

No Hotheads

A hothead is: *“One who reacts quickly (often in anger) and without thinking carefully first.”* It's usually a hothead who starts a riot or turns a peaceful protest violent. The *Torah* is replete with incidents where *Yah-Adonai* was/can be provoked to anger, e.g., *“¹⁴You must not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples around you; ¹⁵for Adonai your God in the midst of you is a jealous God. Otherwise, the anger of Adonai your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you from the face of the earth” (Deut. 6:14-15).* But *Yah-Adonai* is *slow to anger*: *“¹⁸Adonai is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression. Still, He does not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations” (Nu. 14:18) and “Then Adonai passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘Adonai, Adonai, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth’” (Ex. 34:6).* Moses had practiced being hot with anger previously: *“Then he went out from Pharaoh hot with anger” (Ex. 11:8) and “Then it happened, as soon as Moses came near the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing, and his anger burned hot. So he threw the tablets out of his hands, and smashed them at the foot of the mountain” (Ex. 32:19).* Thus, in Moses' life there were multiple incidents of being hot with anger where he displayed the characteristics of a hothead.

All men and women are called into some sort of leadership. For males, you are a leader whether you are a father, or a husband, or in the military, or work in the medical field, or in any sort of managerial position in your employment. Similarly for females, you are a leader whether you are a mother, or a widow, or in any sort of managerial position in your employment. In fact, you are a leader if you are a single mom or dad. Some of us were prepared for the calling of leadership and looked forward to its challenges, but some of us found ourselves leading without any planning or training. In whatever type of leadership, we are in, there are going to be unique tests and ordeals that accompany that leadership role. But we cannot be a hothead!

Parashat Chukat was Ian's and my *Bar Mitzvah* reading in July of 1997. Each time I re-read these verses I am reminded of the difficulties in leadership and the importance of a proper anger-free response. There are always tests in leadership because the ones being led tend to be prone to complaining. Why is it so hard to be thankful for the good things the Almighty accomplishes via His leaders? He has provided godly leaders, and He has brought us out of the land of Egypt (the carnal world) and the land of sinfulness. He told us to: *“honor our father and mother”* (our inherent leaders, e.g., Ex. 20:12, Deut. 5:16, Eph. 6:2) In doing so we will have a *more* abundant life. Isn't it true that we have all been on one side or the other of this trial (*complaining as children and/or adults, or both*). Receiving complaints is a difficult trial and one that requires a godly response. We cannot be a hothead!

My heart is broken when I read what the Lord said to Moses in today's *Parshah*: *“¹²But Adonai said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in Me so as to esteem Me as holy in the eyes of Bnei-Yisrael, therefore you will not bring this assembly into the land that I have given to them’ ¹³These are the waters of Meribah where Bnei-Yisrael contended with Moses, and where Adonai showed Himself holy among them” (Nu. 20:12-13).* Moses burned with anger in Numbers 20 and the consequence was that he lost his opportunity to enter the Promised Land. This time Moses reacted to the complaints of his followers in an angry way (like a hothead) which so unlike his behavior when he interceded for them not to be eliminated after the murmuring and complaining of *Parashat Sh'lach*. The truth is that when we fail to trust *Yah-Adonai*, it affects those around us because our actions diminish everyone's understanding of who *Yah-Adonai* really is. We make *Yah-Adonai* seem weak and ineffective and much more so in the eyes of those that are being led. *Yah-Adonai* is Holy and He is to be sanctified (set apart) in everyone's eyes. Can we, in whatever type of leadership we are in, afford to minimize Him? No! We cannot be a hothead!

When I hear statements like *what have you done lately?* I want to say something like *I have a good track record so judge me on the whole and not on my latest.* But then, should someone be selected to the

MLB All-Star Game if he was really good three years ago or even last year but stinks this year? Of course not! What I do not realize often is that I could have been above reproach all my life but if I do something really wrong like commit murder, for example, am I not a murderer now regardless of what my track record was before? Why is that? It is because the last action was grave and significant *enough to cancel the track record*. Thus, the real problem is that in the final analysis, I am failing to correctly impute the appropriate gravity to this last action. Making *Yah* look lame in front of the Children of Israel (in anger Moses and Aaron took the matter into their own authority) by saying: *"Listen now, you rebels! Must we bring you water from this rock?" (Nu. 20:10b)* and since water did gush out of the rock, did they not usurp the Almighty's Power as their own rendering Him powerless? The statement *"must we bring you water"* demonstrates that (in anger) Moses and Aaron appropriated God's Power and Authority as their own. This is a grave sin indeed because *Yah* was forced to follow up on what He said He would do (bring water from the rock, and even under the circumstances and He did it because He is absolutely reliable) but with the credit usurped by Moses and Aaron. This is all because of being a hothead.

As Believers we are told: *"¹⁷For it is better to suffer for doing good (if it is God's will) than for doing evil" (1 Pet 3:17)*. Therefore, being the leaders that we all are, we are to take reacting in anger (by being a hothead) as something we absolutely *cannot afford to do*. The ending of Mine and Ian's Reading is: *"¹³These are the waters of Meribah where Bnei-Yisrael contended with Moses, and where Adonai showed Himself holy among them"* The Hebrew word *Meribah* means fighter, disputant, adversary, quarrel, strife, dispute, fray, or miff. So, instead of the incident being labeled as Glorious Living Water it is labeled as the Waters of Strife and Quarreling. It is hard for me to imagine a sadder statement being spoken about the result of being a hothead (quick-to-anger). *Shabbat Shalom!* Let us pray....