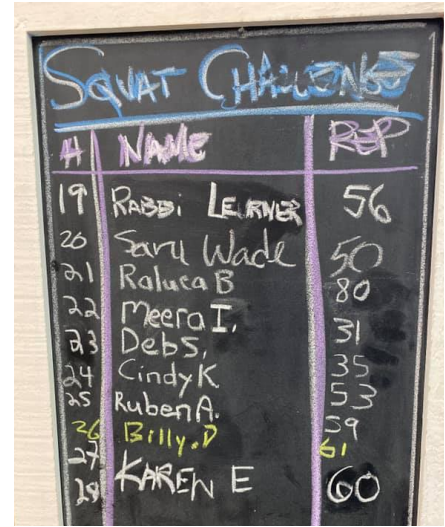


A Rock and The Rock - Ha'azinu 5780

After the intensity of *Yom Kippur*, I headed to the gym the next morning. Seeing the look of exhaustion on my face, my trainer asked me why I looked so wiped out. I explained to him our practice around *Yom Kippur* and then the whole schedule for this month: *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and then right back to Shabbat, *Sukkot* and *Simhat Torah* and on and on.



#	NAME	REP
19	RABBI LEARNER	56
20	Saru Wade	50
21	Raluca B	80
22	Meera I.	31
23	Debs	35
24	Cindy K	53
25	Ruben A.	59
26	Billy P	61
27	KAREN E	60

He looked perplexed. “Who made up this crazy schedule?”

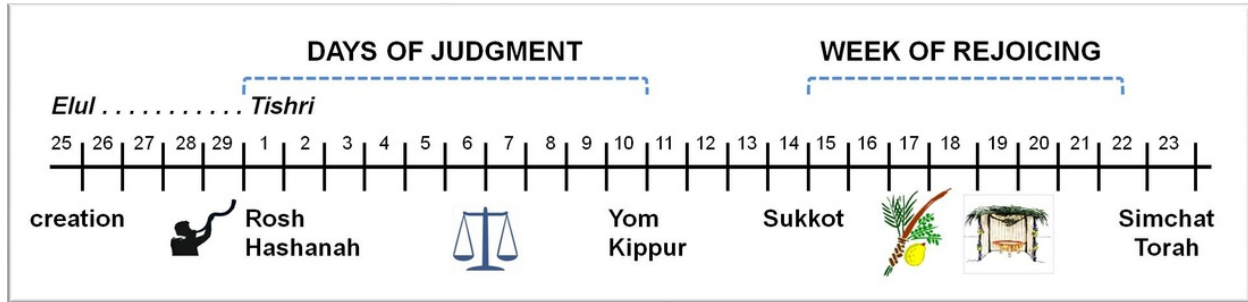
“I could ask the same question!”

* * *

This is the most intense time of the year and the way the holidays fall during the week this year makes an already busy time even more challenging.

But on the other hand, the calendar also presents us with unique opportunities this year. Today, this Shabbat that we do not always have between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkot*, can be seen as an additional gift. An unexpected bonus.

We can experience the Shabbat of this Torah reading not before *Yom Kippur* where it often falls but after it. And that presents us with a wondrous teaching.



* * *

This week's reading contains Moses' final poem to the people: it is an extended excursus on God's greatness versus the stubbornness and not-so-greatness of the people who are so prone to making mistakes.

But I want to leave aside the content and explore the words. One of the keywords of this *parashah* is *Tzur*, meaning Rock. It appears half a dozen times, often referring to God.

Now, it's pretty noteworthy that Moshe utilizes the metaphor of God being a rock at the end of life; this is made even more striking by the fact that he is standing right at the Jordan River, about to enter the Promised Land, which he is not allowed to enter.

Why?

Because he hit a rock!

Now, this is not just a coincidence.

Moshe has been leading the people for forty years through the wilderness and he begged God to let him enter. But it was his transgression when he was supposed to speak to the rock, but he hit it that is preventing him from being allowed in.

And now, at the very end of his life, that is the word he uses for God. Telling, no?

But if we dig a little deeper, there is another layer of meaning here.

There are two words for “rock” that the Torah uses: [se/a and Tzur](#).

There are different theories about the connotations of each, but they seem fairly similar in meaning.

But they are different in the vignettes where the people need water and these rocks are the conduit. In an episode in the book of *Shemot/Exodus*, the people are grumbling for water and Moses complains to God: “what shall I do with this people? Before long, they will be stoning me?”

OK, rocks are implicit, clearly not the best use for them, but they are there.

But God turns that around, stating: “I will be standing there before on the rock (*tzur*) at Horev [one of the names for Mount Sinai.] Strike the rock and water will issue from it and the people will drink.” (Ex 17:6)

And that is just what happens. So, when the rock is a *tzur*, all ends well.

But in a more challenging water/rock episode in the book of *BiMidbar/Numbers*, the word for rock is different.

When Moses and Aaron are told to speak or order the rock to produce water, it is a *se/a*. Moses hits this rock, the *se/a*, water comes out, but there are dire consequences.



Back to our reading, again Moses could have picked any word for God. God is referred to as fire through their years in the wilderness or a cloud of glory. There are lots of metaphors, but Moses chooses rock.

I want to suggest this morning, that Moses does this on purpose. While he is surely disappointed that his life has not turned out the way he wanted it, he has accepted that. A good lesson for all of us – there are many aspects of life that do not work out the way we had hoped they would, but it is our reaction to them, how we cope with them, that can make all the difference.

And I was even more struck by another aspect. I think Moses goes back and revisits this most painful episode of his life to transform it, to help himself heal. While he could have thought back to being with God on the

top of Mount Sinai or becoming aware of God's presence at the burning bush, he thinks back to this low moment in his life.

Here, Moses is modeling a type of *tikkun*, a type of healing. He does not run away from the painful memory, but goes back to it, aware of his missteps and re-incorporates it into his life.

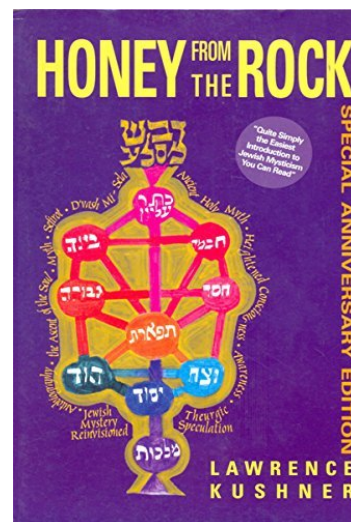
The word choice is telling. God is a *Tzur* – not a *sela*, as if Moses is saying, "I remember my mistakes, the times I acted with the *sela*, and I have grown. Now, I can see it as the *Tzur* and I am OK with that and accept that and what it brought me."

Moses goes to this place of pain – to the *sela* and heals it, transforming it into the *Tzur* – not a rock that tripped him up any longer, but the Rock that shields and protects us.

We can see this most clearly in verse 13 of our reading which states: *Va'yeineekeihu dvash me'sela v'shemen mei'h^ualamish tzur* – God fed him (meaning the Israelites) honey from a *sela*, from a rock and oil from the flinty rock – the *Tzur*.

Here, Moses goes back to the *sela* – this painful memory and sweetens it like honey so that now it can sustain him in the way oil, especially olive oil was so central to ancient civilizations.

Moses reminds us that even the most barren landscapes can yield precious food: honeycombs in fissures and caves and olive trees flourish in the rocky limestone soil of the region.



And to complete the metaphor – that is why we go back to difficult times in our lives, to the rocky moments, to heal them and find the honey and oil that can sustain us.

This word – *Tzur* becomes the word for God that is recited during the holidays in *Hallel*, on *Hanukkah* in *Maoz Tzur*, and even at death in the final prayer at the graveside, the *Tzidduk Hadin*, which over and over refers to God as the *Tzur* – the Rock.

In the days following *Yom Kippur*, we can see the wisdom of looking at something anew, revisiting painful moments, reflecting on them and healing them.

May these bonus days and the bonus Shabbat after *Yom Kippur* help us deepen the work of self-transformation that we began on the Days of Awe.