

*Weekly Parsha CHUKAT Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog*

In the Torah reading of this week we are reminded that one of the traits that Judaism emphasizes and encourages is that of obedience. Obedience requires a suspension of one's own thought process and even behavior. Since this is not usually an acceptable state of being for humans, there is a natural tendency for disobedience and even rebellion. Children resent having to obey their parents, students chafe at the instructions of teachers and society generally abhors and disobeys government and laws on a very regular basis.

The Torah creates for us a commandment and warns us in advance that there is no rational explanation for its existence and fulfillment. It is simply a test of faith and a willingness to obey a higher authority, even if one's own intellect and nature cannot fathom the reason for the command itself. In effect, we are being taught that obedience is the necessary ingredient for human discipline and without human discipline people are little more than uncontrollable wild animals.

It is our nature to filter all rules and laws through our own intellect. If somehow it makes sense to us then we are willing to obey but if we are not able to rationalize the command to ourselves then we feel that we are not obligated to obey.

We all know that discipline plays a great role in human society. No army can exist without it. At the beginning of the Soviet revolution in 1917, the Red Army experimented with running an army based on democracy and the common consensus of the soldiers themselves. Needless to say this proved disastrous to the army as a whole and to the very soldiers individually. Until today, discipline and obedience constitute the basis for all societal organizations and commercial enterprises.

For this necessary feeling of discipline to be instilled, the individual must feel that there is justification for one's obedience, for following orders and commands. The command cannot be intrinsically immoral, illegal or contrary to human nature and tradition. Therefore, the command regarding the red heifer appears late in the books of the Torah. What has gone before shows the reliability of the commandment that is now advanced.

In the background of the commandments of the Torah, in their beauty and harmony, the demand for obedience and unquestioning discipline makes sense. All individual commandments of the Torah must be seen in the backdrop of the entire structure of halachah and Jewish tradition. There are no isolated commandments but rather they are all pieces of a whole, a tapestry of God's will and Divine intent.

The idea of discipline and obedience has already proven itself over through the commandments previously ordained by the Torah. As such, the current request for obedience even though there is no rational explanation for the demand itself, becomes more understandable and fits into the general pattern that is provided for Jewish life and survival.

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***The Consolations of Mortality (Chukat 5778) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks***

Chukat is about mortality. In it we read of the death of two of Israel's three great leaders in the wilderness, Miriam and Aaron, and the sentence of death decreed against Moses, the greatest of them all. These were devastating losses. ^ To counter that sense of loss and bereavement, the Torah employs one of Judaism's great principles: The Holy One, blessed be He, creates the remedy before the disease.[1] Before any of the deaths are mentioned we read about the strange ritual of the red heifer, which purified people who had been in contact with death – the archetypal source of impurity. That ritual, often deemed incomprehensible, is in fact deeply symbolic.

It involves taking the most striking emblem of life – a heifer that is pure red, the colour of blood which is the source of life, and that has never been made to endure the burden of a yoke – and reducing it to ash. That is mortality, the fate of all that lives. We are, said Abraham, "mere dust

and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). "Dust you are," said God to Adam, "and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). But the dust is dissolved into "living water," and from water comes new life.

Water is constantly changing. We never step into the same river twice, said Heraclitus. Yet the river maintains its course between the banks. The water changes but the river remains. So we as physical beings may one day be reduced to dust. But there are two consolations.

The first is that we are not just physical beings. God made the first human "from the dust of the earth"[2] but He breathed into him the breath of life. We may be mortal but there is within us something that is immortal. "The dust returns to the earth as it was but the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

The second is that, even down here on earth, something of us lives on, as it did for Aaron in the form of his sons who carry the name of the priesthood to this day, as it did for Moses in the form of his disciples who studied and lived by his words as they do to this day, and as it did for Miriam in the lives of all those women who, by their courage, taught men the true meaning of faith.[3] For good or bad, our lives have an impact on other lives, and the ripples of our deeds spread ever outward across space and time. We are part of the undying river of life.

So we may be mortal, but that does not reduce our life to insignificance, as Tolstoy once thought it did,[4] for we are part of something larger than ourselves, characters in a story that began early in the history of civilisation and that will last as long as humankind.

It is in this context that we should understand one of the most troubling episodes in the Torah, Moses' angry outburst when the people called for water, for which he and Aaron were condemned to die in the wilderness without ever crossing into the Promised Land.[5] I have written about this passage many times elsewhere, and I do not want to focus on the details here. I want simply to note why the story of Moses hitting the rock appears here, in parshat Chukat, whose overarching theme is our existence as physical beings in a physical world, with its two potentially tragic consequences.

First, we are an unstable mix of reason and passion, reflection and emotion, so that sometimes grief and exhaustion can lead even the greatest to make mistakes, as it did in the case of Moses and Aaron after the death of their sister. Second, we are physical, therefore mortal. Therefore, for all of us, there are rivers we will not cross, promised lands we will not enter, futures we helped shape but will not live to see.

The Torah is sketching out the contours of a truly remarkable idea. Despite these two facets of our humanity – that we make mistakes and that we die – human existence is not tragic. Moses and Aaron made mistakes, but that did not stop them being among the greatest leaders who ever lived, whose impact is still palpable today in the prophetic and priestly dimensions of Jewish life. And the fact that Moses did not live to see his people cross the Jordan did not diminish his eternal legacy as the man who turned a nation of slaves into a free people, bringing them to the very brink of the Promised Land.

I wonder if any other culture, creed or civilisation has done greater justice to the human condition than Judaism, with its insistence that we are human, not gods, and that we are, nonetheless, God's partners in the work of creation and the fulfilment of the covenant.

Almost every other culture has blurred the line between God and human beings. In the ancient world, rulers were usually thought of as gods, demigods, or chief intermediaries with the gods. Christianity and Islam know of infallible human beings, the son of God or the prophet of God. Modern atheists, by contrast, have tended to echo Nietzsche's question that, to justify our dethronement of God, "Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"[6]

In 1967, when I was just beginning my university studies, I listened to the BBC Reith Lectures, given that year by Edmond Leach, professor of anthropology at Cambridge, with their opening sentences, "Men have become like gods. Isn't it about time that we understood our divinity?"[7] I recall that as soon as I heard those words, I sensed that

something was going wrong in Western civilisation. We are not gods, and bad things happened when people thought they were.

Meanwhile, paradoxically, the greater our powers, the lower our estimate of the human person. In his novel *Zadig*, Voltaire described humans as “insects devouring one another on a little atom of mud.” The late Stephen Hawking stated that “the human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate size planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a billion galaxies.” The philosopher John Gray declared that “human life has no more meaning than that of slime mould.”[8] In his *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari reaches the conclusion that, “Looking back, humanity will turn out to be just a ripple within the cosmic data flow.”[9]

These are the two options the Torah rejects: too high or too low an estimate of humankind. On the one hand, no man is a god. No one is infallible. There is no life without error and shortcoming. That is why it was so important to note, in the parsha that deals with mortality, Moses’ sin. Likewise it was important to say at the outset of his mission that he had no special charismatic endowments. He was not a natural speaker who could sway crowds (Ex. 4:10). Equally the Torah emphasises at the end of his life that “No one knows his burial place,” (Deut. 34:6) so that it could not become a place of pilgrimage. Moses was human, all-too-human, yet he was the greatest prophet who ever lived (Deut. 34:10).

On the other hand the idea that we are mere dust and nothing more – insects, scum, slime mould, a ripple in the cosmic data flow – must rank among the most foolish ever formulated by intelligent minds. No insect ever became a Voltaire. No chemical scum became a chemist. No ripple in the data flow wrote international bestsellers. Both errors – that we are gods or we are insects – are dangerous. Taken seriously they can justify almost any crime against humanity. Without a delicate balance between Divine eternity and human mortality, Divine forgiveness and human error, we can wreak much destruction – and our power to do so grows by the year. Hence the life-changing idea of *Chukat*: we are dust of the earth but there is within us the breath of God. We fail, but we can still achieve greatness. We die, but the best part of us lives on.

The Hasidic master R. Simcha Bunim of Peshisheke said we should each have two pockets. In one should be a note saying: “I am but dust and ashes.”[10] In the other should be a note saying: “For my sake was the world created.”[11] Life lives in the tension between our physical smallness and our spiritual greatness, the brevity of life and the eternity of the faith by which we live. Defeat, despair and a sense of tragedy are always premature. Life is short, but when we lift our eyes to heaven, we walk tall. Shabbat shalom.

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***Parshat Chukat(Numbers 19:1 – 22:1) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin***  
***Efrat, Israel — “This is the statute of the law which God commanded, saying, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer’” [Num. 19:1-2].***

One of the most profound mysteries of the Bible is the rite of the red heifer, called a *chok* (statute) because it belongs to the group of divine decrees which human logic cannot penetrate.

We must be mindful of the fact that all other impurities other than a death impurity find their purification by the defiled individual’s immersing himself or herself in a *mikveh*, a gathering of freshly running spring water or specially collected life-giving rainwater; in effect, in all these instances, the defiled individual actually purifies him- or herself!

Only in this rite of the red heifer does the kohen, representing God Himself, effectuate the purification. It is as though the Torah is teaching that we can save ourselves from many of our weaknesses, we can rise above many of our temptations, but only God can ultimately redeem us from death.

And from this perspective, the symbolism of the red heifer ritual begins to make sense. A heifer is the consummate symbol of life, the cow’s mother-milk serving as the universal expression of maternal nurturing of her young; red is likewise the color of blood, and blood is the life-force, the very *nefesh* of the living organism.

However, although human beings come in various shapes, sizes, personalities, and powers – they can be as tall and proud as the cedar tree and as mean and humble as the hyssop plant – the angel of death

ultimately conquers them all, because the scarlet thread of human sin condemns each of us to the common destiny of mortality.

Following the sacrifice, the personage of purity gathers the ashes of the remains, mixes them with the life-giving waters of the divine and, born-again, purified life emerges even from the surrealistic specter of death itself. Inherent in this symbolism is that historic Israel – mother nurturer of the continuity of humanity by means of the Abrahamic “compassionate rightness and moral justice” which Israel taught and must continue to teach – is destined to be slaughtered, but will always rise again to life and to the fulfillment of her mission and destiny.

This symbolism of the red heifer assumed new significance for me after a trip to Berlin I took several years ago. While there, I visited the Holocaust Memorial at the very center of the city, not far from the last bunker from which the “mad Führer” (may his name be blotted out) committed suicide.

One descends into a netherworld of hell, where pictures and stories of Holocaust victims evoke their life experiences and all of their future potential that was snuffed out, inexplicably and cruelly torn asunder from the tree of life by monstrous and subhuman hands.

I stumbled away from the experience feeling as though I had just awakened from a horrific nightmare. The symbolism of the monuments continued to haunt me months after I returned to Efrat; after all, those who lost loved ones in the Holocaust don’t even have graveside monuments to weep over.

Each empty stone screams out with any name, with every name, with my name, and with my children’s names, because a part of each human being was killed in those death camps whose perpetrators attempted to destroy every last vestige of humanness.

But I also came away from the experience feeling cheated by the memorial. Something was missing, the essence was missing, the victorious ending was missing. Because, you see, the Jewish people won the war which Hitler tried to wage against us.

Yes, he succeeded in destroying six million of us, but as he records in *Mein Kampf*, he wasn’t waging a war against six million Jews. He was waging a war against the last Jew, against Judaism, against what he called a slave morality of compassionate righteousness and moral justice, of sensitive concern for the weaker vessels, of a God of ultimate power who insists upon human protection of the powerless. And in that war, Hitler failed!

Yes, we won that war. Alas, the brilliantly alive “red heifer,” a metaphor for the Jewish people, a people who nurture the world with the milk of morality of the Ten Commandments and the milk of human kindness of “You shall love the stranger” and “You shall love your neighbor like yourself” was, to a large extent, tragically and inexplicably slaughtered beyond the “human encampment” in Auschwitz and Treblinka.

But the Almighty God, the “Personage of Purity” Himself, gathered the ashes, Himself mixed them with living waters of rebirth, and Himself transformed those ashes into the fertile soil of the recreated sovereign State of Israel.

And the “Personage of Purity” Himself mixed the ashes with the life-giving wellsprings of Torah, our tree of eternal life, and in addition to our national physical being, likewise revived our spiritual being, and Torah centers to an unprecedented and unparalleled degree all over the world! Shabbat Shalom

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***Chukat: The Book of God's Wars Rav Kook Torah***

The Torah reading concludes with an obscure reference to the “Book of God’s Wars,” describing the Arnon canyon near the border between the Land of Israel and Moab. The verses are cryptic, and the Talmud (Berachot 54a-b) fills in the details with the following story: Just before the Israelites were to enter the Land of Israel, the Amorites (one of the Canaanite nations) laid a trap for them. They chipped away at the rock, creating hiding places along a narrow pass in the Arnon canyon. There the Amorite soldiers hid, waiting for the Israelites to pass through, when they could attack them with great advantage. What the Amorites didn’t know was that the Holy Ark would smooth the way for the Jewish people in their travels through the desert. When the Ark arrived at the

Arnon Pass, the mountains on each side crushed together, killing the Amorite soldiers. The Israelites traveled through the pass, blissfully unaware of their deliverance. But at the end of the Jewish camp were two lepers, named Et and Vehav. The last ones to cross through, it was they who noticed the riverbed turned crimson from the crushed enemy soldiers. They realized that a miracle had taken place, and reported it to the rest of the Israelites. The entire nation sang a song of thanks, namely, the poetic verses that the Torah quotes from the “Book of God’s Wars.” Challenges to the Torah The Talmud clearly understands that this was a historical event, and even prescribes a blessing to be recited upon seeing the Arnon Pass. Rav Kook, however, interpreted the story in an allegorical fashion. What are “God’s Wars”? These are the ideological battles of the Torah against paganism and other nefarious views. Sometimes the battle is out in the open, a clear conflict between opposing cultures and lifestyles. And sometimes the danger lurks in crevices, waiting for the opportune moment to emerge and attack the foundations of the Torah. Often it is precisely those who are on the fringes, like the lepers at the edge of the camp, who are most aware of the philosophical and ideological battles that the Torah wages. These two lepers represent two types of conflict between the Torah and foreign cultures. And the Holy Ark, containing the two stone tablets from Sinai, is a metaphor for the Torah itself. The names of the two lepers were Et and Vahav. What do these peculiar names mean? The word Et in Hebrew is an auxiliary word, with no meaning of its own. However, it contains the first and last letters of the word *emet*, ‘truth.’ Et represents those challenges that stem from new ideas in science and knowledge. Et is related to absolute truth; but without the middle letter, it is only auxiliary to the truth, lacking its substance. The word Vahav comes from the work *ahava*, meaning ‘love’ (its Hebrew letters have the same numerical value). The mixing up of the letters indicates that this an uncontrolled form of love and passion. Vahav represents the struggle between the Torah and wild, unbridled living, the contest between instant gratification and eternal values. When these two adversaries - new scientific viewpoints (Et) and unrestrained hedonism (Vahav) - come together, we find ourselves trapped with no escape, like the Israelites in the Arnon Pass. Only the light of the Torah (as represented by the Ark) can illuminate the way, crushing the mountains together and defeating the hidden foes. These enemies may be unnoticed by those immersed in the inner sanctum of Torah. But those at the edge, whose connection to Torah and the Jewish people is tenuous and superficial, are acutely aware of these struggles, and more likely to witness the victory of the Torah. The crushing of the hidden adversaries by the Ark, as the Israelites entered into the Land of Israel in the time of Moses, is a sign for the future victory of the Torah over its ideological and cultural adversaries in the time of the return to Zion in our days. (Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback), pp. 266-267; adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 246) See also: Chukat: Even in the Hour of Death

***Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chukat For the week ending 23 June 2018 / 10 Tammuz 5778 Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com Insights The Carrot and the Stick “G-d said to Moshe and Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me...” (20:12)*** My Rabbi once told me what his grandmother told him at his Bar Mitzvah more than seventy years ago. She said, “In the Next World they hit you with iron bars.” Apparently this is what a Jewish boy was to be aware of when he reached the age of spiritual majority. I’m not sure how well this would go down as a Bar Mitzvah shmuz (ethics lecture) from bubby these days. Am I mistaken, or hasn’t the average mussar shmuz morphed in the past thirty years, leaving aside any mention of “fire and brimstone”? It could be that we are so weak as a generation that any mention of the “G” word (Gehinom) sends us into paroxysms of depression and despair, which, of course, is totally counter-productive. “G-d said to Moshe and Aharon: Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me...” As a result of the verse, Moshe and Aharon lost the merit of entering the Land of Israel. The Rambam and the Ramban have differing opinions of the sin that caused this. The Rambam says that the main reason for their punishment was that Moshe became angry with the Jewish People and insulted them with the words,

“Listen now, you rebels!” (20:10) The Ramban, however, says that Moshe’s mistake was hitting the rock rather than speaking to it. Really, the two reasons can be understood as being one. There are two kinds of tzaddikim: One type never ceases to exhort his flock with words of fire until they return, while the other type raises them up and makes them feel that it is beneath them to sin. The difference is that the tzaddik who brings his flock to return through the goodness of their hearts causes the natural world to subject itself to him and does his bidding for the good of the Jews. This is because the whole world was created to help the Jewish People in their service of G-d. However, when teshuva has to be forced out of the people through stern and frightening reproof, the natural world also has to be coerced physically to act for the benefit of the Jewish People. When Moshe became angry and admonished the Jewish People with harsh words, the rock was not prepared to respond to Moshe’s words alone, and required physical “encouragement” to bring forth water. *Source: Kedushat Levi © 1995-2018 Ohr Somayach International*

***OU Torah Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb Have You Seen My God?***

There are many reasons why I love to walk the streets of Jerusalem. One of them is the opportunity to read the signs and posters that adorn the streets of the holy city. Many of the signs announce the passing of citizens, ordinary and prestigious. Some of the signs announce meetings of a political nature, which often concern only a small segment of the community. The signs that I find most intriguing are the ones that announce lectures on religious subjects. Recently, I came across a poster announcing an upcoming lecture that especially excited me. The title of the lecture was, “Have You Seen My God?” That title alone was enough to get me to consider attending the lecture. But the subtitle spoke to me even more. It read, “The Thought of Hillel Zeitlin.” I am convinced that every person who is serious about religion seeks to discover or to rediscover the Almighty. Sometimes we feel close to Him, and sometimes He seems elusive. He is, after all, an El mistater, a “God who hides Himself”. How do we find Him during the times that He seems hidden? I maintain that it is at those times that we need a guide, a spiritual mentor who can deal with the question, “Have you seen my God?”. Such a guide understands that question empathically, can answer it affirmatively in terms of his own experience, and can help us find our own way back to Him. Hillel Zeitlin was such a person for me. I never met him personally. His long and productive life came to a close in the dark days of the Warsaw ghetto. It ended, in all likelihood, in Treblinka. But I read many of his works and interviewed several people who did know him, even one person who witnessed him march with his Yom Kippur kittel and tallit to the dreaded Umschlagplatz, the railroad station from which trains packed with Jews departed Warsaw for the certain death which awaited them in Treblinka. His biography and his works reflect a lifelong search for the answer to the question, “Have you seen my God?”. He abandoned his traditional background in search of an answer, first in the universities of central Europe and later from various early twentieth century academic theologians. He wrote books, in German, on topics such as theodicy and nature of religious experience. He eventually returned to traditional religious observance and gained expertise in the religious writings of the Chabad school and of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. His writings reflect his own ecstatic spiritual experiences, and his haunting poems reveal his mystical tendencies. Hillel Zeitlin has been one of the spiritual guides that I have discovered who have enabled me cope with the perennial dilemma of all men and women of faith: drawing closer to God at the times He feels most distant. But Hillel Zeitlin was far from the only such spiritual guide that I have had the good fortune to experience. I believe that such spiritual guides are available to us all if we but take advantage of their availability. Quite frequently, we can find them in our own surroundings, among our teachers and rabbis and friends. What happens to us when we are, for one reason or another, bereft of such sources of guidance? Let me turn to a passage in this week’s Torah reading, Chukat (Numbers 19:1-22:1), to illustrate what happens to our inner lives when such a guide is absent. A central theme in this week’s parsha is the dearth of water in the wilderness. Early in the parsha, we read about the people’s complaint to Moses and Aaron: “Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!” (Numbers 20:5) The ensuing verses describe the efforts of Moses to obtain water for the people. But in the process of doing so, he fails to follow the Almighty’s instruction to “speak to the rock to yield its water”. Instead, he strikes the rock and forever suffers the consequences of disobeying the Almighty. Much later in this week’s Torah reading, we have a much more successful encounter with precious water. The marching Israelites discover a wellspring of fresh water, a miraculous blessing from the Lord. The people react by bursting into song: “Then Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well – sing to it – the well which the chieftains dug...” (Numbers 21:17-18) A national song! But not the first national song sung by the Israelites. Let us recall the “song of the

sea”, the lengthy paean to be found in the Book of Exodus, chapter 15. This song is introduced with the following phrase: “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.” Compare the two introductory phrases. At the crossing of the sea, it was Moses who led the Israelites in song, and the song was addressed to the Lord. In this week’s Torah reading, neither Moses nor the Lord are mentioned. Israel seems on its own, without Moses. They celebrate the discovery of water but do not recognize the role that the One Above played in that life-saving discovery. This discrepancy between the two songs is noted in the Midrash (Yalkut Chukat). The Midrash asks, “Why is there no mention of Moses? Because Moses had met defeat because of water, and no one praises the source of his great failure.” Moses, having failed earlier in our parsha to provide water for the people in precise compliance to the Almighty’s instructions, was incapable of singing joyously at this new and unexpected discovery of water. Water for him the cause of his tragic frustration. He was thus “blinded” to the wonder of this well in the wilderness. Moses, the great spiritual guide, was not available to the people to lead them in song, to help them appreciate the Lord’s great favor, and so they sang on their own, and failed to attribute the discovery of the well to Providence. One of the most profound and insightful spiritual guides of the twentieth century was a man named Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler. In the second volume of his posthumously published *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, Rabbi Dessler expounds upon this Midrashic passage and its implications. He writes, “When one’s teacher is unable to fully appreciate the spiritual significance of one of life’s events, then that teacher’s disciples will also be unable to see the hand of the Lord in those events.” We all need a teacher, a guide, someone who is spiritually aware of things we cannot, or will not, see. This is why, writes Rabbi Dessler, we are urged in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) to “make for yourselves a teacher, *aseh lecha rav*.” Rabbi Dessler summarizes the lesson he wishes us to learn with the following words: “This is the summary of the matter: a person must be careful to find spiritual guides and must take every advantage of the opportunities to learn from them. Life is full of obstacles which impede our ability to benefit from such masters.” In our times, many of us, perhaps most of us, search for God on our own. We resort to meditation, contemplation, introspection. We fail to survey our surroundings to discover others who can guide us. We neglect the vast literature available on our tradition, which can put us into contact with men and women of the past who can serve as our guides although they may have lived centuries ago. We need not, nay we cannot, “go it alone” in a matter as important as finding the answer to the question, “Have you seen my God?”. In this column, I have shared with you the names of two men, both of whom I know only through their writings, who have been helpful to me in my own search for a closer and more meaningful relationship with the Almighty. But Hillel Zeitlin and Rabbi Dessler are only two such individuals. I encourage you, dear reader, to find your own spiritual guides, either among those who are still with us in this world, or those who have passed on to the “world of truth” but who remain accessible to us through their writings and teachings. .

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***njop.org Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Chukat 5778-2018 “The People of Israel are Taught to be More Independent”***

This week’s parasha, *parashat Chukat*, opens with the laws of the פְּרָה אֲדֻמָּה, *Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer that was used in ancient times to cleanse the people from impurity. The parasha, however, also contains a host of other themes, including Miriam’s death and the subsequent lack of water, the punishment of Moses and Aaron for hitting the rock, the death of Aaron, the battle with Amalek, the people’s complaint and the attack of the fiery serpents. The parasha concludes with Israel’s victory in battle over Sihon and the Amorites. After the deaths of Miriam and Aaron and the loss of those great leaders, the people needed to prepare for the future. Life for them would be very different after their leader Moses will no longer be with them. Until now, the people of Israel have been living a supernatural lifestyle, wandering through the wilderness on Divine clouds. According to the Midrash, these clouds leveled out the terrain so the people would not have to endure the challenging mountains or valleys. Their clothes were washed by the clouds and their garments grew along with their bodies. Water suddenly appeared in the wilderness when Moses spoke to the rock. Now Miriam and Aaron were gone. Moses was soon to pass away as well. The people of Israel could not continue to live in this supernatural manner for much longer. They need to prepare for a more normal life that they would experience after the death of Moses, who passed away immediately prior to their entry into the land of Canaan. When the Canaanite kings heard of the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, they regarded the people of Israel as extremely vulnerable and, one by one, began to attack. The first Canaanite king to attack is identified in the Torah (Numbers 21:1), as the king of Arad.

[Rashi](#) citing the Midrash, maintains that the attackers were actually Amalekites, who had disguised themselves as local Canaanites (from Arad) in order to confuse the people of Israel. This tactic would hopefully render the Israelites’ prayers for salvation ineffectual because they were intended to defeat the Canaanites and not the Amalekites. According to the Midrash, the king of Arad and his troops (the disguised Amalekites), captured one Canaanite slave girl, leading the Israelites to do battle with them, in order to redeem the unfortunate captive. The deception did not help, and when the people of Israel took an oath to G-d, the Al-mighty delivered the king of Arad and his people into their hands. The [Ha’Emek Davar](#) notes that Moses did not play a role in this battle, or in the later battles with Sihon and Og, the Amorite kings. While, according to the Talmud *Brachot* 4b, Moses does personally kill Og the giant king of Bashan, it was because it was impossible to defeat Og naturally. Through prayer and battle, the nations of Sihon and Og were defeated by Israel, as was the king of Arad. As we learn in Numbers 21:24, וַיַּכֵּהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְיֵ הַרְבֵּ, and Israel smote him [Sihon] by the edge [literally “by the mouth”] of the sword, meaning that Israel defeated the enemies utilizing both prayer and battle, which continued to be the method employed in the later conquests of the land of Israel as well. Unfortunately, the People of Israel once again fail to acknowledge how their lack of faith affects their security. When the people begin to speak against Moses and G-d, the Al-mighty strikes the people with fiery serpents who begin to bite the Israelites. The [Akeidat Yitzchak](#) points out that with this attack, the supernatural life, which the Israelites had experienced for 40 years, comes to an end, and the natural pattern of life for the Israelites begins. The *Akeidat Yitzchak* notes that even though the Torah, in Deuteronomy 8:15, describes that the people had traveled for 40 years through “an arid desert of venomous serpents and scorpions,” not a single creature had ever harmed them. But, when the people lash out at G-d and Moses, declaring, Numbers 21:5, וַיִּזְעַזְעוּ אֶת־נַפְשֵׁנוּ קֶדְשָׁהּ, וַיִּבְזְעוּ אֶת־הַקֶּלָּקֶל, “our souls are disgusted with this insubstantial food,” G-d brings the serpents to show them what happens when they renounce G-d’s protective powers. The serpents, that were always there but never harmed them, begin to attack. The supernatural protection of G-d vanishes, and nature begins to run its course. The serpents, says [Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch](#), show how dangerous nature really is, and that it is only G-d who protects the people from harm. The Israelites, who will soon enter Canaan—the Promised Land, will have to readjust to their new unprotected reality. Moses, Aaron and Miriam will no longer be there to perform miracles for them and protect them. The Divine clouds, upon which they rode, will disappear and they will have to wash their own garments and tailor new garments as their bodies grow. The “new normal” has arrived, and the Israelites will have to face the consequences of life as it runs its “natural” course. The mercies of G-d can always be evoked, but only for a people who live a life devoted to G-d and His Torah. *May you be blessed.*

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***Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chukas A Perplexing Fast Day Posted on June 7, 2002 (5761)***  
***Dedicated This Year Le’eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov – In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand***  
***A Guide To The Perplexing Fast Day Of Erev Shabbos Parshas Chukas***

The Magen Avraham cites a ‘practice of individuals’ to fast on the Friday prior to the reading of Parshas Chukas [Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim Chapter 580]. In general, it is an anomaly to have a fast day scheduled for a Friday. Of even greater significance is the fact that most fast days are established on a specific calendar date, while this one is not. The Magen Avraham writes that no matter what day of the month the Friday prior to Parshas Chukas falls, that is the day when ‘individuals’ fast. What is the significance of this fast day? It commemorates the burning of 20 wagon-loads of the Talmud and other Sefarim [Rabbinic books] in France. When the event happened, it occurred on the 9th day of Tammuz. However, various Rabbinic authorities of that day learned through dreams that the ‘cause’ of the incident was not related to the day on the calendar, but to the fact that it was the day before the Torah reading of Parshas Chukas. The Magen

Avraham explains that the Aramaic Targum of the opening words of the parsha [Bamidbar 19:2] “Zos Chukas HaTorah” [This is the law of the Torah] is “da Gezeiras Orayisa” [this is the Torah’s decree]. This was understood to be a Torah decree that such a tragic event would occur on the Friday before this Torah reading. The Imrei Shammai supplies additional historical background to this incident. He says that in the exact place where the Talmud and other Sefarim were burnt, the Jews of that town had in previous years publicly burnt the Rambam’s Guide To The Perplexed (Moreh Nevuchim). The Moreh Nevuchim was a controversial work. In those days, the Rambam did not yet have the unquestioning allegiance that he gained in later generations. As surprising as it may seem to us, he had his detractors and there were authorities who were highly critical of the Moreh Nevuchim. In fact, there were even some places where his Book of Knowledge (Sefer HaMadah) (the first volume of his Major Work “The Yad HaChazakah”) was not accepted. As a Heavenly punishment for this earlier burning of the Rambam’s works, 20 cart loads of Torah books were now publicly burnt. When the Jewish community saw this, they recognized their earlier misdeed and repented by establishing a fast day. They prayed for forgiveness and subsequently there was no more controversy about the Guide To The Perplexed. In this way they were very fortunate. They had a clear Sign from Heaven in terms of what they had done wrong. It did not take a genius to put two and two together and draw the appropriate conclusion. The connection was obvious. This is the historical background of the custom of ‘individuals’ to fast on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parshas Chukas.

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**Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Chukas חוקת השעיה רבי שנין**

**Rashi** explains the concept of chok, a mitzvah whose Divine rationale eludes us. While Hashem certainly has a reason for every one of the Taryag, 613 mitzvos, the reason behind every mitzvah is beyond our grasp. Understandably, one might say that not all mitzvos are beyond our ken. Ostensibly, specific mitzvos – such as Kibbud Av v’Eim, Honoring father and mother – are rationally based. The Rambam (Shemoneh Perakim) distinguishes between mitzvos sichlios, rational mitzvos (which supposedly anyone who possesses a modicum of intelligence can understand on his own), and mitzvos shlmuyos, mitzvos we accept and perform purely because we “heard” them – not because we necessarily understand them. Nonetheless, just because a mitzvah is given to human rationale, that rationale does not necessarily define it, since we must view every mitzvah as an afkaata d’Malka, Heavenly decree, which supersedes human understanding. Just because a mitzvah makes sense to us does not necessarily mean that we truly understand it, since Hashem’s reasoning is different than ours, and may actually conflict with others. The following vignette, so poignantly described in amazing detail by the well-known Maggid, Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, is a classic example of such a conflict. The mitzvah of honoring one’s parents is quite sensible. Parents do everything (or at least they should) for their children. It makes sense that the child should show his gratitude and reciprocate. What about parents that are unworthy of such reciprocity, parents who have been far from appropriate to their children, who have mistreated, ignored or even abused their children? Is the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v’Eim relevant under such conditions? While all of these questions require a rabbinic response and elucidation which go beyond the scope of this paper, the following story will suffice. A young couple was blessed with a child. After a fairly easy labor and delivery, the physician came out and presented the parents with a freshly cleaned baby boy. Mazel tov! The joy in the room was palpable as the young parents shared the simchah with one another. A few hours later, after their pediatrician checked out the baby, he returned with some difficult news to accept: their newborn

had a problem. The condition was not life-threatening, but it would require years of therapy and medication. Their baby was not well. The parents were distraught. (We should not judge; everyone reacts differently to life’s challenges.) The parents hastily discussed the issue. They decided that they were both young, and this was their first child. They were not prepared to raise a child that would present such great challenges. They were putting their newborn son up for adoption. It took some time to find the right couple for this child. In the interim, the baby was shuffled from home to home, foster care to foster care, until a benevolent and loving couple without children of their own agreed to adopt the boy and raise him as their own child. The child now had a home and parents who would care for him. His biological parents moved on with their lives. There was really nothing further to do. They neither had any idea who had adopted their son, nor what was transpiring in his life.

The adoptive parents did everything within their power to raise “their” child in the best way possible. They placed him in the best schools, providing him with the finest education that they could afford. They also consulted with various doctors and medical centers concerning how to best treat his impediment. Baruch Hashem, over time, through the agency of the appropriate treatment, he was able to overcome his challenge, and he could look forward to a normal, healthy life. His bar mitzvah was celebrated amid much pomp, since it was also a seudas hodaah, celebration of gratitude, for all of Hashem’s beneficence. Their son was now ready to enter the yeshivah world, which he did with the support of his parents. During this entire time, he heard nothing from his biological parents. It was as if they did not exist. Veritably, as far as they were concerned, he, too, did not exist.

Years passed, and the young boy turned into a young man, married and entered the next phase of his life: kollel. He sat and learned as his family grew; the whole time he was supported by his parents who had done so much for him. Indeed, they had given him back his life. His biological parents had never attended any of the milestone occasions of his life. They just were not present. Years later, our young man was a distinguished pillar of his community, involved now in helping others in need. One day, as he sat in his study contemplating a communal issue, he heard a knock at his front door. He went to answer the door and met an elderly Jew who asked to come in. He invited the man to sit at his table. “How can I help you?” he asked. The old man began to tell a story that floored him, “I would like you to know that I am your biological father.” The host was in a turmoil. “Where have you been these last fifty years?” he asked. “We had our reasons. We made a decision that is of no concern to you. All you must know and accept is that I am now over eighty years old and in failing health. The doctors informed me that I require treatment for my illness and that following the treatment, I will probably have to move into a nursing facility. I will no longer be able to take care of myself,” the biological father explained. “What does that have to do with me?” his “son” asked. “Simple,” the father replied. “All of this costs money which I do not have. As my son, you must support me. There is a mitzvah of Kibbud Av v’Eim, and I demand that you do your part!” The son looked at his father incredulously and exclaimed, “Suddenly, now I am your son! Where have you been for the last fifty years? Do you think that I am wealthy? I barely make enough to support my family.” When the father heard such “insolence” from his son, he became angry and raised his voice, “Is this how a son speaks to his father? Where is your respect? There can be no excuses. As a son, you are obligated to minister to my needs. I will tolerate nothing less!” End of story. Now, let us return to our earlier hypothesis that Kibbud Av v’Eim is a logical, rational mitzvah. What should be our response to the father? Obviously, everyone’s indignation had passed the boiling point. From a rational, human, logical point of view, the father should have been asked to leave with the words, “You forgot about me fifty years ago. I did not exist. Make believe that I still do not exist!” If we were to ask the rav for a halachic perspective, his response would be, “The father is correct in his demand. He might be a terrible person and worthy of nothing, but halachah is halachah. He is the father, and the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v’Eim prevails.”

Now, I ask you: Is Kibbud Av v’Eim a rational mitzvah?

**הַלְּמַד הַתּוֹרָה אֵדָם כִּי יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל** *This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in his tent. (19:14)*

Chazal (Berachos 63b) render the above pasuk homiletically, “This is the Torah – a man who dies in a tent. The Torah is not acquired only (unless) a person kills himself over it.” Obviously, such a compelling statement warrants considerable commentary. Simply, it teaches that in order for one to succeed in Torah study, he must view it as the essence of his life – without which he cannot survive. One must be prepared to devote himself totally to Torah study. The Torah is the life source of the Jew. The Vishnitzer Rebbe, Horav Moshe Hager, zl, offers a profound, but practical, explanation of Chazal’s statement.

Shlomo HaMelech says (Koheles 9:12), *Ki imlo yada ha’adam es ito*, “For man knows not his time (when he will pass from this world).” Nothing eludes one more than the day of his death. David HaMelech asked to be informed of his end of days (Tehillim 39:5), *Hodeini Hashem kitzi u’midas yamai mah hi*, “Hashem, let me know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is.” All David was able to know was the day (Shabbos) of the week that he would die, but, when and how, he would not know. What did David do? He did not waste one minute on Shabbos. He devoted every waking moment to Torah study. How else could he best prepare himself to meet his Maker?

Having said this, let us ask ourselves; if an individual were to be informed that today is his designated day of departure from this world, what would his immediate reaction be? Would he: run to the bank and withdraw his savings? sell his securities? check his cupboard to see how much food there is? Obviously, these are not appropriate activities for one’s last day of life. The most appropriate and rational activity would be to take out a Gemorah and sit himself down in a quiet corner and learn like there was no tomorrow – because there would be no tomorrow! He certainly should not waste a moment of his time. Every moment that he has left should be viewed as utterly precious. He should take breaks only to daven and recite Tehillim. Food should be eaten only if necessary, just enough to give him the energy to continue learning. “This,” explains the Rebbe, “is the idea behind *meimis atzmo aleha*, ‘to kill oneself for it.’” One should view today as the last day of his life. As such, he would never waste a moment, because every moment is precious, and, when it is gone, it is gone. Torah is sustained by one who values his time, realizing that this could be “it,” so that spending “today” on anything but Torah would be absurd. I remember hearing from Horav Yitzchak Sorotzkin, Shlita, a telling dialogue that he had with his father, Telshe Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, shortly before his passing. They were in the hospital, and the Rosh Yeshivah was sitting in a wheelchair, a sefer in his hands, as he waited to be transported to his next round of therapy. Rav Baruch was terribly weak, his weight having decreased to double digits. His eyes glanced up furtively to see if he could steal a few more minutes to learn. Rav Yitzchak looked at his father and asked, “How could you learn now?” The Rosh Yeshivah grimaced in pain and replied, “And, when else, if not now, will I be able to learn?” This is how the Rosh Yeshivah lived. As his talmid, I saw daily how Torah was his life. Sadly, many people do not understand what it is that makes life meaningful. In an excellent article entitled, “How to Find Meaning in the Face of Death,” the author records lessons she heard from the Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. I will use some of these lessons as a springboard to explain how a Jew should live his life, and, especially in the context of the above Torah thought, learn Torah as if today were to be the last day of your life.

The article begins with the premise, “The period of time between diagnosis and death presents an opportunity for extraordinary growth.” The most pressing questions confronting the patients are not: “when”? and “how”? or “how much pain will I have?” Rather, their primary question is: “What makes life meaningful?” They are in search of a meaning that cannot be erased by death. Conclusion: While the spectre of death leads people to conclude that their lives are meaningless, it can also be a catalyst for them to work out, as they have never before, the meaning of their lives. Psychologists posit that when people believe their lives have meaning, it is because three criteria have been satisfied: they feel that their existence is valued by others; they are driven by a sense of purpose or significant life goals; and they

understand their lives to be coherent and integrated. In other words: my life has value to someone other than myself; I do not live solely for myself, but to serve a Higher purpose; my life is logical; it makes sense.

No one lives forever. On the other hand, to have lived and achieved nothing is truly a waste of G-d’s greatest gift to man. Simply, each of us has to justify our presence in this world. This is not a fun trip. It is filled with purpose. How we relate to – and achieve – that purpose establishes our legacy to those who have valued our presence. The search for meaning, the ability to experience meaning, is a basic motivating force of human behavior. Once a person discovers the meaning in his life his spiritual well-being increases, while his feelings of anxiety, depression and whatever else plagues us decrease and really should dissipate. A Jew has purpose in life. It revolves around Torah and mitzvos. Their observance lend meaning to his life, and their achievement establish one’s legacy for the future. Thus, while we should always plan for the future, we should also serve Hashem “today” as if we will have no tomorrow.

**וַיִּרָם מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת הַסֵּלֶעַ בַּמַּטֵּהוּ פַעֲמִים** *Then Moshe raised his arm and struck the rock with his staff twice. (20:11)*

When Moshe Rabbeinu struck the stone, instead of speaking to it, as per his instructions from Hashem, his actions were considered to be sinful. As a result, he was not permitted to enter into Eretz Yisrael. The commentators offer a number of different explanations to shed light on Moshe’s error. Rashi says that altering Hashem’s command from “speaking” to “striking” was wrong. Other commentators attribute the error to his reaction, the derogatory manner in which he spoke to the people: *Shimu na hamorim*, “Listen, you rebellious ones/fools.” Whether the issue was becoming angry or referring to descendants of the Avos, Patriarchs, in such a disgraceful manner, our leader was held accountable. The Bas Ayin coalesces both explanations. Moshe was acutely aware that Hashem had instructed him to speak to – not strike – the stone. Since he had spoken disrespectfully to the Jewish people, however, Moshe thought that he was no longer able to perform miracles using the words that emanated from his mouth. He had impugned the purity and integrity of his power of speech. Thus, he hit, rather than spoke. This appears to be a rational reason for avoiding speaking. Why was Moshe held in contempt? The Bas Ayin explains that one should never despair from doing teshuvah. The power of repentance supersedes all; thus, it has the power to rectify any sin. Moshe could still have performed miracles with his words, had he “repented.” This was his error. The reason that the Ibn Ezra advances is especially noteworthy. He explains that the critique against Moshe and the nation was that upon seeing water pour from the stone, their first reaction should have been to sing shirah, a song of praise, to Hashem. Instead, they drank and gave water to their animals. When we pray for a miracle and Hashem’s response is positive, our initial response must be gratitude – not first enjoying the fruit and only then saying, “Thank you.” Our priority must always be acknowledging our Benefactor.

**יֵעַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתָּ בִּי לְהַקְדִּישֵׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל... הִמָּה מִי מְרִיבָה אֲשֶׁר רָבוּ בְנֵי** *Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael... They are the waters of strife where Bnei Yisrael contended with Hashem, and He was sanctified through them. (20:12,13)*

Had Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen demonstrated greater faith in Hashem by speaking to the rock, rather than striking it, Hashem’s Name would have been sanctified. The Nation would have derived the message: If an inanimate rock – which does not hear, speak, or require sustenance – carries out Hashem’s command (when spoken to), surely we (humans) should do so Ramban explains that Moshe and Aharon certainly were not lacking in faith; rather the phrase should be understood, “Because you did not cause them (the people) to believe in Me;” for if Moshe would have followed Hashem’s directive as commanded, the people would have been infused with faith. While seeing water emerge from a rock that Moshe struck is clearly an infusion of faith, the resulting Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of Hashem’s Name, would have been greater had Moshe spoken to the rock. Thus, by imposing punishment on such holy and spiritually impeccable leaders as Moshe and Aharon, thereby showing that

regardless of one's spiritual status no one has license to sin, Hashem's Name becomes sanctified. Anything that brings about a greater awareness of Hashem is considered a sanctification of His Name. We may derive from here that if a greater Kiddush Hashem could have occurred, then, in effect, a chillul, profanation, of Hashem's Name, has taken place. Every opportunity for Kiddush Hashem that is wasted creates a void where kedushah, holiness, could have penetrated. This is chillul, desecration. A void is a waste. With regard to Kiddush Hashem, there is no place for a wasted opportunity. Perhaps the following story will clarify the meaning of a chillul Hashem. The holy Rizhiner Rebbe (Horav Yisrael) was imprisoned for twenty-two months, sixteen of which were spent in the notorious Kiev Prison, a dark, desolate, cold dungeon. No charges had been issued against him, but, then, since when does an anti-Semitic regime need an excuse for persecuting Jews? The Rebbe fully accepted his predicament as Hashem's decree, and he sanctified Hashem's Name during his interment. On Shushan Purim, 1840, the cell door that separated him from freedom creaked open to release the Rizhiner. The Rebbe rose from the floor, walked out, paused momentarily, then turned around and stepped back into the cell.

Those who witnessed the Rebbe's self-imposed return to the cell looked on incredulously, as he remained inside for a few moments before finally stepping out to freedom. They then understood that the Rebbe viewed his period of incarceration as a period of holiness. It was an experience from which he should learn – and never forget. He returned to the cell to acknowledge this fact. One of the Rizhiner's staunch admirers was the tzaddik, holy, righteous Rebbe, the Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, of Sanz. As Rav of Sanz, he had an illustrious career, both as halachic arbiter and as a mentor to his many followers. When he retired, his son, Rav Aharon, assumed the position of Rav of Sanz. Once, when Rav Aharon presided over a case between two litigants, his ruling was not accepted by the guilty party. He (the guilty litigant) demanded that the Rav retract his verdict. Rav Aharon refused to reverse his ruling. He had studied the case and felt that his ruling followed halachah. He was unmoved by the guilty party's threats of revenge. True to his threats, the miscreant went to the gentile authorities and, after fabricating a bogus story, demanded that Rav Aharon be arrested and locked up. The authorities were only too happy to accommodate him.

Rav Aharon's family and students went immediately to his father, Rav Chaim, to seek his counsel. Surprisingly, he did not react to the entire debacle. He said, "If my son had been incarcerated for some crime that he had committed, I would be greatly concerned. My son, however, was thrown into jail for upholding the Torah and rendering a true verdict based upon Jewish law. He is sitting in jail for upholding kedushas haTorah, the sanctity of the Torah! What greater z'chus, merit, is there?"

When the family saw that Rav Chaim was immovable, they went to his mechutan, parent of one of his children in-law, Horav Yehoshua, zl, of Belz. Perhaps Rav Chaim would listen to reason if presented by someone of his eminence. Rav Yehoshua wasted no time in proceeding to Rav Chaim and explained the entire ordeal to him: from the original case in bais din until Rav Aharon was tragically thrown into jail. He explained that it was devastating for such a refined and dedicated person as Rav Aharon to languish with derelicts in a Hungarian jail. He was suffering, and so was his family and the entire Jewish community. Then he added one last caveat: By allowing Rav Aharon to fester in jail, it was creating a gross chillul Hashem. How could he, Rav Chaim, allow for this desecration of Hashem's Name to continue? The mention of the chillul Hashem "card," ignited Rav Chaim. He turned to Rav Yehoshua and, with tremendous self-control (although he was seething), demanded, "Do you really believe that if one is incarcerated for upholding the sanctity of the Torah by rendering an honest, true and impartial judgment, it creates chillul Hashem? Would you consider the imprisonment of Yosef HaTzaddik by Pharaoh a chillul Hashem? Were the twenty-two months spent by the Rizhiner in a Russian dungeon a chillul Hashem? Absolutely not! On the contrary, it was a Kiddush Hashem of the highest order! Both Yosef HaTzaddik and the holy Rizhiner sanctified Hashem's Name l'eila u'l'eila, to the highest heights. My dear mechutan, I want you to listen to me. Anyone who calls himself

a Jew and is not attached body and soul to his Creator – every moment of the day – is guilty of chillul Hashem! We now understand the word l'hakdisheini, to sanctify Me. A Jew must live a life of Kiddush Hashem and, if he could have reached a higher level and did not, he has failed.

*Sponsored in memory of our dear Mother and Grandmother GIZI WEISS Morry & Judy Weiss, Erwin & Myra Weiss and Grandchildren, Gary & Hildee Weiss, Jeff & Karen Weiss, Zev & Rachel Weiss, Elie & Sara Weiss, and Brian "Love and memories are gifts from G-d that death cannot destroy". Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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**D'var Torah: Parashat Chukat Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

*In this week's D'var Torah for Chukat, the Chief Rabbi explains why the symbol of the medical profession is taken from our Parasha.*

The medical profession's symbol is from our Torah reading (The symbol of the BMA (The British Medical Association), as is the case with many other medical organisations, is a serpent on a staff. The origin of this symbol is in Parashat Chukat. The Torah tells us how Bnei Yisrael, the Israelites, expressed ingratitude for the Manna that fell miraculously from heaven for them to eat. Hashem responded by sending fiery serpents into the camp. Many were afflicted by the venom of their bites. The nation turned in Teshuvah. They repented and recognised where they had gone wrong. And Moshe appealed to Hashem to save those who needed healing. So Hashem said to Moshe to take one of the serpents, place it high up on a pole and he will see, when those afflicted will look up to the serpent they will be healed. That is exactly what happened. The Mishna, in Masechet Rosh Hashana, asks the obvious questions. "V'chi Nachash Meimit O' Nachas Mechayah? – Does the serpent have the capacity to give life or to take life?" And the Mishna explains what really happened was that when those people looked upwards to the serpent on the pole, their hearts were being inclined towards heaven. They were really turning to the Almighty Himself. And it was Hashem who saved them through the serpent. It is a bit like a Mezuzah. We look at our Mezuzas, treasure and cherish our Mezuzas, we touch our Mezuzas, and we kiss our Mezuzas. However, we recognise that it is Hashem who is "Shomer Daltot Yisrael-the Guardian of the doors of Israel." It is Hashem who is protecting our homes through the Mezuzah.

By remembering that passage in our Parasha and having the image of a serpent on a staff, we now recognise what a suitable symbol it is that many medical organisations have. In this way, we appreciate the role of doctors and of all medical staff. They are simply extraordinary men and women, who selflessly devote their lives to caring for us and to help us to have the gift of life. Ultimately, however, we need to recognise that all medical practitioners are the 'Shlichim'. They are the representatives, the agents, of the Almighty. This is because what the Torah says in Parasha Beshalach, is true. "Ki Ani Hashem Rofecha." It is Hashem who is the true doctor for us all. *Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland. 7 הדשות ערוץ*

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*Ohr Somayach :: Insights Into Halacha For the week ending 1 July 2017 / 7 Tammuz 5777 Forgotten Fast Days: Zos Chukas HaTorah Rabbi Yehuda Spitz*

On Motzai Shabbos Korach 5774, our dear, close family friend, Reb Chaim Daskal a"h, was nifter after a prolonged and painful battle with cancer R"l. Never one to complain, Reb Chaim still exuded Simchas Hachaim and gratitude to Hashem even in his weakened and pain-filled state, the last time this author had the zechus to see him, merely a week- and-a-half prior to his untimely passing. In fact, his tza'ava (will) reflects this as well, including how he wanted his own levaya, kevrura, and shiva to be held. One of the maspidim (eulogizers) at the levaya (at 1:45 A.M.!), Elimelech Lepon, mentioned that Reb Chaim passed away only after Shabbos was over, averring that the Malach HaMaves could not take have taken him on a Shabbos. You see, with an open house and a multitude of guests weekly, Shabbos was truly Reb Chaim's special day. In fact, Mr. Lepon revealed that it was exclusively due to the merit of Reb Chaim's extraordinary and warm Shabbos hospitality that he was won over to personally begin keeping Shabbos properly. When my father, renowned Kashrus expert Rabbi Manish Spitz, heard the tragic news of the passing of his friend of almost 40 years, he enigmatically exclaimed 'Zos Chukas HaTorah'! His intent was that the week of

Parshas Chukas is 'mesugal l'puraniyos', a time that has seen much hardship and tragedy for our nation. Therefore, it was fitting that only after Shabbos of Parshas Korach had ended, and the week of Parshas Chukas officially began, that such an incredible man, in the prime of his life, passed away. Yet, there is no mention in the Gemara of the week of Parshas Chukas being one of tragedy, nor is it mentioned by the Rambam, nor Tur, nor Shulchan Aruch! Not even in the Siman where tragedies and proper days to fast are mentioned, Orach Chaim 580! In fact, most are wholly unfamiliar with anything specifically attributed to this week. Yet, the Magen Avraham, citing the Sefer HaTanya[1] (referring to Sefer Tanya Rabbasi; an earlier source that the famous Kabbalistic work of the Shulchan Aruch HaRav) tells of a terrible, albeit fascinating, historical tragedy. Friday of Fire The Magen Avraham prefaces his terrible tale by quoting certain writings[2] explaining that it is "worthwhile for every Jew to cry for the burning of the Torah". He then proceeds to tell of a customary annual fast specifically for this purpose, on Erev Shabbos Parshas Chukas. On that day, in the year 1242, 20 wagonloads (however, the original versions state 24 wagonloads[3]) filled with Gemaros and Talmudic literature (including many works of the Baalei Tosafos) were burned in Paris by agents of the Church and King Louis IX. The pretext was a public debate between an apostate monk and several of the most eminent rabbinical authorities in France; the official verdict against them a foregone conclusion[4]. The impact and importance of this loss was tremendous. Keep in mind that this occurred over 200 years before the printing press was invented, and each of these volumes was a priceless, handwritten manuscript[5]. In fact, this was considered such an enormous loss for Klal Yisrael that the famed Maharam M'Rottenburg[6], an eyewitness, composed an elegy for our loss, 'Sha'ali Serufa Ba'Aish', deemed so essential that it is incorporated into the Kinot recited every Tisha B'Av (Kinah 41).[7] The great rabbis at the time, at a loss to fathom the extent of the tragedy, inquired of Heaven by means of a dream (known as a she'elas chalom) to discover whether this terrible event had been so decreed by Hashem. The Heavenly reply was a succinct three words 'Da Gezeiras Oraysa'. This is the Aramaic translation (see Targum Onkelos) of the opening verses to Parshas Chukas, 'Zos Chukas HaTorah', 'These are the decrees of the Torah' (Bamidbar Ch. 19: verse 2). The Rabbanim understood from this cryptic reply that the burning of the Talmud was indeed Heavenly decreed. Moreover, they gleaned that it was due to the proximity of the Parsha that the tragedy transpired, and not the day of the month[8]. Therefore, and as opposed to every other fast on the Jewish calendar, instead of a specific day established as a fast day, this one, designated a Taanis for Yechidim (fast for individuals), was set annually on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parshas Chukas. For those fasting, Asarah B'Teves would not be the only Taanis that practically occurs on a Friday[9]! Retribution for the Rambam? Rav Hillel of Verona, a talmid of Rabbeinu Yonah, and another eyewitness to these events, wrote a famous letter[10] in which he considered the burning of the Talmud as a clear sign of Divine anger and retribution for the burning of the works of the Rambam, in the exact same place in Paris not even forty days prior! After the Rambam's passing (in 1204), many great scholars who did not agree with his philosophical observations in his 'Moreh Nevuchim' and 'Sefer HaMada' banned his sefarim, with a tremendous controversy erupting throughout the Torah world[11]. Eventually, a number of his detractors submitted copies of his work to the monks of the Dominican Order to determine whether the Rambam's works contained heretical ideas. The Dominican Friars, naturally, summarily concluded that the Rambam's writings were not only false, but blasphemous. In 1234, in Montpellier, France, they publicly collected and burned all copies they found of 'Moreh Nevuchim' and 'Sefer HaMada'. Similarly, in 1242, a fanatical mob burned many of the Rambam's writings in Paris. Less than 40 days later, at the exact same site, the 24 wagonloads of the Talmud were burned, on Erev Shabbos Parshas Chukas[12]. According to Rav Hillel's letter, the famed Rabbeinu Yonah, one of the Rambam's primary opponents, took the Talmud burning as a Divine sign, and publicly and vociferously denounced his former position and opposition against the Rambam's writings and instead emphatically concluded "Moshe Emes V'Torasos Emes, V'Kulanu Bada'in!" "Moshe and his Torah are true (here referring to the Rambam), while we all are liars"[13]. He planned on traveling to the Rambam's grave (in Teverya) and begging forgiveness. Some say this tragic incident was the catalyst of Rabbeinu Yonah's writing what came to be known as his Magnum Opus, 'Shaarei Teshuva'. Further Grounds for Fasting After discussing the burning of the Talmud, the Magen Avraham offers another reason for fasting. On this very day, Erev Shabbos Chukas, two entire cities of Jews were brutally decimated, as part of the Gezeiras Ta'ch V'Ta't, the Cossack massacres led by Bogdan Chmielnitsky ym"sh[14] in 1648 - 1649, as recorded by the Shach. Most know of the Shach simply as one of the preeminent halachic authorities due to his extensive and authoritative commentary and rulings on the Shulchan Aruch, and few know that he also wrote a sefer titled 'Megillas Eifa'[15], detailing the horrific and barbaric slaughter of tens of thousands (he puts the total at over one hundred thousand!) of Jews, and hundreds of entire communities during these terrifying years. Among his entries he relates (in graphic detail) how two cities were totally wiped out on this same day in the year 1648 (5408). Hence, the

Magen Avraham avers that it is proper to fast (Taanis Yachid) on Erev Shabbos Chukas, due to both of these tragedies happening on this same day in history. 20th of Sivan However, that was not the first of the tragedies of Gezeiras Ta'ch V'Ta't. That occurred on the 20th of Sivan, 1648 (5408) when the Cossacks attacked Nemirov (Nemyriv), in the Ukraine, and destroyed the Jewish community, numbering over 6,000. Several hundred Jews were drowned; other were burned alive. The shuls were ransacked and destroyed, with even the Torah parchments desecrated and used as shoes. Since this horrifying catastrophe was unfortunately the first of many to come in the following years, the Shach, at the conclusion of his 'Megillas Eifa', declared a personal fast on the 20th of Sivan for himself and his descendants[16]. This was soon codified as a public fast by the Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos, the halachic and legislative body of all Lithuanian and Polish Jewry[17]. Indeed, the Magen Avraham concludes his passage by stating that in many places in Poland, the custom is to fast on the 20th of Sivan for this reason. Additionally, the Shach, the Tosafos Yom Tov, and Rav Shabsi Sheftel Horowitz[18], as well as several other Rabbanim of the time, composed specific Selichos to be recited on this day annually. The First Blood Libel and Massacre However, the 20th of Sivan was not chosen as a fast day exclusively due to the annihilation of the hundreds of Jewish communities during Gezeiras Ta'ch V'Ta't. It actually held the ignominious distinction of being the date of one of the very first blood libels[19], in Blois, France, almost 500 years prior, in 1171 (4931)! According to one of the Selichos recited on that day, 'Emunei Shelumei Yisrael', attributed to Hillel ben Yaakov, which lists the place and year of the tragedy, the King offered the 31 innocent Jewish prisoners (some listed by first name in the Selicha!), including several Gedolim and Baalei Tosafos, the chance to convert. When they refused, he ordered them burned alive! The martyrs recited Aleinu L'Shabayach in unison as the decree was being executed. Although, as detailed in the Selichah, as well as ascribed by an eyewitness to the atrocities, Rabbi Efraim of Bonn in his 'Sefer Hazechira', which was later appended to Rabbi Yosef Hakohen's sixteenth century 'Emek HaBacha', a chronicle of the terrible devastation of the Crusades (starting in 1096 / 4856; known as Gezeiras Tatn'u[20]), the martyrs' bodies did not burn. Still, this tragedy foreshadowed and portended future cataclysmic events for the Jewish people. In fact, this terrible libel was a major factor in the expulsion order of Jews from France a mere ten years later. The great Rabbeinu Tam and the Rabbanim of the time instituted the 20th of Sivan as a fast day, even exclaiming that this fast is 'akin to Yom Kippur'[21] The Selichos established for 20 Sivan, aside from the one mentioned previously which actually describes the horrendous pyre in Blois, were written by the Gedolim of the previous generations regarding the destruction of many Jewish communities during the Crusades (known as Gezeiras Tatn'u). Many Kinot of Tisha B'Av are recited in commemoration of these tragedies as well, including Rav Shlomo HaBavli[22], Rabbeinu Gershon (Me'ohr Hagolah), and Rav Meir ben Rav Yitzchak, the author of Akdomus. Interestingly, several of the Selichos, especially the one titled "Elokim Al Dami L'Dami", strongly reference and invoke the idea and essence of Korbanos in their theme, comparing the self-sacrifice of the Kedoshim of these decimated communities who gave up their lives Al Kiddush Hashem to Korbanos offered in the Beis Hamikdash. Re-Establishing the Fast In fact, it is due to the dual tragedies that occurred on this day that the Shach declared the 20th of Sivan a fast day[23]. In other words, he didn't actually set a new fast day; rather, he re-established the 20th of Sivan as a fast day, as it already had the distinction of a day that went 'down in infamy' almost 500 years previously. Therefore, it was only fitting to commemorate the unspeakable Cossack atrocities with a fast on this very same day, the day that the first Jewish community was destroyed as part of Gezeiras Ta'ch V'Ta't. Chronicles of the disastrous occurrences of this day do exist and can still be found. Aside for the Shach's 'Megillas Eifa', there is also Rav Nosson Nota of Hanover's 'Yavein Metzulah', Rav Avraham ben Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's 'Tzar Bas Rabbim', Rav Gavriel ben Yehoshua of Shusberg's 'Pesach Teshuva', and Rav Meir ben Shmuel of Sheburshen's 'Tzok Ha'itim', all written by eyewitnesses to the carnage and wanton destruction[24].[25] Although nowadays it seems not widely commemorated or even known about[26], nevertheless, the 20th of Sivan is still observed among several Chassidic communities, mostly of Hungarian origin. During the Holocaust, Hungarian Jewry was R"l decimated mainly over the span of the months of Iyar, Sivan, and Tamuz in 1944. Therefore, Rabbanim of Hungary re-established the 20th of Sivan as a fast day for Hungarian Jewry[27]. Recent events have proven to us the timelessness of the dictum of 'Zos Chukas HaTorah' - where tragedies beyond our understanding happen to the Jewish people in exile. Our pain and tears over the recent senseless and brutal abduction and murder of three of our finest young men Hy"d have driven home the point to us that throughout our long and protracted exile there have been no dearth of reasons to fast. May we soon welcome Moshiach, and have no further need for fast days. The author wishes to thank Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz for his help in clarifying much of the historical content of this article.

*This article is dedicated L'Ilui Nishmasam shel R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben David Tzvi and Naftali Frankel, Gilad Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach Hy"d.*



[1] Magen Avraham (O.C. 580, end 9), quoting the *Sefer Tanya Rabbasi* (end 58, Inyan Arba Tzomos pg. 63b). This version of the tragic events is also later cited by the Elya Rabba (ad loc. 4), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 4), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 31). The Tanya Rabbasi is an early halachic work written anonymously by a Rishon who was a colleague of the Shibolei HaLeket and Maharam M'Rotenberg. Interestingly, the Tanya Rabbasi was merely quoting the Shibolei HaLeket's account; ergo, it is unclear how slight variations crept into the Magen Avraham's retelling. [2] The Oz V'Hadar Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16) references this to be referring to the teachings of the Arizal (Shaar HaKavanim of Rav Chaim Vital, Drushei Tikkan Chatzos 1 and Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Tikkan Chatzos Ch. 3). [3] Indeed, the Biurei Maharsha" (on the Tanya Rabbasi ad loc. 8) points out that there must have been a ta'us safer in the Magen Avraham's writing, as in original he was quoting, it explicitly states 24 wagonloads and not 20. [4] The full proceedings of this debate was recorded by one of the Rabbanim who defended the Talmud, Rav Yecheil ben Yosef, the Rosh Yeshiva in Paris and father of the Rosh, in a sefer titled 'Vikhuach Rabbeinu Yecheil M'Paris'. For more background on this tragedy, see Artscroll's Kinot and Tefillos for Tisha B'Av (Introduction to Kinah 41). [5] See Shu"t Menachem Meishiv (vol. 2, pg. 262, 62; part of the sefer Tzayon L'Menachem) who cites that approximately 12,000 individual volumes were burned! [6] Aside for the Kinah he wrote, the Maharam referenced this great loss in his responsa (Teshuvos Maharam M'Rotenberg 250), citing the reaction of Rav Shmuel of Falaise, another of the Rabbanim who unsuccessfully attempted to defend the Talmud from being burned. On a historical side note, the Maharam M'Rotenberg, was later niflar (in 1293) in captivity after being unjustly imprisoned, in order to force the resident Jews to pay an exorbitant ransom to fill the Emperor's depleted coffers. The Maharam refused to allow himself to be ransomed, fearing that it would set a dangerous precedent for rulers holding Rabbis captive and forcing the unfortunate Jews to pay the price. Indeed, a short while after his passing, the Emperor attempted to do the same for the Maharam's prized pupil, the Rosh, who only narrowly avoided capture, escaping to Spain. [7] In an interesting side point, the Goren Dovid (Shu"t O.C. 41) utilizes this tragedy as a reason to explain why nowadays Yom Tov Sheini is still observed. Unfortunately, throughout our long and bitter Golus we never know when a government might make a gezeira ra'ah and all halachic literature be lost. How then will we be able to properly calculate the months and years to know when are the correct days to observe? He explains that this was a fulfillment of the Gemara's warning (Beitzah 4b) to keep Yom Tov Sheini "Hicharu B'Minhang Avoseichem B'Yadeichem". "You should still be vigilant with the custom of your forefathers that has been handed down to you because there might be times when the local government will issue a decree and it will cause confusion". For more on this topic see recent articles titled 'Rosh Hashana: The Universal Two Day Yom Tov (and Why Yom Kippur is Not)' and 'One Day or Two? What is a Chutznik in Eretz Yisrael to Do?' [8] The Shibolei Leket (263, Ha'arugah HaTishi'is Seder Taanis, Din Arba Tzomos; whom other sources are ostensibly based on) cites this as well, albeit with slight variations. First of all, from his writing it seems that he was also an eyewitness. Second, he refers to it as 24 (and not 20) wagonloads filled with 'Sifrei Talmud, V'Halachos V'Hugados', similar to the Maharam M'Rotenberg's version. Third, according to his version, the Heavenly response received was 'V'Da Gezeiras Oraysa', 'And these are the decrees of the Torah'. Accordingly, the Rabbanim understood the response to mean that Yom Vav (the sixth day) of Parshas Chukas specifically was the gezeira. This 'vav' is understandably not present in our Targum Onkelos on the pasuk of 'Zos Chukas HaTorah', as the pasuk does not state 'V'Zos'. As mentioned previously, this account is also the version in the original Tanya Rabbasi, as he was citing the Shibolei Leket. Other variations include the *Sefer HaTadir* (32, Hilchos Taaniyos pg. 233 - 234) who cites that 24 wagonloads were burned like the other Rishonim, but writes that the Heavenly response was 'Da Gezeiras Oraysa' (without the 'vav') similar to the Magen Avraham's version, and the Korei HaDoros (pg. 23a - b s.v. ukafi) who writes that 21 wagonloads were burned, but places the date of the Talmud burning 62 years later, right before the Jews were actually expelled from France. Interestingly, the Maharam M'Rotenberg makes no mention of the she'elas cholom in his Kinah dedicated to this tragedy. Neither does the Mishna Berura (ibid.), who summarized the reasons for the fast. However, in a different vein, in his recently published manuscript, Rav Chaim Paltiel, a Rishon and talmid chaver of the Maharam M'Rotenberg writes (Perushei HaTorah L'Rabi Chaim Paltiel, Introduction to Parshas Chukas, pg. 527; thanks are due to Rabbi Avrohom Goldstone of England for pointing out this source) that the minhag in France was to fast annually on the 6th of Tammuz, as that was the date that the Talmud was burned. And a siman for this is 'Zos Chukas HaTorah', which the Targum is 'Da Gezeiras D'Oraysa', meaning that on that date there was a gezeira on/against the Torah. It seems that both the Maharam, as well as Rav Paltiel, were unaware of the she'elas cholom, and Rav Paltiel understood that the fast to commemorate this tragedy was set as an actual date and not on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parshas Chukas. Since his manuscript was only first published some 30-odd years ago (5741), it is understandable why none of the Acharonim quoted his version of the events. For more on the topic of She'elos Chalomos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodi's *Lekutei Eliezer* (ppg. 59 - 63). [9] For more on this topic and why that Asarah B'Teves is the only Taanis Tzibbur that can fall out on a Friday, as well as the halachos of a Friday fast, see article titled 'Fasting on Friday'. [10] This letter is brought in Chemdah Genuzah (pg. 18), as well as Otzar HaGedolim (vol. 7, pg. 105), and cited in Torah L'Duas (vol. 2, Parshas Chukas pg. 280 - 281) and Kuntress Peninei Gevuros Akiva (Parshas Chukas pg. 3). Rav Hillel even mentions that the ashes of the burnt sefarim of the Rambam mixed together with the ashes of the burnt Talmud. [11] These letters, back and forth between the great scholars of the time, have been collected as the third volume of Kovetz Teshuvos HaRambam V'Igrosav, titled 'Igros HaKina'os'. [12] For more on the historical aspects of this see Rabbi Avraham Meir Weiss's recent *Mishnas Chachamim* (pg. 265, footnote 50) and the Artscroll Kinot and Tefillos for Tisha B'Av (Introduction to Kinah 41). [13] This is a paraphrase of the quote Chazal attribute to Korach after he was swallowed up by the earth at the conclusion of his ill-fated rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu! See Gemara Bava Basra (74a), Midrash Rabba (Parshas Korach Ch. 18, end 20), Midrash Tanchuma (Parshas Korach 11), and Kli Yakar (Parshas Korach Ch. 16, 34 s.v. nasu). [14] A genocidal and bloodthirsty mass murderer who could have given Adolf Hitler ym"sh a run as most notorious antisemite in history, Chmielnitsky ym"sh is nevertheless still considered a national hero in Ukraine for being the father of Ukrainian nationalistic aspirations. The Cossacks' sheer brutality and the scale of their atrocities were unsurpassed until the Nazis. According to noted historian Rabbi Berel Wein, the only reason why the Cossacks did not manage to kill as many Jews as did the Nazis ym"sh, was that there were no mechanized weapons to enable easy mass murder back in the 1600s. It was not due to lack of trying, R"l. [15] Although this author could not find this sefer among the works of the Shach, I was able to locate it annexed to the back of Rav Shlomo Ibn Varga's Shevet Yehuda (also known as 'Matteh Yehuda'), a fascinating (and unfortunately horrifying) work detailing the trials and tribulations Klal Yisrael has gone through in different lands over the millennia of our prolonged exile. Although Rav Varga died over a hundred years prior to Gezeiras Ta"ch V'Ta"t, the Shach's shocking account and vivid descriptions of the massacres were later included in this important work. Essential reading on Tisha B'Av! [16] The Shach added an additional

reason why he chose this date (also cited in Shaarei Teshuva - O.C. 580, end 9): 20 Sivan cannot fall out on a Shabbos on our calendar, ensuring and enabling fasters to be able to do so on that day every year. The Shach (as well as later the Yaavetz in his Siddur Bais Yaakov and as mentioned in the special aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamin' recited on that day for the Harugei Kehillos T"ach [V'Ta"t]; reprinted from an old manuscript that was printed in the Shach's lifetime) especially mourned the loss of the city's Chief Rabbi, Rav Yecheil Michel, a tremendous Talmid Chacham. Interestingly, a few short years earlier, the famed Tosafos Yom Tov, Rav Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, served as the town's Rav. [17] Pinkas Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos; cited by the Taz (O.C. 566, 3; although he quotes it as the Vaad Shalosh Ha'Aratzos) and Shaarei Teshuva (O.C. 580, end 9), as well as Rav Nossan Nota of Hanover's 'Yavein Metzulah', Rav Avraham ben Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's 'Tzar Bas Rabbim' (Reshumos vol. 3, pg. 279), and the Tosafos Yom Tov's Hakkama to his 'Selichos L'Kaf Sivan'. See also Yad Shaal (Y" D 228, end 136), Daas Torah (O.C. 580, 4), Siddur HaShelah, Siddur Bais Yaakov (of the Yaavetz), Siddur Derech Hachaim (of the Chavas Daas), Yesod VeShores HaAvodah (Shaar 9, Ch. 11) and the introduction to sefer 'Yesh Manchilin'. This fast is also mentioned by several other authorities including the Magen Avraham (ibid., and in O.C. 568, 10), Elya Rabba (O.C. 566, 3), Maadanei Yom Tov (ad loc. 1; aside for the Selichos he wrote), Pri Megadim (ad loc. M.Z. 3), Eishel Avraham (Butchatch, O.C. 580; at length), Mishna Berura (ibid.), and Kaf Hachaim (ibid.). [18] He was the son of the Shelah and Av Bais Din of Prague, as well as the author of *Vavai HaAmudim*. His *Selicha* was printed in the Siddur HaShelah. In the aftermath of these tragedies, the Tosafos Yom Tov (cited in the end of Shaarei Efraim, Hilchos Krias HaTorah) also composed a famous Tefillah against talking in Shul. [19] The ignominious distinction of being the very first blood libel seems to have occurred in 1144, Norwich, England, after a boy, William of Norwich, was found dead with stab wounds in the woods. Although his death was unsolved, the local community of Norwich attributed the boy's death to the Jews. William was shortly thereafter proclaimed as a saint in Norwich, with 'miracles' attributed to him, with a cult established in his name. However, in this case, the local authorities did not convict the Jews due to lack of proof and of legal jurisdiction. Although this sordid affair marked the first official 'Blood Libel', on the other hand, Blois in 1171 was the first recorded time and place such baseless accusations were actually acted upon, concluding with a gruesome massacre of the town's Jews, HY"D. Thanks are due to Stephen Posen for pointing out these details. [20] For this reason alone, the Taz (O.C. 493, 2), although maintaining that one need keep the restrictions of Sefira only until Lag B'Omer, nonetheless, exhorts us to continue with the prohibition on weddings even after Lag B'Omer until shortly before Shavuos due to the horrific tragedies perpetuated by the Crusaders to many Ashkenazic communities during the second half of Sefirah (Gezeiras Tam"u). See previous article titled 'Switching Sefirahs? - Understanding Your Minhag and its Ramifications'. [21] In fact, according to this source, the tragic events in Blois so distressed Rabbeinu Tam that he passed away a mere 14 days later, on 4 Tammuz 1171 (4931). However, Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi (Alpha Beta Tanyaesa D'Shmuel Zeira vol. 1 pg. 391) posits that this was not referring to the famous Rabbeinu Tam who was Rashi's grandson, but rather his talmid, Rav Yaakov of Orleans who was called Rabbeinu Tam M'Orleans. He adds, citing that the Ohev Yisrael of Apta (end Parshas Mattos), although not mentioning the terrible pyre on that day, related an astounding drush that "the 20th of Sivan is the beginning of Yom Kippur". He adds a Biblical allusion to this from Parshas Ki Sisa (Shemos Ch. 17: 16): "Ki Yad al Keis Kah" - Keis (Kaf - Samach) stands for Kaf (20) Sivan and Kah (Yud - Hei) stands for Yom Kippurim. [22] Rav Shlomo HaBavli is referred to by the Rishonim with great veneration. For example, he is quoted by Rashi (Parshas Terumah Ch. 26, 15 s.v. v'asisa) and the Rosh (Yoma Ch. 8, 19). The Maharshal (Shu"t Maharshal 29) writes that Rabbeinu Gershon, teacher of all Ashkenazic Jewry, learned Torah and received his mesorah from Rav Shlomo HaBavli. [23] Shach, in the conclusion of his 'Megillas Eifa', also cited by the Shaarei Teshuva (O.C. 580, end 9) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. end 31). This double catastrophe on the same day as part of the cheshbon to renew the fast of the 20th of Sivan is also mentioned by the Tosafos Yom Tov in his Hakkama to his Selichos L'Kaf Sivan, and in Rav Meir ben Shmuel Sheburshen's 'Tzok Haltim'. [24] Be forewarned: Much of the content is quite graphic and gruesome in its explicitness. The Cossacks' sheer depravity, cruelty, brutality, and bloodlust, were simply unprecedented in scale and scope, R"l. [25] Many of these works were collected and reprinted together around a hundred years ago in 'Lekoros HaGezeiros al Yisrael' (vol. 4). Additionally, there are several contemporary sefarim that give a summary of the tragedies of Gezeiras Tach V'Tat and the 20th of Sivan, including *Sefer HaTodaah* (vol. 2, Chodesh Sivan, Kaf B'Sivan, ppg. 357 - 360), and Netei Gavriel (on Hilchos Shavuos, Chelek HaBirurim 6, ppg. 282 - 299). Especially of interest is Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff's recent article titled 'The Twentieth of Sivan'. [26] There are several theories raised to explain this. See Yad Shaal (Y" D 228, end 136), and the Maharsham's Daas Torah (O.C. 580, 4). One supposition is that the original decree from the Vaad Arba HaAratzos to fast on the 20th of Sivan was only for a hundred years. Another theory is that the decree was only on Jewry who lived in those lands. In fact, the lashon of the Magen Avraham (O.C. 580, end 9), as well as the Mishna Berura (ad loc. 16), bears this out, as they only mention the fast as a 'minhag Poland'. Moreover, the Tosafos Yom Tov himself, in his Hakkama to his Selichos L'Kaf Sivan, writes that the fast was incumbent upon all throughout the Arba HaAratzos; implying that it was never accepted in other outlying lands. Nowadays, there are not many Jewish kehillos left in Poland or Ukraine to uphold this. Indeed, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Y" D vol. 4, 57, 11 s.v. v'lo) and Rav Yitzchak Isaac HaLevi Herzog (Shu"t Heichal Yitzchak O.C. 61, 3) [and although disagreeing in psak about the main inyan in their respective responsae] both wrote that the takana to fast on the 20th of Sivan was only observed in those lands. [27] See Netei Gavriel (ibid. ppg 297 - 299), citing the Pinkas Minhagim of Kehal Yereim of Budapest from 5706 / 1946 and the Mishnas Yaakov (O.C. 580). For example, the Belz minhag is to be very makpid with reciting the Selichos of the 20th of Sivan, including the later additions of special aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamin' recited on that day for the Harugei Kehillos T"ach [V'Ta"t] (reprinted from an old manuscript that was printed in the Shach's lifetime) as well as a more recent, albeit unfortunately similar, aleph-beis acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamin' for the Kedoshei HaShoah (Ta"sh - Tash"h). For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: [yspit@ohr.edu](mailto:yspit@ohr.edu). Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority. L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and l'chus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef umiyad! Rabbi Yehuda Spitz serves as the Sho'el U' Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim. He also writes a contemporary halacha column for the Ohr Somayach website titled "Insights Into Halacha" For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: [yspit@ohr.edu](mailto:yspit@ohr.edu). © 1995-2017 Ohr Somayach International

לע"נ

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