**[Seeing the Serpent of BOREDOM – Parshat Hukat](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/seeing-the-serpent-of-boredom-parshat-hukat)**

Beneath the richness of contrasting experiences, there is a great ocean of consciousness, a radiant field of knowing-ness, an inherent goodness with no opposite. This goodness is the root of our own being; it is not remote or attainable by only a few. Rather, it is our own sentience, the simple awareness behind all experience, available to everyone.

And yet, because it is the constant and un-varying backdrop of all experience, it is ordinarily unnoticeable. Ironically, it is, on one hand, the most miraculous thing available to us, the singular spiritual nourishment that can satisfy the longing of the human soul; yet, on the other hand, its extraordinariness is ordinarily hidden in plain sight.

There is a hint in the *parshah* (Numbers 21:5):

וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר הָעָ֗ם בֵּֽאלֹהִים֮ וּבְמֹשֶׁה֒ לָמָ֤ה הֶֽעֱלִיתֻ֙נוּ֙ מִמִּצְרַ֔יִם לָמ֖וּת בַּמִּדְבָּ֑ר כִּ֣י אֵ֥ין לֶ֙חֶם֙ וְאֵ֣ין מַ֔יִם וְנַפְשֵׁ֣נוּ קָ֔צָה בַּלֶּ֖חֶם הַקְּלֹקֵֽל׃
*And the people spoke against Elohim and against Moses, “Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and our souls have come to loathe this ‘miserable bread!’”*

– *Ayn lekhem v’ayn mayim – No bread and no water…*אֵ֥ין לֶ֙חֶם֙ וְאֵ֣ין מַ֔יִם

“Bread and water” are metaphors for varieties of experience; they are different types of contrasting and complementary gratification.

לֶ֙חֶם֙ הַקְּלֹקֵֽל – *Lekhem Haklokel –* The “miserable bread” is the *mon,* the miraculous “manna” that the Israelites ate in the wilderness. This “manna” is a symbol for our deepest being; on one hand, it is a miracle, our sustaining essence as we traverse the wilderness of life. On the other hand, it is the constant background; it is “bread” without “water,” a “goodness” without “badness”… and therefore not really a goodness, which is why it is called קְּלֹקֵֽל *klokel –* miserable, tedious, boring.

The word קְּלֹקֵֽל *klokel* is ק *koof*ל *lamed,* then ק *koof*ל *lamed* again. The symbolism of ק*koof* has to do with seeing the sacred in the ordinary, and ל *lamed* has to do with curiosity, with learning from every experience.

So, put together, קל could mean: “learning to see the sacredness in the ordinary.” This is a fundamental and not difficult practice, simply entailing the bringing of awareness into connection with the ordinary moments of life. In fact, the word קל literally means “light” or “simple.” This is Presence.

But, when the letters are repeated, קל – קל, it implies the tediousness of trying to find the sacred in the same old thing, over and over again.

What is the remedy for this tediousness?

וַיְשַׁלַּ֨ח יְהוָ֜ה בָּעָ֗ם אֵ֚ת הַנְּחָשִׁ֣ים הַשְּׂרָפִ֔ים וַֽיְנַשְּׁכ֖וּ אֶת־הָעָ֑ם וַיָּ֥מָת עַם־רָ֖ב מִיִּשְׂרָאֵֽל׃
*Hashem sent fiery serpents against the people; they bit the people and many of the Israelites died.*

The “fiery serpents” are emotional reactivity; when we feel the tediousness of the same thing over and over again, emotions like anger and frustration can actually be a kind of relief from the tedium.

*…they bit the people and many of the Israelites died.*

But, they are also destructive; in and of themselves, they don’t help us access the “goodness” hidden in plain sight. Instead, they “deaden” our sensitivity to the miraculous. But, there is a way to make use of them:

וַיַּ֤עַשׂ מֹשֶׁה֙ נְחַ֣שׁ נְחֹ֔שֶׁת וַיְשִׂמֵ֖הוּ עַל־הַנֵּ֑ס וְהָיָ֗ה אִם־נָשַׁ֤ךְ הַנָּחָשׁ֙ אֶת־אִ֔ישׁ וְהִבִּ֛יט אֶל־נְחַ֥שׁ הַנְּחֹ֖שֶׁת וָחָֽי׃
*Moses made a copper serpent and mounted it on a pole; and when anyone was bitten by a serpent, they would look at the copper serpent and live.*

“Copper serpent” is *n’khash n’khoshet;* it is a play on words, because “copper” and “serpent” are essentially the same word, built from the root:     *nun – khet ­– shin.*“Copper” is a common metal, as opposed to the more precious metals of gold and silver. “Serpent” is the pain of emotional reactivity. So, the “copper serpent” represents the emotional pain that comes from too much of the same old common experience.

And yet, the copper serpent had the power to heal the Israelites who were “bitten” by the “serpent” of emotional pain. We can see how in the letters themselves:

נ*Nun* represent impermanence, the pain of loss.
ח *Khet* represents patience, grace, being simply present.
ש *Shin* represents the fire of transformation, the increased consciousness that comes from bringing awareness to pain.

In other words, “looking” at the “serpent” means patiently being with the emotional pain. Through this *khet* practice of “presence with,” the latent “fire” of transformation (*shin*) within awareness is brought forth, allowing us once again to truly “live” – to experience the miraculous nature of the Essential Life within.

This is meditation.

Through meditation, and specifically through the willingness to allow awareness to dwell with whatever pain arises, the vast and spacious depths of the formless and constantly present field of awareness that we are becomes palpably and experientially knowable as freedom and peace; the inner and ever-available “manna” that we need to traverse this wilderness of life…

Principio del formulario

Final del formulario

***More on Hukat...***

[**The Lime Water – Parshat Hukat**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/parshat-hukat)
The other night while I was flying back to Tucson, the flight attendant came through the cabin and asked me what I wanted to drink. “I’ll have sparkling water with lime please,” which is what I always have.

“We have lime flavored sparkling water, is that okay?”

*No that’s not okay!* That’s what I was thinking – but I said, “sure, thanks.”

I’ve been getting sparkling water with lime on the plane all my life, and suddenly it was gone – and in its place, a cheaper substitute. “Lime flavor” is not the same and is not as good as a piece of real lime – on a number of levels – but business decisions like this get made all the time. So many products nowadays are worse than their predecessors. This phenomenon is sometimes called, “selling out.”

“Selling out” means reducing the quality of something for the sake of monetary gain; it is an exchange of one value for another. But this doesn’t happen only in business; it is a basic ability we have to override our inner sense of what is right for the sake of something else we want. And, it’s not a bad ability to have, if used properly.

For example, it’s good to exercise every day, to eat healthy food, to spend quality time with others, and so on. But what if there is an emergency – someone has a crisis and needs your help. It is good to be able to put all those things on hold temporarily and take care of the crisis.

In this kind of case, “selling out” your personal health for the sake of another value – helping someone in crisis – can be a good thing. It is good to not be so attached your own needs so that you can respond to the needs of the situation. The problem is when this ability to override – to “sell out” – takes over and becomes our norm. The problem is when we completely “sell out” in the realm of personal health for the sake of a career, for example; that’s when we get into trouble.

This is why it’s so important to *consciously choose and create our habits.*

We can break them when necessary, as long as we return to them. Don’t let the exception to the rule become the new rule! Many of us are full of unconscious habits – behaviors we took on for certain reasons – that have become our norm, without ever consciously choosing them.

The *haftora* for *Parshat Hukat* tells the story of Jephtah, the son of a harlot. Jephtah’s half-brothers of the same father don’t want their son-of-a-harlot half-brother to share in their inheritance, so they kick him out of the house and send him away.

Now Jephtah is a great warrior, and he attracts a band of men who become his loyal companions. Years later, when the Ammonites attack Israel, the brothers come back to Jephtah and ask him to please come lead the fight against the Ammonites.

“But you hated me and sent me away! Now you come back to me when you are in need?”

The brothers offer him a deal: “If you come back and help us fight, then when it’s all over, we will make you our leader.” Japhteh is convinced – he “sells out” in a sense, giving up his pride and sense of justice for the sake of prestige and status.

Before Japhteh goes into battle, he prays: *Oh Hashem, if you make me victorious, I will sacrifice to you whatever comes out of my house first when I return home!*

What?? This is very strange – what does he think is going to come out of his house? Sure enough, when he returns home, his daughter runs out to greet him, and he cries out in horror as he realizes he must sacrifice his own daughter.

This is such a strange story. Obviously, if he vows to sacrifice “whatever comes out of his house,” he will end up sacrificing a family member; it’s not like a goat or sheep is going to run out of his house! But if we understand the story metaphorically, it makes sense as an illustration of this “sell-out” mentality:

First, Jephtah is the son of a harlot, and prostitution “sells out” the ordinary values of relationship and family for the sake of pleasure and monetary gain. Second, Jephtah agrees to help his betraying brothers fight for the sake of prestige; more selling out. Finally, he vows to sacrifice whatever comes out of his house if he wins.

This is the clearest example – he is willing to sacrifice the most precious thing at a future time for the sake of gaining something else in the short run. Then, he is surprised when it leads to tragedy – just as we too can be surprised when we unconsciously make bad choices for the sake of short term, relatively unimportant goals.

On the deepest level, when it comes to how we use our own minds, “selling out” tends to be the norm for most of us.

Meaning: Right now, we have something so precious – the most precious thing there is in fact – we have the ability to receive this moment with love and gratitude, to know that we are an expression of the miracle of Being, in this moment.

And yet, many of us unconsciously and unwittingly give up this most precious gift – for what? For mostly useless thinking. If we’re not aware of what we are doing, we can simply cover up this most precious thing with our constant stream of thoughts, just like our hand can cover our eyes and block out the entire sun. The mind has a certain illusory gravity; it says, “Pay attention to me! I have something urgently important!”

But wake up to the majesty of this moment, and see: most thinking is a bogus urgency. Make it a habit to know yourself as spaciousness, as openness, rather than as busy thinking, and the miraculous becomes your norm. Yes, of course, sometimes you have to “sell out” – it’s okay – the situation will sometimes require you to get busy with your thinking, to rush around, to take care of business. Sometimes you have to put aside the most precious thing for the sake of the situation, but don’t make that the norm! When you can, come back in *t’shuvah* to Presence, come back to this moment, come back to the Divine *as* this moment – be the openness within which the fullness of this moment arises.

In fact, our innate capacity to return from the trivial to the miraculous is encoded in Jephtah’s name – *Yiftakh –*which means, “open.” No matter how much we have “sold out,” our potential to return to openness – to know ourselves as openness – is ever-present, and we can always do it from wherever we are, in the present...

[**Rage Against Rock – Parshat Hukat**](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/rage-against-rock-parshat-hukat)

Reb Pinkhas taught, "If you wish to guide others, you must not become angry at them, because not only will the anger pollute your own soul, it will infect those you are guiding as well."

And at another time he said, "Since I've learned to tame my anger, I keep it my pocket, and take it out when needed."

In order to occasionally use anger in a directed and effective way, you have to not be taken over by it. Only when you are free from anger, can you use it effectively. Lord knows there is a lot in our world to be angry about!

But in most situations, it's best to be conscious of anger as it arises, feel your anger fully, but not direct it at others.

There's a hint of this in this week's reading, *Parshat Hukat.* The Israelites complain once again against Moses and Aaron that they are thirsty. Hashem instructs Moses to speak to a rock, and it will give forth water for them to drink. But instead, Moses yells at the people: "You rebels!" and then hits the rock with a stick. Water comes forth, but Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land for his burst of anger.

And so it is: If we want to dwell in the "Promised Land," we must be at home in this moment, in whatever this moment brings. People are complaining? Anger is arising? Be conscious of it. "Speak" to the "rock" of your own heart: "Ah, here is anger arising. This is actually a gift, an opportunity to practice being conscious in real time, not just during meditation."

Let the "water" flow from your heart out of Presence, rather than being demanding, and you will enter the Promised Land from wherever you find yourself...

[**The Mystery of Music- Parshat Hukat**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-mystery-of-music-parshat-hukat)

*V’yik’khu eilekha fara aduma t’mimah-
And they should take to you a cow that is red, completely...*
In *Parshat Hukat,* it says, *Zot hukat haTorah- This is the hok- the decree of the Torah- v’yik’khu eilekha fara aduma t’mimah- and they should take to you a cow that is red, completely.*

The red cow is then burned up, and the ashes are mixed with water to make a special potion for purifying anyone who touches a corpse. The premise behind this is that if you touch a corpse, you become *tamei,* which means ritually unfit or impure, so that you wouldn’t be able to engage in certain rituals without first doing a purification process. So what’s this all about?

The Hassidic master, Rabbi Mordechai Yosef, known as The Ishbitzer, taught that “death” represents the past, because the past is over already; it’s dead. The *tuma,* teaches the Ishbitzer, is really anger or resentment about something from the past. That’s because feelings of negativity and judgment about something that’s already happened keep you stuck- you’re holding on to something that you really need to let go of- and that’s the *tuma-* the spiritual “contamination” so to speak.

Now the red cow is itself the very embodiment of death. Why? Because it’s a living creature that’s completely burned up. It’s also completely red, the color of the blood that bleeds out of a slaughtered animal, as well as the fire that destroys the form of the animal.

So why does this symbol of death cure someone from the contamination of death? Because the contamination, the *tuma,* comes from resisting death- from being angry at something in the past- from not letting go. To be cured from your resistance, you have to accept whatever you’re resisting; you have to embrace it. So paradoxically, it’s in embracing the past that you let go of the past, because being stuck means that you were holding on to an idea of how it should have been. Now that you accept what has been, you get soaked with the ashes of the red cow, so to speak, and you can let go of it. Then you’re *tahor-* purified from that clinging, that holding on, so that you can fully come into the present, into the sacred dimension of simply Being.

So how do you do that? How do you accept whatever you’re resisting, and let go of it? In other words, what are the “red cow ashes” we can use today?

There’s a Hebrew cipher known as *Atbash* in which you connect every Hebrew letter with another Hebrew letter, so that the first letter, *alef,* gets connected with the last letter, *tav.* The second letter, *bet,* gets connected with the second to last letter, *shin,* and so on. In this way, you can substitute letters in words to come up with new words. According to kabbalah, words that are connected through *Atbash* have a connection in meaning as well.

Now the word for being spiritually whole and pure is *tahor.* Through *atbash* we can substitute a *nun* for the *tet,* making *nahor.* Rearrange the letters, and you have *rinah-*song. And that’s exactly the power of song and music in general- to transform negativity and resistance not necessarily by turning away from it, but by turning into it.

Why? Because *music makes it feel good to feel bad-* hence the blues, as well as a lot of mournful Jewish liturgy, the *krekh* of the clarinet in Klezmer music, and a thousand other examples.

That’s the miracle of music- *it makes it feel good to feel bad-*it transforms negativity without negating it, allowing you to accept and even embrace whatever it is you’re resisting. And out of that letting go grows the realization that there’s only One Reality- there’s not me, on one hand, and that thing I’m judging, on the other, there’s just What Is- there’s just Hashem- Reality, Being, God. As Rebbe Nachman said, “The most direct means for attaching yourself to God is through music and song. Even if you can't sing well, sing. Sing to yourself. Sing in the privacy of your home, but sing.”

But why? How does music work anyway? That’s the great *hok,* the great mystery of music itself, and its power to bring us deeply into the depths of our present experience and open us to the wholeness that we are.

So on this Shabbat Hukat- the Sabbath of the Mystery- I bless you to use your voice in prayer and song. “Even if you can't sing well, sing. Sing to yourself. Sing in the privacy of your home, but sing.”

Good Shabbos!

[**Ain't Misbehavin'- Parshat Hukat**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/aint-misbehavin-parshat-hukat)

On the way to the airport, our daughter started shrieking in the back seat. "What's the matter honey??"

"The phone died!!!" she screamed. She was playing a game on my wife's phone and it ran out of juice.

"I see you're really upset," said my wife.

It always amazes me how Lisa is able stay present even with that shrieking sound; a great reminder to me.

It all began a few years ago, when she read about a parenting method called, “Positive Discipline.” Positive Discipline encourages firmness in correcting children, but instructs you to first connect with them in empathy *before* correcting.

The catch phrase for this is *“Connection Before Correction.”* In other words, speak to your children first, connect with their hearts, let them know you understand why they are upset or why they might have done whatever they did, and only afterward speak to them firmly about what behavior needs to change.

While I have not found this approach to be workable all of the time, especially in extreme situations, I still find the principle incredibly useful. And when it does work, it’s not only better for the children, it’s better for the parent. That’s because when you communicate only through harshness, it’s all too easy to be seduced into anger.

And though it is possible for the parent to correct the child with anger, the parent is then misbehaving too!

After all, anger demonstrates a lack of patience, a lack of composure- the very thing you want to correct in the child. So while expressing anger may have the desired effect of correcting the child’s behavior, it would have the opposite effect on oneself.

Spiritually speaking, impatience and loss of composure have a deeper root- they stem from a loss of presence, and consequently, loss of connection with *the* Presence. When a child acts out, they have lost their presence; they have been taken over by their impulses. Have you ever seen an adorable and beautiful child suddenly become a monstrous terror?

And in the presence of such *lack*of presence, it can be very difficult to keep your own presence.

In this week’s reading, there’s a metaphorical demonstration of this principle. The name of the *parshah-* *“Hukat”-*is a form of the word *hok,*which means “decree,” or “statute.” The particular *hok*described here is the ritual for purifying someone who has come in contact with death. Metaphorically, death represents the loss of presence that comes when you are taken over by anger and negativity.

In the ritual, one must take a completely red cow and slaughter it, then burn it up completely. (Both the redness of the cow and the burning represent the fire of anger, which causes one to become spiritually “dead.”)

Then, the ashes are mixed with water and made into a potion to be sprinkled on the impure person. And, while the potion causes the impure person to become pure again, it causes the one who sprinkled the potion to become *impure-*just as parents who discipline their children with anger may help to “purify” the child’s behavior, but in the process they become impure themselves.

This theme continues to vibrate throughout the *parshah-*

Shortly after the *hok*of the red cow, Moses’ sister Miriam dies. Metaphorically, Miriam’s death is the loss of connection with the Divine Presence, which Miriam represents. After she dies, we are then told that there is “no water to drink.” Meaning, there is a “thirst” for connection with the Presence that was lost.

The people then gather against Moses and Aaron, angrily demanding water. Hashem instructs Moses to “take the staff”- meaning, take hold of his own inner power- and “speak to the rock before their eyes”- meaning, *bring awareness* *to the hardness-* to the lack of connection*.*

Then it says-

*“Hotzeita lahem mayim min haselah-*
*“You shall bring forth water from the rock and give drink…”*

The barrier to holiness can be penetrated by gently bringing awareness to it through speech, by using speech to return people to presence. That’s the role of the spiritual teacher- to help others return to Presence, often through speech.

But, as you may know, that’s not what Moses does. He becomes angry and instead yells at the people, calling them “rebels,” and then strikes the rock with his staff. The water comes forth anyway and the people drink- but Moses is told he cannot enter the Promised Land. His anger puts his own soul into exile.

You can apply this principle not only to correcting others, but perhaps more importantly, to correcting yourself! How often do you beat yourself up for not living up to your highest intentions?

While beating yourself up might motivate you to change externally, it creates more negativity internally. Try talking to yourself gently, but firmly. You have the power to teach yourself from your “Inner Torah”- to set yourself on the path you want to be on, if only you take the time to open to that wisdom and really work with it.

But to do this, you have to consider yourself- *your deepest self*- to be a holy Torah. Yes, we are flawed humans, but on the deepest level we are also Torah. That level of Torah within is ever available, if you but remember and open to it.

There’s a hint of this in the *parshah* as well, when it describes the law for a person who dies in a tent:

*“Zot hatorah Adam ki yamut b’ohel-*
*“This is the torah (teaching) for when a person dies in a tent…”*

The beginning of this verse can also be read in a completely different way- *“Zot haTorah, Adam-*This is the Torah- a person!”

One Shabbos, in the year 1840, Reb Yitzhak of Vorki attended a festive meal in the synagogue of the Seer of Lublin who had passed away twenty-five years earlier. When it was time to sit for the meal, the hassidim tried to convince Reb Yitzhak to sit in the Seer’s chair.

Reb Yitzhak declined saying, “When our rebbe was alive, I always kept a distance from him of at least half the length of the room out of sheer awe of his presence.”

But as soon as he sat down, scores of hassidim eagerly crowded and pushed their way to be close to him anyway.

Reb Yitzhak gently spoke to them: “You know, every person is like a holy book- every person is in fact a Torah- as it says, *‘Zot haTorah, Adam- This is the Torah- a person!’*And just as you wouldn’t pile things on top of a *Sefer Torah,* so too please don’t push and shove one another.”

One of the Hassidim at that gathering later commented, “If I had come only to hear that remark, that would have been sufficient!”

On this *Shabbat Hukat,* the Sabbath of Decree, may we take care to embrace the “decree” of what is, even when confronting the negativity of others, not allowing our resistance to be embodied in self-defeating anger. But rather, let us embody Presence in all three garments- in our actions, words and thoughts.

Good Shabbos!
-reb brian yosef

[**Am "I" Holy or Not? Parshat Hukat﻿﻿**
​](http://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/am-i-holy-or-not-parshat-hukat)
This week’s reading begins with the laws of purification for coming into contact with death.

The name of the *parshah-* *Hukat-*is from the word *hok,*which means “decree”, or “statute”. The particular *hok*in this *parshah*contains strange instructions to burn up a completely red cow- a *parah adumah-* and to mix a magical purification potion from the ashes. Due to the particularly obscure and bizarre nature of this practice, the rabbis came to see the word *“hok”*to refer to *any* of the *mitzvot* in general that don’t seem to make rational sense.

After describing the process with the red cow, it says (Bamidbar 19:14)- *“Zot hatorah Adam ki yamut b’ohel-*this is the torah for when a person dies in a tent…”

The beginning of this verse can also be read in a completely different way- *“Zot haTorah, Adam-*This is the Torah- a person!”- hinting that a person is like a holy book, containing all spiritual wisdom within oneself...

One Shabbos, in the year 1840, Reb Yitzhak of Vorki attended a festive meal in the synagogue of the Seer of Lublin who had passed away twenty-five years earlier. When it was time for the meal, the hassidim tried to convince Reb Yitzhak to sit in the Seer’s chair.

Reb Yitzhak declined, saying, “When our rebbe was alive, I always kept a distance from him of at least half the length of the room out of sheer awe.”

But as soon as he sat down in one of the regular seats, scores of hassidim eagerly crowded and pushed their way to be close to him.

Reb Yitzhak gently spoke to them about their rude behavior: “You know, every person is like a holy book; that’s why you mustn’t lean on or push one another.”

One of the hassidim countered, “But aren’t we allowed to stack holy books on top of other holy books?”

Replied Reb Yitzhak: “Yes… but even though you should see every person as a holy book, you shouldn’t see *yourself*as a holy book.”

One of the Hassidim at that gathering later commented, “If I had come only to hear that remark, that would have been sufficient!”

Recently, my wife has been learning about a parenting method called, “Positive Discipline”. Positive Discipline encourages firmness in correcting children, but instructs you to first connect with them in empathy *before* correcting them.

The catch phrase for this (which I find incredibly useful) is *“Connection Before Correction”.* In other words, speak to your children first, connect with their hearts, let them know you understand why they are upset or why they might have done whatever they did. Only afterward you speak to them about how they need to change their behavior.

But this approach is not only better for the children, it’s better for the parent! It’s possible to correct children through harshness alone, but what effect does that have on *your own* soul?

The answer comes from looking at the *motive*behind the child’s misbehavior. Why does the child misbehave?

Generally speaking, they misbehave for the same reason the hassidim in the story misbehaved. The hassidim misbehaved because they were desperately *seeking*something. In their case, they wanted the juice from the *tzaddik,*they wanted *Shekhinah,*the Divine Presence.

The *Tzaddik*is telling them- “your desperate seeking is keeping away the very thing you seek! Learn the *middah*of composure, of respect, and the Divine Presence will open Itself to you.”

He could have communicated this harshly, and after the hassidim get over the initial shock of the harshness, it would have the same effect. They would still learn the lesson.

But in expressing the teaching through anger, the teacher would have separated himself from the Presence! After all, anger demonstrates a lack of patience, a lack of composure. So while it may have the desired effect for others, it would have the opposite effect on oneself.

We can also see this in the *parshah,*beginning with chapter 20:

First, Moses’ sister Miriam dies. Metaphorically, this means that connection with the Divine Presence (represented by Miriam) is lost. We are then told that there is “no water to drink”. Meaning, there is a “thirst” for connection with Presence.

The people then gather against Moses and Aaron, angrily demanding water. The child is misbehaving! The hassidim are leaning and pushing!

*Hashem* then instructs Moses to “take the staff”- meaning, take hold of your own inner power- and “speak to the rock before their eyes”- meaning, *bring awareness* to the hard barrier (the rock) created by the seeking*.*

Then it says, *“hotzeita lahem mayim min haselah-*you shall bring forth water from the rock and give drink…” The barrier to what you seek can be removed through gentle words of instruction.

As you may know, that’s not what Moses does. He becomes angry and instead yells at the people, calling them “rebels”, and then strikes the rock with his staff. The water comes forth anyway and the people drink- but Moses is told he cannot enter the Promised Land. His anger puts his own soul into exile.

You can apply this principle not only to correcting others, but perhaps more importantly, to correcting yourself! How often do you beat yourself for not living up to your highest intentions?

While beating yourself up might motivate you to change externally, it creates more negativity internally. Try talking to yourself gently, but firmly.

As the teaching goes, a person is a Torah!

Meaning- you have the wisdom within to teach yourself, to get back onto the path you want to be on, if only you take the time to open to that wisdom and really work with it.

In this sense, you should indeed consider yourself- *your deepest self*- to be a holy Torah!

I bless you that in this *hok*of life, this life that is often incomprehensible, that you remain steadfastly committed to embodying the wisdom, compassion and positive transformation that you came into this world to embody.

Good Shabbos!
-b yosef ​