not believe in Me…**"(Numbers 20:12). **Had you believed in Me your time would not** yet **have come to leave the world.** |

| **Hizkuni on Bemidbar 20:10** | |
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| **הֲמִן הַסֶּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מָיִם** יִשְׂרָאֵל סָבְרוּ כְּמִשְׁמָעוֹ, כְּלוֹמַר אֵיךְ יוּכַל לִהְיוֹת שֶׁסֶּלַע זֶה יוֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם וּמֹשֶׁה רָצָה לוֹמַר הֲהָיִיתֶם סְבוּרִים שֶׁמִּן הַסֶּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מָיִם כְּמוֹ שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה, וּלְכָךְ הִקְפִּיד הַקָּב״ה, שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ לְפָרֵשׁ דְּבָרָיו שֶׁיֵּדְעוּ הַכֹּל בְּפֵרוּשׁ שֶׁהַקָּב״ה נוֹתֵן לָהֶם מַיִם וְהוּא לֹא דִּקְדֵּק בִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ. | **"Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?"** Israel understood the phrase according to its simple meaning, namely: "How could it be that this rock will bring forth water for you?" But Moses intended to say: "Did you think that we would bring forth water for you from this rock, as we did previously?" Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, was upset, because Moses should have explained his words more clearly, so that everyone would explicitly understand that it was God who was giving them water. But he was not sufficiently precise in his language. |

| **Kedushat Levi on Bemidbar 20:8** | |
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| וְהִנֵּה יֵשׁ שְׁנֵי בְּחִינוֹת בְּמוֹכִיחַ שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁיַּעֲשׂוּ רְצוֹן הַבּוֹרֵא בָּרוּךְ הוּא. אֶחָד, שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ בִּדְבָרִים | There are two ways in which a leader may rebuke Israel and inspire them to do the will of the Creator. One way |

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

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| טוֹבִים, דְּהַיְנוּ שֶׁאוֹמֵר לְכָל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל גְּדֻלַּת מַעֲלָתוֹ וּמְקוֹם מְקוֹר מַחְצַב נִשְׁמָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בֶּאֱמֶת נִשְׁמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲצוּבָה לְמַעְלָה מִכִּסֵּא כָּבוֹד וְגֻדֶּל הֲנָחַת רוּחַ אֲשֶׁר לְהַבּוֹרֵא יִתְבָּרֵךְ כִּבְיָכוֹל מִמִּצְוַת כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגֻדֶּל הַשִּׂמְחָה אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל הָעוֹלָמוֹת בַּעֲשׂוֹת אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְוַת הַבּוֹרֵא בָּזֶה וּבָזֶה הַתּוֹכֵחָה מַטָּה אֶת לֵב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן הַבּוֹרֵא בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְקַבֵּל כָּל אִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל עֹל מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם עָלָיו. | is through kind and uplifting words. Such a leader speaks of the greatness of every Jew, of the lofty source from which the Jewish soul is hewn—for in truth the souls of Israel originate beneath the Throne of Glory. He speaks of the immense pleasure that God, as it were, derives from the mitzvot of every Jew, and of the joy that fills all the worlds when a Jew fulfills the will of the Creator. Through this kind of encouragement, the hearts of Israel are inclined to accept upon themselves the yoke of Heaven. |
| וְיֵשׁ שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּדְבָרִים קָשִׁים וּבְדִבְרֵי בִּיּוּשִׁים עַד שֶׁהֵם מֻכְרָחִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹן הַבּוֹרֵא. וְהַחִלּוּק שֶׁבֵּינֵיהֶם, זֶה שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטוֹב מַעֲלֶה אֶת נִשְׁמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעְלָה לְמַעְלָה וּמְסַפֵּר תָּמִיד בְּצִדְקַת וּבְגֻדֻלַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּמָּה גָּדוֹל כּוֹחָם לְמַעְלָה וְרָאוּי הוּא לִהְיוֹת מַנְהִיג עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְזֶה שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּדְבָרִים קָשִׁים אֵינוֹ בַּבְּחִינָה הַזֹּאת. | The other way is to rebuke Israel with harsh words, criticism, and humiliation until they are compelled to do the will of God. The difference between these approaches is significant. One who rebukes through kindness elevates the souls of Israel higher and higher, continually speaking of their righteousness and greatness and of how powerful they are in the upper worlds. Such a person is fit to be a leader of Israel. One who rebukes through harshness does not operate on this spiritual level. |
| וְזֶהוּ הָרֶמֶז יַעַן לֹא הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי זֶה שֶׁמּוֹכִיחַ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטוֹב יָכוֹל גַּם הוּא לְהַשִּׂיג אֶת הָעָם זֶה הַשֵּׂכֶל. וְזֶה הָרֶמֶז לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּמַאֲמַר חֲכָמֵינוּ ז"ל עֵינֵי עֲדָה, חַכְמֵי עֲדָה שֶׁגַּם הֵם יַשִּׂיגוּ זֶה הַשֵּׂכֶל: | This is the meaning of the verse, "Because you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me before the eyes of the Children of Israel." A leader who rebukes Israel through goodness can bring the people themselves to perceive this spiritual truth. This is hinted at by the phrase "before the eyes of the Children of Israel." As the Sages say, "the eyes of the congregation" refers to the wise ones of the congregation. Moses failed to teach the people—and especially their leaders—the spiritual principle that the greatness of Israel is what enables creation itself to respond willingly to their needs. |

**3. Don’t Lose Your Head**

| **James E. Kugel, *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times*, 213** |
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| Actually, I have never understood why this passage should seem so mysterious to commentators. The Bible states the reason for Moses's and Aaron's me now, you Me,' sanctifying Me in the Israelites' sight, you will not lead this congregation to the land that I am giving them." What does this mean in context?...The problem was the "can we get water." Through this little slip of the tongue, it seemed as if Moses and Aaron were actually taking credit for a miracle that God was about to perform and thereby not "sanctifying Me in the Israelites' sight." |
| The slip is somewhat understandable. After all, faced with the same situation some years earlier…But now, God gives Moses what looks like the same order, and Moses, having no reason to fear that the outcome will be any different this time, confidently uses the occasion to reprove the Israelites for their lack of faith…Moses had plenty of trust that everything would turn out well; that's why he could give his swaggering challenge to the people…it was precisely his overconfidence that led him to omit thereby "sanctifying Me in the Israelites' sight." |

| **Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 168-169** |
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| If you find yourself heroically stepping into the breach to restore order, it is important to remember that the authority gained is a product of social expectations. To believe it comes from you is an illusion.<br>Don’t let it get to your head. |