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ON CHUKAS - 5765

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Parah Adumah (Red Heifer)
Lecture by RAV SOLOVEITCHIK
on March 20, 1976

There are questions which arise in Sefer Bamidbar (Book of Numbers) especially the parshiot of Shlach, Korach and Chukat. Where is the continuity? What follows the section of Parah Adumah (the law of the red heifer)? Directly following parah adumah we find the rebellion causing the downfall of Moshe. Then, we find the refusal of Edom to allow Israel to pass through its borders. What is the continuity from the rebellion of Korach to parah adumah, and then from Moshe's fall to the refusal of Edom?

The law of parah adumah (burning of the all red heifer together with cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet thread, mixing the ash with running water and spreading some on a person defiled through contact with the dead--on the third and seventh day in order for him to regain his purity) is unintelligible to the human mind. The human mind is incapable of assimilating this law.

The rabbis did not try to rationalize this law, but decreed that it must be accepted without explanation, reason or motives. Man, therefore, must suspend his judgment and accept the inscrutable judgment of G-d. It is perhaps one of the only places in the entire Torah and all the mitzvoth that such a situation applies. It is said that only Moshe understood the memory of parah adumah and only because G-d told him. Even so, we may inquire as far as we are concerned. We must not ask, "Why Shabbat, why kashruth, why laws regarding sexual behavior?" We may however ask, "What does it mean to me that I may improve myself? What spiritual message is involved?"

The Rambam (Maimonides) emphasizes that every religious act should be an experience or should be experienced. It should never be just mechanical no matter how often performed. Thus, we find for example that Aaron lighted the menorah and removed the previous day's ashes for 38 years--each day with the same zeal and enthusiasm as the first time. Tefilah (prayer) is not just pronouncing words but should be felt. the same applies to every mitzvah--not just a performance of hand but of heart, such as waving the lulav or sitting in the succah. It is said that there were some who could not sleep the night before Succoth due to their enthusiasm to perform the mitzvah. Others take it, wave it, and that is all it means. Unless there is feeling, it is not a perfect mitzvah.

But, this is not the motive for G-d creating the mitzvah! What does it mean to me? It is difficult to make others feel what we feel although we can lecture about it (such as the feeling we desire during Yom Kippur). You can therefore not explain parah adumah but "what it means to me." How can you experience this chok (law) of the Torah? What is so peculiar? There is an enigma, a mystery about it.

I believe we will do well to abandon the popular approach. The Ramban says that all the sacrifices are chukim (a chok in the Torah is a law without a logical explanation as far as humans are concerned such as not eating swine's flesh, red heifer, not wearing shatnez or mixture of linen and wool), hard to understand. But how is the red heifer sacrifice different?

Let us shift from parah adumah to tumat met (defilement through contact with the dead). All other tumah (defilement) is washed away regularly. (If you touch dead creatures or nocturnal pollution, you wash yourself and clothes in water and are unclean until evening.) Tumat met (contact with human dead) calls for sprinkling with the ashes and water on the third and seventh day. The sprinkling is of utmost importance. Why does the Torah single out tumat met? The Torah warns us not to take it lightly, for if you don't sprinkle, he is not rendered clean, and if an unclean enters the holy Tabernacle or Beit Hamikdash, he is liable to excommunication. (Therefore, this portion is read before Pesach when all had to bring the paschal lamb sacrifice to the Temple.) I believe that the peculiar method is indicative of the existential metaphysical.

What is the difference between immersion for cleaning and sprinkling for cleaning? The basic difference is that immersion is accomplished by the person alone, while sprinkling must be done by another. The person who is tameh met cannot possibly sprinkle himself. The clean must sprinkle upon the unclean. Someone who is clean possesses the strength to cleanse another. But, he cannot acquire taharah (cleanliness) by himself. The tumah holds man in his clutches and will not let him go. In the haftarah this week of Ezekiel, we are told, "I'll sprinkle water on you and cleanse you from your sins." This refers to tumat chet (uncleanness of sin) and refers to the Messianic era when G-d will cleanse the people of there iniquity. T'shuvah (repentance) is equated with tumat chet and tumat met. T'shuvah needs both immersion and sprinkling. Sometimes. it is impossible for man to accomplish it alone (as in reference to Messianic cleansing), so G-d helps him by sprinkling him.

We can understand the sprinkling in tumat chet because in his sins man received some sort of satisfaction. In tumat met there was none. In tumat sheretz (uncleanness with a dead animal), we have been in contact with a decaying animal, there is fear of infection, disease--immersion is understandable. But, in contact with human death, there is more to it than merely ugliness or the experience of disease.

In the animal kingdom, the life and death of the creature is not a catastrophe. Animal life is not individual but a class. We become alarmed when a genus is on the verge of extinction, but general one dies and one replaces. It is merely an organic function. In the human being however something is suspended. There is in each living person a spiritual individuality replete with rejoicing, with remembering, with hopes, fears, likes, dislikes, imagination, emotions etc. Death of an individual destroys, shatters an entire world. A whole world dies! Gone are all the good things and the bad things. Man anticipates so many good things for himself--so many plans and hopes--but always in his mind is the scepter of death!

At the moment when one stands near the grave of a beloved one, one sees the futility of all hopes. Luckily, with time we do overcome the futile feeling. The tumah comes from the experience of worthlessness. Man loses confidence in himself. At that moment man is incapable of cleansing himself by himself. Someone else must help him regain his faith. At that moment man cannot help himself; another must help him. Man should fight death by healing and prolonging man's life, but he can never achieve immortality alone. Only G-d can achieve this for him.

How can he achieve cleansing from death? The sprinkling is placing the trust on G-d. The clean is G-d sprinkling on the unclean (man) in the future. In the interim, how should man live? Man should have faith in G-d that at some time in the future death will be defeated. One cannot free himself

from the fright of death without faith in G-d. Why is parah adumah a chok (incomprehensible law)? As death is most understandable, so is parah adumah.

Before the sedra of Chukat we read Korach and before that we read Shlach. Between the last paragraph of Korach and the following sedra in Chukat describing the death of Miriam, there is a period of thirty eight years (38 out of the 40 years in the desert.) The story of the miraglim (spies) in Sedra Shlach and the rebellion of Korach both took place during the second year following the exodus from Egypt. All the previous sedra of exodus took place in the first two years. The death of Miriam, Aaron, and Moshe occurred in the fortieth year (kahuna, priesthood, came in the second year).At Miriam's death, all had already died who were destined to die in the desert. At the time of Miriam's death, all were expressly for life. Of these intervening 38 years, we have no record, not a single word is mentioned. Thus, there is a big gap in time between Korach and Chukat. You find one single sentence in Sedra Devarim which reads after the miraglim, "V'naifen, v'na'avor derech Midbar Moav" (and we turned and we traversed the way of the Desert Moav), we retraced our steps.

Also, for 38 years G-d did not hear the voice from Kadesh Barnea to Zered. The "hand" was to destroy them from the camp. When the last Jew destined to perish in the desert had done so, G-d gave the instruction, "Advance to Israel." There was complete lack of recognition by G-d of them during the period of the death, and even Moshe was not in communication. On each night of Tisha B'av, the living males dug graves and lay in them during that period. In the morning, a Divine voice called, "Let the living separate from the dead." In all our history, only the Holocaust is similar. The people were perplexed. It is one of the most enigmatic and incomprehensible periods in man's life.

Parah adumah is the bridge between the periods (2nd year to the 40th year). What does this bridge tell us? "Man must accept G-d's will." If one has faith in G-d, salvation will come. If there was no parah adumah (which is synonymous with faith), all would have perished. During the seven days of shivah (mourning) man loses faith in himself, but it is the clean who help him bridge the gap. It is the great need for faith at this time. "Zot chukat haTorah" (this is the law of the Torah) is faith. Despite their terrible 38 years, they had faith. The same applies to Eretz Yisrael. If we have faith, we see that things are not against us but for us. That is why we need parah adumah before Pesach. Pesach is a holiday of faith.

Is the experience of bondage in Egypt the only one? Theoretically, the Messianic era should have begun then. Yet, we have had the two exiles and the long period of suffering. Why are we still slaves and the geulah (salvation) has evaded us? If we say (as we do in the Haggadah) "Hashana Avday" (this year we are slaves), how can we celebrate freedom? It is beyond human understanding. That's why we read parah adumah before Parshat Hachodesh. Because only if we have faith can we have geulah.

Why did Moshe die? He was chosen as the redeemer and he did so much for his people. His desire to enter was to fulfill the mitzvoth. However, not only was his prayer rejected but he was enjoined against prayer which is quite opposite the entire concept of t'shuvah (repentance). Is it possible to rationalize Moshe's death? It is an enigma. No matter what the reason may be (10 various reasons are listed such as hitting the rock, forgetting the people while busying himself with Miriam's death etc.), he didn't die because he was guilty (for an ordinary person it would be hardly counted a sin) but because of Bnai Yisrael. As the passage phrases it, "L'manchem (for your sake).

How were the people responsible? If the chet (sin) was hitting the rock, why were the people responsible? After all, they were thirsty! The tragedy is that of the teacher being too great for his disciples, too deep, too profound for the generation. He was great but not appreciated. Moshe died because his disciples were not worthy of him. Of course, those who followed, Yehoshua and Pinchas, received the Torah and carried out the mitzvoth; however, he was teacher par excellence of all the people, not just a few. By the time the incident of Bal Peor (sinning with the daughters of Midyan) came in the 40th year, the people had been completely under Moshe's tutelage. It was the generation which had completely grown up under him. We are not speaking of those who came out from Egypt, for they were imbued with avodah zara (idolatry). The tragedy is that the second generation, brought up completely by him "still spoke the language of their parents." That is why Moshe broke down and wept. The only time that he wept, "Ha'am bochim" (they wept--Moshe), was at Zimri ben Solu at Bal Peor. He didn't weep at the egel (golden calf), miraglim (spies) but at this time. He had brought them up, he had hoped for better things, they should have been better. It was most frustrating. He was worthy to go on living forever.

Moshe's failure to cross the Jordan changed history. Had he entered, it would have been less tragic but less great. Moshe would have conquered the promised land and the Messianic rule would have been his. He would have been greater than Mashiach. Mashiach will be great, but not as great as Moshe. (In the expressions of Maimonides we declare, "Moshe was greater of prophets from either before his time or after his time.") So, why did G-d separate Mashiach from Moshe? The answer is that the Messianic era would have begun only if the entire generation had accepted him and become his disciples. Thus, since it didn't happen, G-d denied him the crown. Some people did not acknowledge him. Thus, Jewish history took another turn! He did not cross the Jordan or receive the Messianic crown.

From: TorahWeb.org [torahweb@torahweb.org] Sent: July 07, 2005

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The incident of mai merivah is one of the most obscure narratives of the Torah. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh cites ten different positions, from Rashi to the Maasei Hashem, as to what the sin of Moshe was. Rashi (Bamidbar 20:12) explains the sin to have been Moshe's hitting the rock instead of speaking to it. The Ramban challenges Rashi by asking, if Moshe was to only speak to the rock, why was he told to take the staff? Moreover, asks the Netziv (Bamidbar 20), we are not informed as to what exactly Moshe was to say to the rock.

The Netziv then suggests that mai merivah has to be viewed from the context as to when it occurred. In his hashlama to the book of Bamidbar he postulates that the book is one of transition from the time the Jewish people entered the midbar to the time they are about to enter Eretz Yisroel. It is a book of transition from a state of l'malah min hatevah - from mon, be'air and clouds of glory, to a state of tevah, a natural world of man working the land and dependent upon rain for his water supply.

It is for this reason explains the Netziv that thirty nine years prior to mai merivah, at Massah U'merivah (Shemos 17:1-7) Hashem actually instructs Moshe to hit the rock. The mateh - staff of Moshe - personifies a miraculous existence. We recount at the Pesach seder the verse from parshas Ki Tavo (26:8) "Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand ... with signs and with wonders." The haggadah explains - "os-os, zu hamateh - 'signs' refers to the staff of Moshe". Thus, at the infancy of the Jewish nation the rapport between Hashem and the former slaves was supernatural.

Now as they are about to enter Eretz Yisroel, Hashem wants to teach them what the procedure will be in case of a drought. The mishna (Ta'anis 2:1) teaches that they would bring out the ark to the town square, and the eldest among would preach ways of inspiration. This was to be the new method, the new rapport between the nation and Hashem. Moshe, explains the Netziv, due to his anger, forgot this approach and relied upon the former proven method of hitting the rock, which is why Moshe believed he had the staff in the first place, if the new method did not succeed.

The Ohr Hachaim suggests a different approach, citing a medrash (Yalkut, parshas Chukas #764) which says that Moshe was instructed by Hashem, "Teach before it one chapter", meaning, learn Torah before the rock, and nature will respond positively on behalf of Torah. That nature is subservient to Torah, as is understood by our Chazal - "Breishis" for Israel, who are called "reishis", did Hashem create heaven and earth. The ideal harmony between nature and Israel is that nature is to serve Israel's needs. Thus the Ohr Hachaim explains that the significance of the splitting of the Red Sea was not so much the actual parting of the waters, but rater the timing of the event. He notes (Shemos 14:24) that the water split for Rav Pinchas ben Yair (Chulin 7a). He had the merit of Torah, so it is understandable that the water should divide. However, at Yam Suf they had not yet received the Torah, and still the water split! This was indeed a miracle!

While much of mai merivah is couched in mystery, one concept emerges mist clearly. The world was created to sustain the Jewish people and the study of Torah. Often we marvel at the ability of young kollel families to make ends meet. The response to that wonderment is that of the Yalkut - "sha-neh alov perek echad" - one mishna, one daf of gemorrah, one siman of Shulchan Aruch, has positive consequences beyond our national comprehension.

From: Kol Torah [koltorah@koltorah.org] Sent: June 19, 2005 To: koltorah@koltorah.org

KOL TORAH A Student Publication of the Torah Academy of Bergen County Summer Issue 11 Sivan-29 Av 5765 June 18-September 3, 2005 Vol.14 No.38

...Chukat

HOLY COW

BY RAV DANIEL FELDMAN

Keriat HaTorah, for the most part, is a rabbinical obligation. The one exception generally noted is the reading of the Parsha of Amalek before Purim (according to many explanations of the Rosh in Masechet Berachot). However, many Rishonim, such as Rashba (Berachot 13a), have included another reading as a biblical obligation: Parshat Parah, which appears originally in Parshat Chukat and is traditionally read right after Purim. This notion is also quoted in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 146 and 685).

This is a somewhat puzzling assertion, as it is unclear where exactly in the Torah we find a commandment to read Parshat Parah (see Magen Avraham, O.C. 685, and Aruch HaShulchan 685:7). Such a gaping hole has led some authorities (such as the Vilna Gaon) to maintain that the entire reference is actually a scribal error, and the reference was not to Parshat Parah but to "Parshat Purim," another name for the Parsha of Amalek that shares Parshat Parah's initials. Others, hesitant to label as error a statement found in numerous Rishonim, offer innovative theories to explain the source. (See, for example, Meshekh Chokhmah and Torat Moshe, as well as Responsa Divrei Yatziv, Orach Chaim 288).

One theory that is put forward (see Artzot HaChaim of the Malbim, Hilchot Tzitzit, and Responsa Arugat HaBosem, Orach Chaim 205) concerns those select concepts and commandments that the Torah has distinguished with an imperative of "remember" (the Zechirot). Authorities differ as to the precise count of these precepts, but they include prominently such concepts as Amalek, Shabbat, and the exodus from Egypt. And indeed these three find Halachic expression: we remember Amalek through the special Keriat HaTorah, Shabbat through Kiddush on Friday night, and the exodus through its mention twice a day in the third paragraph of Keriat Shema.

However, one concept that appears to deserve inclusion seems to lack Halachic representation. Regarding the Cheit HaEigel, the Torah commands: "Remember, do not forget, how you angered Hashem, your God, in the desert" (Devarim 9:7). If so, why does no ritual or reading commemorate the incident of the golden calf? Should there not be an implementation in Jewish practice of this obligation?

Therefore, it is suggested, perhaps this indicates a source for a biblical obligation of Parshat Parah. Chazal perceived a linkage between the Mitzvah of Parah Adumah and the sin of the golden calf. As Rashi says, "Let the mother come and clean up the soiling of the child." The adult cow symbolizes the parent, and in atoning for Cheit HaEigel, it is "cleaning up" the mess of the calf.

Within that understanding, it may be posited that the sin of the calf is indeed commemorated, albeit in an indirect manner. Rather than directly evoke the disgraceful episode of the golden calf, we chose a less embarrassing path, reading about the commandment that atones and not about the transgression that incurred guilt.

Such a reading would reflect back on the very nature of the obligation of remembering the calf. The focus is not on the sin, but rather on the path back from impurity. The Torah wishes to impress upon the psyche that even in the aftermath of egregious moral failing, the route of return remains open.

However, there were those who assumed a different theme in this commandment of remembering. Some suggest that we are told to constantly recall the instance of the calf as a cautionary measure. At the time of the sin, the Jewish people were on an extremely high level of spirituality, so close to the occasion of the giving of the Torah. At such a time, one may believe himself invulnerable to temptation or moral error, protected by a bubble of holiness. The incident of the calf must always be remembered to warn that no one is protected in that manner, and that descent to sin can happen whenever inadequate care is taken.

If that is the theme, then, it would seem that using the Parah Adumah as a reminder would be an ineffective method. It may represent atonement, but the message of spiritual vigilance would be lacking.

However, it might be suggested that even this motif is present in the Parah Adumah. We are well aware of the central paradox of this commandment. At the same moment that it confers purity upon the impure, it incurs impurity on to the purifiers. From a straight logical perspective, this is confounding: is the Red Heifer a vehicle of purity or of impurity?

It might be suggested that this is precisely where the warning of Parah Adumah lies. At times, one may feel that he is on such a high level as to be invulnerable from stumbling. This could have been the mentality of the Jews at the time of the golden calf; at such a point in history, how could they sin? We are bidden to constantly remember this incident in order to remind us that no one is absolved from the responsibility of personal vigilance.

In its own way, the Parah Adumah makes this point as well. If one is involved in a religious activity, in a rite of purification, it might be assumed that one is insulated from any spiritual failing. Yet we find that even this activity contains the elements of impurity. The message is clear: no context or activity is a spiritual guarantee; it is only through constant, careful, self-awareness that one can ensure that his behavior is actually a true expression of the Ratzon Hashem.

ONLY HUMAN

BY ARI PRUZANSKY

Parshat Chukat, the Torah relates the story of Miriam's death. Rashi raises the question of why Miriam's death is recorded next to the description of the system of Parah Adumah, the process of purification from contact with a corpse. He answers that just Parah Adumah and similar Avodot and Korbanot atone for man's sins, so too, the death of a Tzadik atones for people's sins. This Rashi seems quite strange. How can one person's death atone for another's sins? This whole idea seems to resemble the belief of the Notzrim, who say that the death of one man

atoned for all humans' sins. What is the idea here? In order to answer our question, we must first understand another question: what is atonement? Perhaps atonement is when a person is comfortable with the fact that he is human and makes mistakes. The reason why Korbanot atone for a sinner is because if he merely performed plain Teshuvah, he might never feel closure on the issue. But the final step of Teshuvah, a Korban, produces Kapparah and enables the person to move forward and progress, rather than constantly dwelling on his past Aveirot. Similarly, the concept of Mitat Tzadikim is that when a Tzadik, a most perfected and righteous person, passes away, it comforts man to think that even such a great person is a human being and that he too is subject to death. This causes the sinner to feel a certain comfort with his own imperfections and humanity, reaching a higher level of Kapparah.

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http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2004/parsha/rsob_chukas.html
[from last year]
RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY
PARAH ADUMAH AND THE PARAMETERS OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

Rashi approaches the beginning of Parshas Chukas in two apparently contradictory ways. Initially, Rashi defines chukah as a decree which has no apparent reason. After the halachik details of parah adumah have been addressed, Rashi quotes R' Moshe Hadarshan who interprets the entire mitzvah of parah adumah as an atonement for the cheit ha'eigel. The intricate details of the mitzvah correspond to all the events that occurred during the cheit ha'eigel. How should we view the parah adumah with all of its intricate halachik details? Are we supposed to look for a meaning we can grasp or view it as an absolute Divine decree which cannot be understood?

In Tehillim (119:66), Dovid Hamelech calls out to Hashem, "Tuv ta'am v'da'as lamdeini ki b'mitzvozecha he'emanti" ("teach me proper understanding because I believe in your commandments"). Dovid Hamelech requests to understand the reasons of the mitzvos, yet he stresses that he believes in their validity regardless. There are two approaches to understanding the rationale behind mitzvos. One can use the rationale as a stipulation for the fulfillment of the mitzvos. Another approach is a complete commitment to their performance, yet a striving to extract a meaningful lesson from their fulfillment. Dovid Hamelech emphasizes that he is only entitled to delve into the reasons for mitzvos after he has solidified his trust that the mitzvos are good.

Rashi is also addressing this dual approach to mitzvos. He begins the parsha by defining parah adumah as a chok – a Divine decree that must be fulfilled in all of its intricate detail . Only after the parah adumah has been prepared can one search for some significance in its myriad of halachos.

Perhaps more than any other mitzvos, it is critical that parah adumah first be accepted as a chok. Chazal saw a connection between three events – the cheit of Adam and Chava, the acceptance of the Torah, and the cheit ha'eigel. The downfall of Adam and Chava that was brought about by the eating from the Etz Ha'da'as was rectified by the acceptance of the Torah. Tragically, this accomplishment was undone by the cheit ha'eigel. Adam and Chava were tempted by the possibility that they could be like Hashem. They desired the understanding that would equate their knowledge with the knowledge of their Creator. It was the commitment of na'aseh v'nishma that counteracted that original error. The declaration of nishma following na'aseh can be understood if we define nishma to mean we will understand as shema sometimes has this meaning (see Rashi on Breishis (42:23)). Bnai Yisroel accepted to perform the mitzvos regardless of their understanding of the rationale behind them. After establishing the validity of the mitzvos as chukim, they were entitled to delve into any reasons that would make the mitzvos more meaningful to them. Na'aseh v'nishma was a declaration of the distinction between Divine and human wisdom. It was the total acceptance of Divine wisdom as fundamentally different than human insight that corrected the cheit of Adam and Chava. Whereas Adam and Chava refused to live without knowing as Hashem knows, Bnai Yisroel were willing to accept the knowledge of Hashem as being absolute, and human intellect can at best get a glimpse at the Divine scheme.

All of this changed at the cheit ha'eigel. The panic that occurred preceding the cheit ha'eigel was expressed by Bnai Yisroel, "ki zeh Moshe ha'ish asher he'e'lanu meEretz Mitzrayim lo yodanu meh haya lo" (Shemos, 32:1) - "we do not know what happened to Moshe who took us out of the land of Egypt". Rather than wait for Hashem to respond, they acted on their own lack of understanding what had happened to Moshe. They assumed that if they didn't know what his fate was, they could take action without instruction from Hashem. They had forgotten the commitment of na'aseh v'nishma - human knowledge has limitations. They had undone the process of correcting the cheit of Adam and Chava and had once again placed human understanding on par with Divine knowledge.

The only way to rectify this recurring problem was to give Bnai Yisroel a mitzvah that could only be performed by acknowledging the limits of human understanding. The parah adumah which defies human logic is the ultimate subjugation of human intellect to the Divine will. Parah adumah must be first and foremost a chok. Only after this is established can one begin to delve into its meanings. Only one who is wholeheartedly committed to na'aseh can accept nishma.

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Sent: July 07, 2005 To: rabbiwein@torah.org
Subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Chukas
www.RabbiWein.com LAST WEEK OF 50% SAVINGS & TOUR REGISTRATION http://rabbiwein.com
Jerusalem Post July 08 2005
www.rabbiwein.com/jpost-index.html
MONEY

The understanding, importance and nuances of money have been known to the Jews since earliest times. Though the rabbis of the Talmud correctly stressed that the Jews "do better" spiritually under conditions of poverty than under conditions of extreme affluence, they never promoted poverty as a way of life nor did they disrespect or condemn those who were wealthy, even though those who were extremely wealthy. The Talmud quotes a number of sages as to the duty to respect wealth and the wealthy. The rabbis however did caution that handling wealth is a tricky business and that many a person who was a fine human being when earning a living became an ogre and a tyrant when becoming very wealthy. The rabbis saw the obligation of the wealthy as being the support of the poor, the community and Torah. Those who fulfilled that obligation were deemed to be righteous and to be held in very high esteem. It is not accidental therefore that philanthropy is almost a Jewish vocation and trait. It "saves one from death" and it is one of the pillars upon which all human society rests. In most cases, the divisions in society between the rich and the poor are relative, meaning that today's poor would qualify as the wealthy perhaps seventy years ago. Nevertheless, the Torah advised us that these divisions would never completely disappear despite our efforts to equitably distribute a society's wealth amongst all of its citizens. Therefore, the

obligations of the wealthy to their society are and will always be present and demanding.

The Talmud was very sophisticated in its understanding of the "economics" of currency. Currency was never viewed as an absolute but rather as a commodity whose value fluctuated relative to other commodities. A study of the fourth and fifth chapters of Baba Metzia in the Babylonian Talmud will reveal to the student the sophistication and understanding of the halacha in dealing with all forms of monetary matters. Gold, silver, money are all treated as having relative value one to another. Because of this, investments – as opposed to straight out interest and usury – are entitled to profits and this became the basis of the famed heter iska that governs Jewish commerce in today's commercial world. This sophistication led Jews to devise modern banking methods centuries before they became common in the Western world. Checks as commercial instruments of payment were found in the famous Cairo genizah dated in the twelfth century. The Jews were adept at establishing trade outposts all along the "silk route" to China because of their ability to issue and honor letters of credit one to another. A Christian merchant in twelfth-century London was able to remark that "as long as Isaac of York has a cousin, Solomon of Jerusalem, engaged in the same trade as he, European commerce will continue to flourish." In an age when everything was paid in coinage, trade was always hampered by limited availability, by adulteration of the coins and by the logistical difficulty and danger of having to deal over long distances with this coinage. It was not until paper currency reached Europe from Asia and the ideas of letters of credit and commercial instruments were introduced that a modern mercantile system emerged. Jews were active in these developments and the international banking system pioneered by the Rothschild family served as a model for all later generations of bankers and financial institutions.

To a great extent, it was the grinding poverty of Jewish Eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that contributed to the secularization and radicalization of a substantial portion of that society. Since the traditional Jewish world offered no concrete plan to escape that yoke of poverty, child mortality and despair, millions of Jews chose emigration, radical social and political movements and assimilation as their escape routes from poverty. The fact that over a century later we can assess that most of these "solutions" to the Jewish problem were illusory and unreal does not mitigate the fact that poverty without hope is a serious detriment to the continuity and popularity of Jewish tradition and a Torah way of life. In a world of relative affluence, where everything and everyone is increasingly visible to one another, preaching poverty as a permanent way of life is a dangerous strategy. The rabbis likened poverty to death itself. That is why it is so important that our society have a viable, productive and expanding economy. This will produce not only prosperity and physical results; it will also aid in producing a stronger traditional and spiritually oriented society.

Parsha July 08, 2005
http://www.rabbiwein.com/parsha-index.html
CHUKAT http://rabbiwein.com/column-937.html

The series of tragic events that overtook Israel in the desert that have been recounted in the Torah readings of the last three weeks culminates in this week's parsha with the story of Moshe striking the rock a the waters of Meriva. Moshe too will not be able to reach the promised land of Israel. And even though the Torah seems to attribute Moshe's punishment in not being allowed to enter the Land of Israel solely to his hitting the rock instead of speaking to it as he was commanded to do by God, the commentators throughout the centuries have searched for the "real" reason that lies behind such a punishment for what is apparently so minor an offense. Maimonides attributes the punishment to Moshe's anger, which recurred many times in his career. Others attribute it to Moshe's very greatness and therefore even the slightest deviation from the level of holiness and greatness brings about consequences and his punishment. There is another reason advanced that I find most striking and intriguing. It is that if Moshe's generation did not merit entering the Land of Israel, then Moshe himself as the leader of that generation must suffer the same fate as his flock. The rabbis taught us that "there is no king without a people." The leader is held responsible for the community that one led. It would therefore appear grossly unfair that the leader – even Moshe – should enter the Land of Israel while his entire congregation dies in the desert of Sinai.

The rabbis extended this thought to include the relationship between teachers and students. If students do not merit the World to Come, then their teacher is also jeopardy of not arriving there either. Perhaps this is the rationale behind the idea of the rabbis as expressed in the Talmud in warning teachers not to teach Torah to "improper" students. If the students do not merit immortality, it is unlikely that the teacher will be held completely blameless. Therefore, the series of events that led up to the incident of the waters of Meriva - the hedonism of those who desired meat and complained about the manna, the disaster of the spies, the rebellion of Korach, all of which led to the demise of the generation of the desert, in effect also precluded Moshe from entering the Land of Israel. To a great extent, the adage of the navies of the world that the captain goes down with his ship applies here as well. It is therefore more understandable to us that Moshe's intensive prayers to G-d to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel, justifiable as his request and prayers may have been, went largely unheeded. It is the people that make the king. It is the student that makes the teacher. It is the flock that determines the fate of the shepherd. We are all caught up in the generation that we live in – in its greatness and follies, its triumphs and reverses. We must therefore strive to improve not only ourselves but our generation as well, for our fate is inextricably tied to its fate as well.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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http://www.chiefrabbi.org/
Covenant & Conversation
Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from
SIR JONATHAN SACKS
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth
[From last year]
http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html
Chukkat - Law and Narrative

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING FEATURES OF THE TORAH - and of the Judaic heritage generally - is insufficiently commented on, namely its combination of law and narrative. The Mosaic books contain both, and they gave rise to two different literatures in the rabbinic period, namely halakhah and aggadah. Halakhah represents law. Aggadah is the generic name for everything else - stories, theological reflections and interpretations of biblical narrative. The two literatures have a different feel about them. They reflect different sensibilities. Halakhah is detailed and demanding and uses sophisticated rules of jurisprudence. Aggadah is more intuitive and imaginative. One might almost call them the left and right hemispheres of the Jewish brain.

Why both? There is a famous comment of R. Yitzhak, cited by Rashi at the very opening of his commentary to the Torah:

Rabbi Yitzhak said: the Torah should have commenced with [the verse], "This month shall be to you the first of the months" [Ex. 12: 1] which is the first commandment given to Israel. Why then did it begin with the creation [of the universe]? The answer is less significant than the question which is, on of the face of it, astonishing. Rabbi Yitzhak is asking, why was it necessary for the Torah to mention the fact that G-d created the universe? He goes further. Implicit in his suggestion that the Torah should have begun with the twelfth chapter of Exodus is that the entire book of Genesis - the lives of the patriarchs and the birth of Judaism - is unnecessary. So too are the first eleven chapters of Exodus itself, with their account of the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt, the choice of Moses, the plagues and so on. How could he have said or thought such a thing? These narratives are fundamental to Jewish belief.

However, Rabbi Yitzhak's question makes good sense. Essentially he is asking, what kind of book is the Torah? To what literary genre does it belong? The word Torah in its narrowest sense means "law." If so, it should have begun with the first law, and it should contain nothing but legal material. We do not expect a textbook on torts or family law or contract to contain a history of England or the United States. If it did, we would conclude that the author was confused. Law is one thing, narrative another. Narrative answers the question "What happened?" Law answers the question, "How shall I act rightly, and what redress do I or society have if someone acts wrongly?" They do not belong in the same book. If, then, the Torah is a compendium of law, it should not contain metaphysics and history, the creation of the universe and the early story of mankind. Rabbi Yitzhak has logic on his side.

Why then does the Torah contain both? The answer goes to the heart of the Judaic enterprise. Law is not, for Judaism, a series of arbitrary rules even though it comes from G-d himself. Nor is Judaism a matter of blind obedience - obedience, yes, but blind, no. Law is rooted in history and cosmology. It reflects something other and older than the law itself. It speaks to us out of the heart of the human situation. It belongs to a total vision of the universe, the place of mankind within creation, human psychology (especially our propensity for violence and injustice), and the attempts (at first halting and unsatisfactory) to create relationships and societies based on respect for human dignity and the natural environment.

What is more, we are expected to know the story behind the law. The Torah does not seek to create a society around the naked fact of Divine command. G-d wants us to know, not only what to do, but why. He wants us not merely to obey but also to understand. In early stages of childhood, a parent insists on simple rules: Do this, don't do that. But as the child grows, he or she needs to question, challenge, probe. Successful parenthood depends on taking these enquiries seriously. The mere assertion of parental authority is not enough. Eventually one of two things will happen: either the child will rebel, or he or she will fail to develop an adult moral sense. That is why a good parent will, as the child matures, begin to explain why it is important to act this way, not that.

The Torah is G-d's book to mankind. G-d is a parent. We are his children. And G-d speaks to us as adults. He wants us to understand the logic of the law and the history of why it is necessary to have these rules not those, this particular structure of commands and constraints.

Some examples: the story of Adam and Eve in Eden is a prelude to the complex Jewish dietary laws. Even in paradise there are things one may not do. An act as rudimentary as eating must still be accompanied by some form of self-restraint. A world in which everyone did as they pleased, recognizing no limits to the gratification of desire, would not be heaven but hell.

The story of Cain and Abel explains the peculiar horror Judaism has for murder. Human beings, we are told in the first chapter of Bereishith, are created in the image of G-d. Therefore murder is an assault not just on humanity but on G-d himself. The name Hevel(the Hebrew word for Abel) means "mere breath." It is the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes. The phrase hevel havalim, hakol havel is usually translated as "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," or "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless." It actually means neither of these things. It means, "Life is fragile; a mere breath separates a living human being from a corpse." The juxtaposition of the story of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel conveys one of Judaism's most consistent themes, that vice is contagious. It spreads and grows. Disrespect for property eventually becomes an assault on persons. Adam and Eve take a fruit, Cain takes a life. That is why one cannot effectively legislate against murder without legislating against many other wrongs as well.

The story of Abraham praying for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gemorrah introduces many other themes: the need for justice, the importance of mercy and the moral requirement that we be concerned for the fate of others - even though they belong to another nation, a different culture and despite the fact that they are wicked. We already begin to hear the imperatives, "Love the stranger," "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour," and "Justice, justice shall you pursue."

One of the most striking examples is the long account of the life of Jacob who marries two sisters, loves one (Rachel) more than the other (Leah), and favours the child of the first (Joseph) more than the others. The resulting tension within the family explains the background to two later laws, one in Leviticus, the other in Deuteronomy:

Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living. If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him. The second, in particular, is almost a counter-commentary to the story of Jacob and uses language common to both ("the first sign of his father's strength" echoes Jacob's words to Reuben, his first-born son by Leah: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength," Gen. 49: 3) 4. As to why Jacob acted contrary to later biblical law, Nachmanides gives the simplest explanation. The patriarchs kept the Torah (before it was given) only in the land of Israel. The story of Jacob's two wives takes place in exile, in Laban's household.

In short, in the Torah law and narrative are intertwined for the most profound of reasons, namely that G-d's law is not arbitrary. It speaks to the human condition. It arises out of human history. G-d, said the sages, "is not a tyrant." He does not issue laws and decrees for His sake but for ours. Moreover, He wants us to understand the laws so that we can act not by rote but by educated moral instinct. The Lawgiver is also the Creator (this is what the sages meant when they said, "G-d looked into the Torah and created the world" 6). Therefore the law goes with the grain of creation. That is the ultimate answer to the question posed by Rabbi Yitzhak. Why does the Torah begin with creation? Because the Torah represents a way of life that respects the integrity of creation and the Creator, in whose image we are.

Nowhere is this set out more clearly than in the sedra of Chukkat. On the face of it, the various sections do not hang together at all. The sedra begins with the law of the Red Heifer. It derives its name from the phrase, "This is the decree of [chukkat] the Torah." Judaism traditionally saw the ritual of the Red Heifer as the supreme example of a chok, that is, a decree that has no reason or logic other than the fact that it was commanded by G-d.

The sedra then proceeds to a series of narratives set towards the end of the Israelites' forty years in the desert. First Miriam dies. Then the people rebel because there was no water (a well accompanied the Israelites on their journeys, said the sages, because of the merit of Miriam. When she died, the water ceased). Then Moses and Aaron lose their temper with the people - "Listen now you rebels." For this sin they are condemned not to enter the promised land. Aaron dies, and the people mourn. Moses too knows that his days are numbered. He will not live to cross the Jordan. He will die in sight of the land but without setting foot on it. Law and narrative seem to have no connection at all.

But they do. More than any other passage in the wilderness years, Chukkat is about mortality. We know from the story of the spies that the people who left Egypt will not be destined to enter the land. A people born in slavery (says Maimonides) cannot create a free society: that task would fall to their children, born in liberty. But what about the three great leaders, Moses, Aaron and Miriam? They were not guilty of the sin of the spies. They did not join in the people's revolt. Surely they would see the fulfillment of their mission.

It was not to be. That is the nature of mortality, an idea given its most famous expression by Rabbi Tarfon in the Mishnah: It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it. The great tasks of humanity are too large to be completed in a single generation. The kind of leadership needed to lead a people out of slavery is not the same as that needed to induct them into freedom. Nor is any of us privileged to see the full fruits of our lives and the impact we make on the next generation. There is a world that will come after us, that we will not live to see. That is the human condition - and Moses, Aaron and Miriam, for all their greatness, were human.

Nowhere else in the Torah is mortality so poignantly expressed. We feel little sympathy for Adam and Eve. They had only one command to keep and they broke it. Abraham and Isaac die in relative serenity. Jacob dies reunited with his beloved son. Joseph dies in honour, a prince of Egypt. What hurts is the death of the two brothers and their sister, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, their journey incomplete.

That is why the narrative is preceded by the law of the Red Heifer, whose entire purpose is to purify those who have come into contact with death. Indeed the whole passage exemplifies one of the axioms of Judaism that "G-d provides the cure before the disease."

The symbolism the Red Heifer is simple. The Red Heifer itself represents life in its most primal form. Firstly it is an animal - and an animal simply lives without reflecting on life. Secondly it is red, symbolizing blood, which for the Torah represents life itself. Thirdly it is an animal "on which a yoke has not yet come." Its life has not been constrained by being domesticated, used. This is life at its most vigorous and elemental.

The heifer is killed and burned and reduced to ash, in the most dramatic possible enactment of death. The ashes are mixed with those of burnt cedarwood, hyssop and crimson thread (part of the purification ritual of the metzora or "leper" also: see Lev. 14; evidently these three elements had a particular power, physical or symbolic, to absorb and thus remove impurity). They are then dissolved in "living water" to be sprinkled over the person who has been contaminated by contact with, or proximity to, a human corpse.

The phrase "living water" is an explicit metaphor. Water is the source of all life, plant, animal and human. In the desert, or more generally in the Middle East, you feel this with a peculiar vividness. Hence it became the symbol of G-d-who-is-life ("They have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water," Jeremiah 17: 13) 9. We now understand the symbolic significance of the fact that when Miriam died, the flow

of water to the Israelites ceased. As long as she was alive, there was water, i.e. life. Her death marked the beginning of the end of Moses' generation, and the sign of this was the drying up of the well that had served the people until then.

We die, but life goes on - that is the symbolic statement of the Red Heifer rite. All that lives eventually turns to dust (and in the case of the Red Heifer to ash), but life continues to flow like a never-ending stream. Significantly, the Hebrew word for "inheritance," nachalah, is related to the word for a stream or spring, nachal. Heraclitus said that "no one bathes in the same river twice." The water that was once here is gone. It has flowed into the sea, evaporated into cloud, and fallen again as rain. But the stream continues to flow in the same course, between the same banks. There is death, yes, but there is also continuity. We are never privileged to complete the task, but others will take it on and move a little closer to fulfillment. So long as there is a covenant between the dead, the living, and those not yet born, mortality is redeemed from tragedy. The dead live on in us, as we will live on in our children or in those whose lives we touched. As dust dissolves in living water, so death dissolves in the stream of life itself.

Far from being unintelligible, the law of the Red Heifer is a powerful statement about life and death, grief and consolation, the ephemeral and the eternal. And far from being disconnected with the narrative that follows, it is intimately related to it, and the two are commentaries on one another. Together they form a fugue. Before we are exposed to the death of Miriam and Aaron and the decree of death against Moses, the Torah provides us with a profound metaphysical comfort. They died, but what they lived for did not die. The water ceased, but after an interval, it returned. We are destined to mourn the death of those close to us, but eventually we reconnect with [the water of] life.

Law informs the narrative, and the narrative explains the law. We need both, just as we need the analytical left-hemisphere and the integrating right-hemisphere of the brain. And now we understand the meaning of the word that gives the sedra its name, chok, usually translated as "statute" or "decree." In actual fact, chok is a word that brings together two concepts of law. There are scientific laws, which explain the "isness" of the world, and there are moral laws which prescribe the "oughtness" of the world. The singular meaning of chok is that it brings both concepts together. There are laws we ought to keep because they honour the structure of reality.

The most significant feature of the structure of human reality is death. To be human is to be mortal. The law of the Red Heifer honours the fact of death. It does not try to deny it. Death is real; grief is inevitable; bereavement is the most painful of all human experiences. But G-d is life. G-d is to us as water is to the desert ("G-d, you are my G-d; I search for you, my soul thirsts for You, my body yearns for you, as a parched and thirsty land that has no water," Psalm 63: 2). The Red Heifer comforts us for the loss of Miriam, Aaron and Moses, and for the existence of death itself. The touch of G-d, like the sprinkled drops of the waters of purification, heals our loss and brings us back to life.

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"And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon at Har HaHor, near the border of the land of Edom, saying, 'Aharon will be gathered to his people…'" Rashi on this parsha elucidates the connection between these two pesukim. Rashi explains that it was because Bnei Yisroel attempted to become friendly with the nation of Edom that they were punished, in that they lost Aharon, one of their great leaders. HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt'l explains, that when Bnei Yisroel sent an envoy to the king of Edom, asking for permission to pass through his land, they approached him using the phrase, "So say your brothers, Bnei Yisroel." The fact that Bnei Yisroel displayed closeness with the wicked nation of Edom, as shown by their referral to Edom as a brother, was viewed as a mistake which Bnei Yisroel would have to be disciplined for. Their punishment was the loss of Aharon HaKohen, and all the miracles that Bnei Yisroel had merited on his behalf.

However, there is a question on this Rashi. Elsewhere, the Torah admonishes us not to detest the nation of Edom, as they are our brothers. How then could Bnei Yisroel be found at fault for expressing a relationship with Edom?

Rav Yaakov answers that obviously the Torah recognizes the biological connection that we have with Edom, and it was for this reason that we are commanded not to despise them. However, it is nevertheless forbidden for any Jew to feel any familial relationship or brotherhood with them, as they are complete reshaim. While we still may not hate them, as the Torah has commanded us not to, we nonetheless may not recognize any unique connection with them. The trouble with Bnei Yisroel's actions in the midbar, was that they related to Edom as close relatives, without the detachment that the Torah requires.

Rav Yaakov continues by pointing out why it was necessary for Bnei Yisroel to approach Edom in the first place. Obviously, Bnei Yisroel had no expectations of a warm reception, nor would they receive permission to pass through Edom's land, so why did they even bother asking? Rav Yaakov explains that this charade was necessary in order to be able to conquer the lands of Sichon and Og later on. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisroel to be able to overpower these lands, as part of the mitzvah of conquering Eretz Yisroel, and keep them as part of their territory. However, after seeing the miracles that were performed for Bnei Yisroel in Mitzrayim, no nation would have dared to start up with Bnei Yisroel. Sichon and Og would have let Bnei Yisroel pass through their lands without a fight. Therefore, Hashem had Bnei Yisroel approach Edom, and then back away, as if to show the world that Bnei Yisroel were weak, and could not fight a war. As such, when Bnei Yisroel requested permission to pass through the land of Sichon, he responded by coming out to wage war with this supposedly weakened nation. Bnei Yisroel fought back, and were able to conquer the lands that Hashem wished them to have as an inheritance .

From: RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM PARSHA COLUMN [Shabbat_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il] on behalf of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column [parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, July 06, 2005 4:26 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Hukat by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Hukat (Numbers 20:1-22:1) By Shlomo Riskin "TORAH LIGHTS" WEBCAST VIDEO Rabbi Riskin's insights on the Parsha</> now live online @ www.ots.org.il

Efrat, Israel -

"From Ashes to Ashes…", From Berlin to Jerusalem and Back Again.

One of the most profound mysteries of the Bible is the rite of the red cow, called a hok (Hebrew for statute) because it is an illogical Divine decree, concerning which we may not even speculate in an attempt to understand it (Numbers 19:1, Rachi ad loc).

Detailed in the first twenty- two verses of our Torah reading, the ceremony certainly sounds strange to the modern ear: a completely red cow, without blemish and upon which no yoke has been brought, shall be entirely slaughtered outside of the encampment of Israel; cedarwood, hyssop and a scarlet thread shall be cast into the burning pyre of ashes, and a "personage of purity" (Ish Tahor) shall gather the ashes in a sacred place, mix them with spring water (mayim chayim), waters of life, and use the mixture to purify those who have been contaminated by contact with a corpse. What can we possibly make of such a primitive sounding ritual?

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/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/herself! Only in this rite of the red cow does the Kohen, representing G-d Himself, effectuate the purification. It is as though the Bible is teaching us that we can save ourselves from many of our weaknesses, we can rise above many of our temptations, but only G-d can ultimately redeem us from death.

And from this perspective, the symbolism of the red cow ritual begins to make sense. A cow is the consummate symbol of life, 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- nevertheless 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. The "personage of purity" then 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.

This symbolism of the red cow has assumed new significance for me since my recent trip to Frankfurt and Berlin. Ohr Torah Stone's Joseph Straus

Rabbinical Seminary has sent close to two hundred rabbis and their families to communities throughout the world, from Caesarea to Curacao to Guatemala City to Johannesburg to Lincoln Center- with six of our graduates presently in Germany. This past week we sponsored two inspirational events- replete with cantorial music and messages of Torah- one in Frankfurt and one in Berlin. While in Berlin, I took advantage of the opportunity to visit their newly completed Holocaust Memorial at the very center of the city, not far from the last bunker from which the mad fuhrer committed suicide. The open air memorial consists of 2,711 stones, monuments of various shapes and sizes. Walking amongst the narrow, massive slabs of stone, one becomes lost within a giant cemetery, feeling helplessly and hopelessly minute and insignificant within a maze of monuments whose eerie, death- imbedded caskets seem to have overtaken world and life; one then descends into a netherworld of hell, where pictures and life stories of Holocaust victims evoke live experiences, and potentials which were, which could have become, but which were cruelly and inexplicably torn asunder from the tree of life by monstrous and sub human hands.

I stumbled away from the experience feeling as though I had just awakened from a horrific nightmare. The symbolism of the monuments continues to haunt me days after I returned to Efrat; after all, those who lost loved ones in the Holocaust don't even have grave site 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 humaneness.

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.

And we won that war. Alas, the brilliantly alive red cow which was the Jewish people, a people who nurtured the world with the milk of the 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 G-d, 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 re-created sovereign State of Israel. And the "Personage of Purity" Himself mixed the ashes with the life-giving well springs of Torah, our tree of eternal life, and revived Torah centers and Daf Yomi Talmud study groups to an unprecedented and unparalleled degree all over the world. Take note: there are 2,711 monument stones in the Memorial, and, as pointed out by Rav Moshe Kotlarsky of Chabad, there are 2,711 folio pages in the Babylonian Talmud! Adolf Hitler is thankfully dead, and discovered alongside of his self-inflicted suicide-tomb was a Tractate Pesahim which tells of the Passover Festival of Jewish freedom and redemption; he apparently had hoped to bury the last Talmud tome in existence, but instead the Talmud tome buried him! Indeed, 2,711 pages of the Talmud have literally walked out of the 2,711 monument stones, and have granted to the Jewish victims the eternal life of Jewish victors!

The Bible promised us 4000 years ago that despite exile, persecution and death, G-d would sprinkle upon us His revivifying waters of purity and rebirth, and would restore us to our land, our law and our lore. And so, "from Zion is coming forth Torah" to the world at large with the scores of rabbis and educators we're sending all over the globe every year. Judaism is re-awakening even in the failed fuhrer's own home city of Berlin, where three new Yeshivot (Torah Study Academies) have been dedicated during the past several years. Imagine the historical irony in the fact that the only two growing Jewish communities in the world today are Israel and Germany!

We learn from the rite of the red cow that only G-d, the Personage of Purity, can redeem from death; and in our post-Holocaust generation, He certainly has. There ought be a final glorious exhibit in the Holocaust Memorial which features pulsating present day- religious Jewish life in Germany, as well as a magnificent tribute to the State of Israel reborn.

"Thus says the Lord your G-d….I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the Land of Israel…And I shall put My spirit in you and you shall live and I shall place you in your land". (Ezekiel 37:13,14)

Shabbat Shalom

From: office@etzion.org.il on behalf of Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: Wednesday, July 06, 2005 5:54 PM To: yhe-parsha@etzion.org.il Subject: PARSHA65 -39: Parashat Chukat

Yeshivat Har Etzion Yisrael Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Parashat Hashavua

This parasha series is dedicated in memory of Michael Jotkowitz, z"l.

http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha65/39-65chukat.htm PARASHAT CHUKAT

Dedicated in honor of the upcoming marriage of Jackie Siegel (Silver Spring) and Bruria Neuburger (Teaneck) by parents Yitzchok and Barbie Lehmann Siegel and sister Russie.

Julie and David Fine in memory of Chemda bat Sara, z"l and Ziesel Rivkah bat Gitel Maryam, z"l

Dedicated in memory of Zvi ben Moishe Reinitz, whose yahrzeit will fall this Shabbat, Bet Tammuz. From those who remember him.

The VBM wishes a warm mazal tov to Malka and Aharon Simkovich on the birth of a son! Yehi ratzon she-tizku legadlo le-Torah, le-chuppa u-le-ma'asim tovim. Mazal tov also to the proud grandparents, Rabbi Moshe and Laurie Simkovich and Dr. Allen and Naomi Zeiger. May you always have much nachas!

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SECOND GENERATION

BY RAV YAIR KAHN

The Israelites arrived, the entire congregation, at the wilderness of Zin in the first month [of the fortieth year] ... (Bemidbar 20:1)

Rashi: "The entire congregation" means the congregation that was complete, for [the generation of the exodus] had died in the desert, and these had remained alive.

Here we are finally introduced to the second generation, who will succeed where their predecessors had failed. In a previous shiur, we noted the midrash which defines Sefer Bemidbar as the book that distinguishes between light and dark, i.e. between the first generation, who failed in their mission, and the second generation, who succeeded. Therefore, we would expect the difference between these two generations to be as clear as night and day.

However, even a glance at our parasha leads to the troubling conclusion that nothing seems to have changed. The same mistakes made by the first generation seem to be repeated by their successors. When we read the passages where Benei Yisrael complain about food and water, we are struck with the strange sensation of deja-vu. The recurrent theme of the first generation "why did you take us out of Egypt" is repeated by their children (Bemidbar 20:5 and 21:5). Are we to conclude from this that there really is no significant difference between the two generations? Is the only difference rooted in one isolated incident that wasn't repeated by the second generation? In order to resolve this issue, we must take a closer and more critical look at those events which appear to be mere repetitions.

Let us first examine the complaint regarding the "manna."

They set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to skirt the land of Edom. But the people grew restive on the journey, and the people spoke against G-d and against Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food." (Bemidbar 21:4-5)

The comparable complaint of the first generation is recorded in Parashat Baha'alotekha. The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and

garlic. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!" (Bemidbar 11:4- 6) In their first complaint about the manna, Benei Yisrael reminisce about the wonderful menu they had enjoyed while subject to Egyptian bondage. This is certainly a strange and ungrateful reaction, highlighted by the striking term "chinam" - for free. Even if we were to accept that the Egyptian slavemasters treated their Hebrew slaves to culinary delicacies, we can hardly be impressed by their generosity. Benei Yisrael paid dearly for their meals with blood, sweat and tears. In contrast, how much did G-d charge for the manna that fell daily from the heavens? Our sages, of course, noted the absurdity of this argument. Rashi quotes a Sifrei (Beha'alotekha, 29) which offers an insightful interpretation.

"We remember the fish" - Did they indeed receive fish for free? Does it not say, "Go and work, and straw will not be given to you" - if they would not give them even straw, would they give them fish? What, then, do they mean by "free?" [They mean} free from mitzvot. According to this explanation, Benei Yisrael's complaint revolved around the requirement to abide by the divine commandments imposed upon them. They reminisced about the unfettered life they led in Egypt, before being bound by the divine imperative. The food they received in Egypt was not dependent upon halakhic behavior. Manna, in contrast, demanded restraint and acceptance of the halakhic norm. Only a specific amount could be taken, and only on certain days. All that was taken had to be finished within the time allotted by the law. Let us try to uncover what lies at the root of this complaint. In Beha'alotekha, Benei Yisrael have only recently been freed from bondage. However, the transition from slavery to freedom is complex and requires more than nullifying the possession of the slave- owner. After all, the distinction between a free person and a slave is not merely an economic one, but an existential one as well. A free man shoulders responsibility, while a slave is totally dependent upon others. His life functions are controlled by his master. He makes no choices for himself, and looks upon others to support him. He is not tormented by the consequences of his decisions, because he does not decide. Although in a state of bondage, he is free from the worries that are inherent to the responsibilities of independence.

Our Sages had profound insight into the depths of human character and boldly proclaimed, "Avda be-hefkeira nicha lei" - a slave, from his limited perspective, prefers the lack of commitment which is typical of bondage (Gittin 13a). In fact, the Torah informs us that under certain circumstances a person is apt to choose a life of slavery over freedom.

But if the slave declares, "I love my master, and my wife and children: I do not wish to be free"... (Shemot 21:5)

However, in such a case, the law requires that the ear of the slaved be pierced. According to our Rabbis, this indicates that the decision to remain in slavery runs counter to the message, transmitted both in Egypt and at Sinai, of commitment to God.

"Then his master shall bring him ... to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever." (Shemot 21:6)

Rashi (quoting Kiddushin 22b): Why is it more appropriate to pierce [the slave's] ear, rather than any other part of his body? Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said ... The ear which heard at Sinai, "For to Me are Benei Yisrael slaves," and then went and acquired an owner for himself - let it be pierced! Rabbi Shimon expounded this verse beautifully: In what way are the door and the doorpost different than all other utensils in the house? G-d said: The door and the doorpost were witness in Egypt when I passed over [the houses of the Jews] and said, "For to Me are Benei Yisrael slaves; they are My slaves" - and not slaves to slaves; yet nevertheless this person went out and acquired a master for himself - let him be pierced before them!

In Judaism, religious commitment requires existential freedom. Although man must surrender his will unconditionally to G-d and accept absolutely the divine imperative, G-d is not interested in obedience that enslaves man existentially, but rather in commitment that uplifts man spiritually.

"And the writing was the writing of God, engraved (charut) upon the tablets" - Do not read "engraved" (charut) but rather "free" (cherut), for no one is truly free except he who engages in Torah study. (Avot 6:2)

Man must be able to freely accept upon himself the halakhic norm along with the yoke of Heaven. He must be capable of exercising "free will" - the ability to choose between good and evil, between life and death. He must be willing to shoulder responsibility for those decisions. Free man redeems himself by choosing life. In sharp contrast, the slave prefers to free himself of responsibility; however, he enslaves himself existentially. He accepts orders and acts accordingly so as not to be fettered by responsibility and tormented by decisions.

Although freed from Egyptian bondage, Benei Yisrael had not as of yet been weaned from a slave mentality. Despite receiving the Torah and boldly proclaiming, "Naaseh Ve-nishma" - "We shall do and we shall hear," the transition from bondage to freedom had not been completed. Therefore the people complained about the manna, which demanded the high price of spiritual responsibility and commitment. They reminisced about the uncommitted life of slavery typical of Egypt.

In discussing the episode of the spies, we noted that the decree was due in part to the nation's immaturity. They lacked the security and composure necessary to conquer Canaan. The "telunot" (complaints) reflected a character flaw of a people unwilling to assume the responsibility required to realize Jewish destiny. According to our analysis of the complaint regarding the manna, this deficiency can already be detected at the beginning of the journey from Sinai.

Based on this, we can explain the opinion (Shabbat 116a) that the parasha of "Vayehi bi-nesoa" was introduced in order to separate the negative events which precede the parasha (i.e. childishly escaping Sinai), from those which are recounted afterwards (the complaints at the beginning of the journey beginning with manna). Following the parasha of "Vayihi bi-nesoa," we noted a steady decline which continues through Korach. There is no attempt at downplaying the impression of deterioration. Why then was it necessary to insert "vayihi bi-nesoa" to separate specifically between these two iniquities. It appears that the separation was introduced in order to distinguish between inherently incommensurate events. The sense of relief when leaving Sinai is unrelated to the process of decline which led up to the sin of the spies. It is merely a human reaction to the intensity and profound spiritual tension of "matan Torah." On the other hand, the decree condemning the first generation to death in the wilderness is inherently connected to the "telunot" at the onset of the journey. There is a link between the complaint regarding the manna and the sin of the spies. Both reflect a basic character flaw typical of a nation raised in bondage.

We are now ready to examine our parasha:

They set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to skirt the land of Edom. But the people grew restive on the journey and the people spoke against G-d and against Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food." (Bemidbar 21:4-6)

Once again it seems that the people, like their parents, complain about the exodus from Egypt. However, upon closer analysis, we notice something odd about this complaint. Why do the people speak of dying in the wilderness? Although they are tired of eating manna for forty years, monotony is not usually fatal. Furthermore, why do they continue to complain about water? We read in the previous chapter that the well was restored.

It seems clear that the people are not reminiscing about Egypt, but rather expressing their frustration at not immediately entering Eretz Yisrael. In order to avoid Edom, they are directed back towards Yam Suf, instead of turning towards Canaan. They are fed up with wilderness and its manna, and challenge Moshe: Were we taken out of Egypt in order to perish in the wilderness!? Wasn't the purpose of the exodus to inherit Eretz Yisrael, a land of wheat fields and running water? They are impatient, not hesitant; they are brimming with confidence, not incapacitated by fear.

We find a parallel distinction regarding the water complaint. The first generation argues that they should never have been taken out of Egypt and placed in a life- threatening situation in the wilderness.

"Why did you bring us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" (Shemot 17:3)

The argument of the second generation runs in the opposite direction, towards Eretz Yisrael, not back to Egypt.

The people quarreled with Moshe, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the Lord's congregation into this wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? 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!" (Bemidbar 20:3-5)

With the death of Miriam, the well is no longer available to the people. They find themselves in the wilderness with no source of water. They are dying of thirst and begin to complain about the wilderness. Surprisingly, they do not complain immediately about their thirst; first they point to the lack of wheat and figs, pomegranates and dates, and as an afterthought they also mention the lack of water. This bizarre argument leaves no room for doubt about their true intentions. We all know what figs, dates and pomegranates refer to, and it is obvious what was foremost on their minds. In spite of the lack of water, they complain about still being in this horrible wilderness. After forty years, it's time to enter Eretz Yisrael.

In conclusion, the generation taken out of bondage was not able to fully free itself from the mindset characteristic of slaves. After the exodus, they view G-d as a divine slavemaster who has to care for their every need. Unwilling to assume personal responsibility, they complain every time their needs are not provided for. This trait expresses itself in the events which immediately follow the exodus, such as the complaint regarding the lack of water. However, even after receiving the Torah and commencing on the march towards Eretz Yisrael, they continue to complain, longing for the simple, uncomplicated and uncommitted life of Egypt. The

climax is finally reached at the sin of the spies, when the fateful decree was issued. However, we can trace the roots of this decree to Masa and Meriva, when the nation redeemed from Egypt complained about the lack of water.

This connection is expressed in a well known message from Tehillim recited every Friday evening.

Do not harden your hearts as in Meriva, as in the day of Masa in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, even though they saw My deeds. Forty years long did I loathe this generation and I said, It is a people that errs in their heart, and that do not know My ways; whereupon I swore in My wrath that they should not enter into My resting-place. (Tehillim 95:8-11)

A careful reading of parashat Chukat reveals the metamorphosis of Keneset Yisrael. They are confident - not insecure, impatient - not hesitant. They find themselves in similar situations as their parents, however, the subtleties that separate their respective responses distinguish night from day.

"And G-d distinguished between the light and the darkness" - This alludes to Sefer Bemidbar, which distinguishes between [the generation that] left Egypt and those who entered the Land. (Bereishit Rabba 3:5)

From: kby-parsha-owner@kby.org on behalf of Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org] Sent: July 07, 2005 To: Parsha KBY Subject: Parshat Chukat

"THIS IS THE DECREE OF THE TORAH"

ROSH HAYESHIVA RAV MORDECHAI GREENBERG SHLITA

"This is the chukah of the Torah" (Bamidbar 19:2), Onkelos translates as: "This is the gezeirah (decree) of the Torah."

The Shibolei Haleket writes about what happened in his time on Fri., Erev Shabbat Parshat Chukat, when twenty-four wagons full of Talmud scrolls were burned in France. The rabbis of the time posed the question whether this was a Divine decree, and the response in a dream was, "This is the decree of the Torah." I.e., the day of this parsha caused this decree against the Torah. From that day on, individuals accepted upon themselves to fast each and every year on the Fri. of Parshat Chukat.

This is cited in the Magen Avraham (O.C. 480:9) and also in the Mishna Berura (480:16)

The Maharam of Rothenburg wrote about this terrible tragedy the famous kina (recited on Tisha B'Av), "Sha'ali serufah ba'esh." Some linked the burning of the Talmud books to the fact that in France they belittled the honor of the Rambam in the Maimonidian controversy. In the place that the works of the Rambam were burned, there also the books of the Talmud were burned. It is said that R. Yona wrote his sefer, Sha'arei Teshuva, as a means of compensation for the burning of the Rambam's works.

R. Moshe Chaim Luzzato writes in a letter to his mentor, R. Yeshayahu Basan, about another decree that was in Italy a few hundred years after the decree in France. He also links this decree to the words of the Targum, "This is the decree of the Torah." He writes that in these places there were big persecutions because people did not sufficiently dedicate themselves to learning Torah, but followed the pleasures of the world.

The Shach similarly writes in his work, "Megillat Eiphah," in his kinah about the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648, that on Fri., 4 Tammuz, two great communities 60 miles apart were destroyed. This is what the pasuk alludes to in the parsha, "The [serpents] bit the people, and many people of Israel died." (Bamidbar 21:6)

There were other incidents that caused the writers of the time to write that this day, the Fri. of Parshat Chukat, is of bad omen. The Chasam Sofer writes in his sermons that perhaps this is the allusion of the pasuk, "Let them take to you a red heifer," on which the Midrash comments, "To you I reveal the reason of the heifer." He writes about this: "See Magen Avraham (480:9) that this is a language of decree and sorrow. It would appear that to Moshe Rabbeinu there was sorrow, since G-d revealed him the secret, and, as it says, 'To you I reveal it, and to others it is a decree.' [Moshe] would have preferred not to know, than to know and not reveal to others."

About a hundred years ago, a kinah was publicized in Vienna about the destruction of the Krems community:

חוק יום, זה לזה שמורה.
בשישי לזאת חוקת התורה.
זכותן קדושים אלה כשריפת הפרה.
זכותם לנו לנצח תהא זכורה.

This decree, for this day reserved, On Fri., of "Zot chukat Hatorah." The merit of these saintly is like the burning of the heifer; Their merit should forever be remembered to us.

Therefore, the custom was to fast on these days. The poskim even dealt with the question of whether to complete the fast when it falls on Erev Shabbat.

The Minchat Yitzchak explains the Targum in an entirely different direction, based on the words of the Kli Yakar in explaining Rashi's comment, "It [the red heifer] is always called on your [Moshe's] name." Chazal say that the heifer atones for the sin of the golden calf. Just as Moshe began the atonement with the burning of the calf and grinding it until thin as dust, so, too, the completion of the atonement is with the burning of the heifer. Therefore, the conclusion is called after him, since is mitzvah is credited to the one who completes it. The beginning of the atonement was with the breaking of the Tablets, about which G-d said, "Yishar Koach that you broke [them]." This is what the Targum alludes to: This – i.e., this heifer – is the completion of the beginning of the decree of the Torah, of the breaking of the Tablets.