

6/30/2017

*BronfmanTorah: commentary on the Torah that draws on the lives, skills, and insights of our community*

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# God Is a Linguaphile, and so Am I

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*Ilana Weinstein ('16) recently graduated from St. Louis Park High School, and is taking a gap year before attending the University of Chicago next fall. She will participate in the Transom Story Workshop in Woods Hole, MA this fall.*

**Part 1: a play I wrote in the shower last summer on Bronfman (with slight modifications)**

*Miriam enters, has a heart attack*

*Beat boxing begins*

*Israelite performs chest compressions on Miriam to the beat*

Israelite:

Moses! Aaron!

I've got some news worth sharin'.

At first we weren't exactly sure

But now it is apparent

That Miriam's dead!

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Moses:

Oh my gosh!

Aaron:

Yitgadal v'yitkadash.

Bury her body in the desert,

Then we'll have a little nosh.

Israelite:

There's nothing to eat!

This land is cursed!

We're gonna starve

Or die of thirst.

*[beat boxing stops]*

We're even out of fresh cucumbers.\*

Moses:

No cucumbers?

That's a first.

Where the *[chorus sings angelically]*

Are my cucumbers.

Aaron (aside):

A real quote

From the Book of Numbers.

*Beat boxing resumes*

God:

Aaron! Moses!

(But mostly Moses.)

The hydration situation

Seems to be a point of focus.

To quench the thirst of the Israelites,

Ask that rock but be polite.

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The rock's not Flint; you'll be alright.

*(aside)* The official drink of Taglit Birthright! *[wink]*

Moses (to Israelites):

I'll get you water from this rock.

All I have to do is knock.

*[taps staff on rock twice to the beat]*

God:

I'm detecting a defection

From my clear, distinct directions.

Your distressing insurrection

Cannot go without objection.

You'll never enter Yisrael.

Next time, better listen well.

If you're compelled to be rebellious,

You will burn just like Grenfell.

*\*It seemed like cucumbers were the only thing we ever ate while we were in Israel.*

## Part 2

An idiomatic conundrum: actions speak louder than words, but the pen is mightier than the sword. Of these contradictory clichés, I've always sided with the latter. After all, a sword is only a word with an s in front.

In this week's parsha, Chukat, God takes a similar position. He tells Moses to ask the rock for water. Instead, Moses strikes the rock. Though the rock still releases water despite Moses' infraction, God punishes Moses by restricting his immigration to Canaan, even though Moses definitely had a visa already. Moses isn't the only person from a Middle Eastern country to experience this. Sorry. That's a different discussion.

Moses forgets how much God values words. God created the universe through

words. He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He said, "Let there be atheists," and there were single-celled organisms that evolved into other life forms. Or something like that.

Moses, who has a speech impediment, prefers actions to words. That is the true test: will Moses obey orders and confront his weakness, or will he defy God to avoid his deficiency? God needs a mouthpiece, not a muscleman. Moses fails the moment he hits the rock.

This is not a call to inaction. It is a call to do what our preschool teachers always said: use your words. Talk to other humans. Write to your congresspeople. Read more fiction. Experiment with slam poetry. Make fantastic puns. Take a few moments to appreciate how the words "brick" and "zinc" move from the front of your mouth to the back. Channel your inner Dr. Seuss/Lin-Manuel Miranda and write some rhymes. And if you find yourself in need of water from a rock, try the diplomatic approach before beating the crap out of it. Whether or not there is a God who can create worlds out of words, humans do just that every time we speak and write. I will always find that infinitely more miraculous than summoning water from a rock. (But maybe that's just because I'm the type of person who writes Torah raps in the shower.)

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**Continue the *conversation*. Send Ilana your thoughts:**  
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***P.S.: We're always looking for more dvar torah writers. Interested? Contact [stefanie@byfi.org](mailto:stefanie@byfi.org). We look forward to hearing from you.***



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