

HE WAS SANCTIFIED IN THEM*

וַיִּקְהֵלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקְּהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֵּלֶעַ וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם
שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַמְּרִים הַמִּן־הַסֵּלֶעַ הַזֶּה נוֹצִים לָכֶם מַיִם:
וַיָּרֶם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת־הַסֵּלֶעַ בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַיִם
וַיֵּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׁתַּהֲעַדָה וּבְעֵינֵיהֶם:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַל־אַהֲרֹן
יַעַן לֹא־הֵאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְכֵן לֹא תָבִיאוּ אֶת־הַקְּהָל הַזֶּה אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:
הַמָּה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר־רָבוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־יְהוָה
וַיִּקְדַּשׁ בָּם:

And Moses and Aaron gathered together the assembly before the rock, and he said to them:
Hear now you rebels, are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?
And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice;
and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.
And the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron:
Because you believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel,
therefore you shall not bring the assembly into the land that I have given them.
These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord,
and He was sanctified in them.

And Moses and Aaron gathered together the assembly before the rock, and he said to them: Hear now you rebels, are we to bring you forth water out of this rock?—Bitter that after 40 years “he had still not won the confidence and trust of the people” (S.R. Hirsch), Moses “denigrated—and so delegitimized—the very nature of the nation” (S. Riskin) by characterizing all the people as “fools” (Rashi), which was chillul Hashem (Rambam). And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle—Moses and Aaron were bidden by God to “speak to the rock before their eyes” (20:8)—instead of within their hearing—because the commandment was “calculated to impress the people with the omnipotence of God” (J.Z. Mecklenburg), which would have sanctified God. And the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron: Because you believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring the assembly into the land that I have given them—Because you did not believe that the rock itself, contrary to the laws of nature, could be changed “from ‘rock’ to ‘water’” through the speech that I placed in your mouth, you did not demonstrate to the people my “excellence and goodness” (Sforno), which might have turned them from their rebellion; and this failure of faith was more offensive than before (11:22) because, unlike the earlier instance which was “committed in secrecy,” here it was committed in the “presence of all Israel” (Rashi). These are the waters of Meribah, where the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them—Had Moses and Aaron not been punished, they may have been viewed as exempt—allowed to cross over, where the others of that generation were not—since ultimately all would know of the commandments they received from God; and thus their deaths—as the fire-pans of those who rebelled against God were beaten into plates to cover the altar, and as the ashes of the heifer which was tamei in the salughtering were used by those who salughtered it to purify themselves—served to sanctify the Divine Name “among mankind” (Rashi), as it is stated, “Through them that are close to me I will be sanctified” (Lev. 10:3).

* Numbers 20:10-13 (in Chukat)