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BS"D

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHUKAS - 5781

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subject: Why don't we always appreciate G-d's kindness?  
Chukat

**Why don't we always appreciate G-d's kindness?**  
**Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon**

Moses struck a rock twice and water issued forth. Once in Parshat Beshalach and again in Parshat Chukat. In Parshat Beshalach G-d desired a physical strike – even commanded it. In Parshat Chukat, though, G-d didn't want the latter but rather that Moses speak to the rock (according to Rashi). If the miracle in Parshat Beshalach was effected via striking the rock, why 40 years later, here, in Parshat Chukat, was the miracle not to be carried out in the same way?

Though we can answer this in a number of ways, let us adopt one approach. Since the miracle of striking the rock had already occurred & was well known, its repetition, despite the passage of 40 years, would not have had such a great impact. Thus there was a need for a different miracle.

This principle I learned from the Meshech Chochmah in a different context – that of Splitting the Reed Sea. The Midrash says that in the future G-d will perform more miracles for Israel in the World to Come than He did at the Splitting of the Reed Sea. The Meshech Chochmah is puzzled – were the latter miracles insufficient? He answers that after the Israelites had seen these miracles, there was a need for greater miracles to arouse their wonder. He gives the example of the telegraph, explaining that once people became accustomed to it, they weren't all that impressed with the telephone which followed it.

The Mechilta at the end of Chapter 11 comments on (HaShem) does wonders. He did wonders for the fathers and in the future will do so for the children, as it says "As in the days of your coming out of the land of Egypt, I will show him wondrous deeds." (Micah 7:15) – I will show him what I did not show the fathers. A wonder – a miracle- means something which boggles the mind, which a person cannot credit until he sees it with his own eyes. Thus

with the invention of the telegraph – it amazed the beholders' imagination. It was indeed a wonder. Afterwards, with the invention of the telephone, which required far greater expertise, people were not as amazed as they had been with the telegraph.

So, with the miracle of the Sea Splitting and the wonders of the Manna and the Slav, everyone was amazed. The Navi now says that since the splitting of the Sea and the Manna were already known as the fathers had them, in the future G-d will do things which will awe the children anew. Then the Sea splitting and the Manna will be like the natural order. Thus afterwards there will be no comparison between what the fathers saw with what the children will see. From my grandfather Harav Chananya Zt"l.

And so too in our Parasha. The miracle of bringing forth water by striking the rock was indeed most impressive, but after the Children of Israel saw this miracle, they were not so amazed when it repeated itself again. So there was a need for a greater miracle – one of speech.

We experience so many miracles, so much Divine goodness in so many things, we often fail to appreciate the enormity of the salvation which G-d brings us, all the time. Occasionally we need to go back and observe, to feel all of G-d's kindness "For Your wonders and favors are with us in every season" and from observing G-d's kindness, we will always remember "It is good to thank G-d".

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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

**For the Love of Torah**

"This is the Torah (the teaching) regarding a man who dies in a tent..." (Chukas 19:14). Chazal (Brachos 63b) interpret this posuk homiletically to mean that words of Torah make a lasting impression only on one who figuratively "kills" himself in the tent of study. The Taz (Orach Chaim 46:1) explains that this refers to someone who exerts much effort and toil (ameilus) to understand the depths of Torah. At first glance, this statement of Chazal seems puzzling. Studying Torah with extraordinary ameilus is certainly praiseworthy. But why should investing effort to understand the Torah automatically lead to a better retention of the Torah that is studied? The Mishna (Avos 6:1) states, "Reb Meir says that one who engages in the study of Torah for its own sake (lishma) merits many things." The first of these is that he is called a rei'ah ahuv (beloved friend) of Hashem and the Torah. What does it mean to be a "beloved friend"? Reb Chaim of Volozhin (Ruach Chaim, ibid) suggests that there are two types of friendships. Some friendships are formed out of selfish considerations. A person might want to benefit from another's wealth, services, or position of prominence, or he might simply want to feel the honor of being the friend of such a distinguished individual. Such a friendship is not deeply rooted and sincere; it is superficial and utilitarian, and will last only as long as it remains beneficial for the parties involved. About such a relationship Shlomo HaMelech warns, "Do not frequent your friend's home too often lest he become satiated with you and he will hate you" (Mishlei 25:17). When a friendship is pursued for the sake of convenience, there is always the concern that the other individual might feel that he is being taken advantage of, and the relationship might sour. Maintaining a healthy distance is key to preserving such a relationship.

But there is a second type of friendship, and that is one which is based on mutual respect and admiration. Such a relationship is enduring because it is motivated not by selfish concerns but by an appreciation of the character and the inherent qualities of the other person. Friends of this type enjoy each other's company and the more time they spend together the stronger the bonds between them become. This is what Reb Meir refers to as a "beloved friend". When someone appreciates the value of his friend and he cherishes

their relationship for its own sake, he becomes beloved in the eyes of his friend, and the friend will reciprocate that love in return.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin explains that this is why a chosson and kallah are referred to as reiyim ahuvim (beloved friends) because the ideal marriage relationship is one in which the husband and wife are not looking to advance their own interests, but rather are willing to sacrifice of themselves for the benefit of the other. Such a relationship which is based on mutual respect and selflessness will only strengthen over time and will make each person more beloved in the eyes of the other. Similarly, one who engages in Torah study not to receive honor or to make a living, but rather for the sake of the Torah itself is called a "beloved friend" of the Torah and of Hashem because through his learning he demonstrates his unconditional love for the Torah, and in return the Torah and Hashem love him as well.

Perhaps this is the deeper meaning behind the statement of Chazal that words of Torah make a lasting impression only if one "kills" himself in studying them. The more effort a person invests in Torah study and the more he is willing to sacrifice in order to learn Torah, the more he demonstrates his love for the Torah, and that emotional bond which he develops with the Torah will cause him to remember the Torah that he studied. Moreover, when a person shows his love for the Torah, the Torah and Hashem reciprocate that love, and the individual is blessed with extra special powers of retention. As Chazal comment (Eiruvin 54a) on a later posuk in Parshas Chukas (21:18) "And a gift from the desert" - one who makes himself ownerless (hefker) like a desert...will remember his Torah." One who sacrifices his own needs and selflessly pursues the study of Torah receives an extra gift of Torah. He is blessed with additional siyata dishmaya (divine assistance), and that enables him to retain his Torah more easily.

Hard work and effort are necessary prerequisites to acquire any type of knowledge. But when it comes to the study of Torah these ingredients pay extra dividends.

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date: Jun 17, 2021, 7:39 PM

subject: Rav Frand - The Power of One to Purify the Many  
Parshas Chukas

The Power of One to Purify the Many

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1167 - "If Hashem Saves Me, I Make A Neder to..." Good Idea or Not? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Chukas begins with the laws of Tumas Mes, where we learn that if a person comes in contact with a dead body (or is merely under the same roof as a dead body) he is given the status of a 'Tameh Mes' and the only way for him to become tahor (pure) is for him to be sprinkled with the water of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer) on day three and day seven of a seven-day procedure.

The pasuk reads, "And the pure one shall sprinkle on the impure one on the third day and on the seventh day, and he shall purify him on the seventh day; then he shall immerse his clothing and immerse his flesh in water and be pure in the evening. [Bamidbar 19:19]. There is an interesting passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud) which certainly requires further exposition. Rav Yehoshua ben Kafsai said "My whole life I read this pasuk 'the pure one shall sprinkle on the impure one...' and I assumed that a single tahor individual needed to sprinkle the Parah Adumah water on a single impure individual." Rav Yehoshua ben Kafsai then says, "This was the case until I learned otherwise from 'Oztrosha shel Yavneh' (literally - the

storehouse of Yavneh) that a single tahor individual can even sprinkle on many tameh individuals."

The question is, what does it mean he learned this law from the "Otzros of Yavneh"? What does the Talmud Yerushalmi mean by the term storehouse of Yavneh? Rav Meir Shaprio, the Lubliner Rav and the founder of the Daf Yomi concept, was also a powerful orator. He presents a homiletic exposition to this passage of the Talmud Yerushalmi.

What happened in Yavneh? At the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai met Vespasian, the Roman General who later became Emperor of the Roman Empire. Vespasian granted Rav Yochanon ben Zakkai three wishes. One of the three things Rav Yochanon ben Zakkai asked for was "Yavneh and her Sages." Yavneh was a city on the Mediterranean Coast of Eretz Yisrael. It had a Yeshiva. Rav Yochanon pleaded that this Yeshiva be spared so that despite the great Destruction that was coming to the Temple and the Jewish population in Jerusalem and other parts of the country, he would have a few remaining Talmidei Chachomim who would preserve Torah and Judaism for future generations.

The Talmud (Gittin 56b) suggests that Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai may have made a mistake. Perhaps one of his requests of Vespasian should have been to spare the Beis HaMikdash. Be that as it may, Rav Meir Shapiro suggests that the Yerushalmi, in referring to the "Otzros of Yavneh," was indeed referring to the lesson learned from the Yeshiva of Rabbi Yochanon ben Zakkai in Yavneh!

The Torah that we learn here today, and the fact that there are still people who learn Torah throughout the Jewish world, is the result of the few Talmidei Chachomim left in Yavneh after the Churban HaBayis who literally saved the world of Torah. Had they been wiped out, Torah would have been forgotten.

So, what do we see from the "Otzros of Yavneh"? Rav Yehoshua ben Kafsai was saying, "I see from Yavneh the power of one individual. One person—and certainly a few good people—can make a difference, can save the world! I always thought that one tahor person can sprinkle on one other tameh person and have a one-on-one affect. But from Yavneh I see that one tahor person can affect hundreds of people."

We have seen in our lifetime individuals who have revolutionized the world. It is his homiletic insight, so we can cite him as an example. Consider Rav Meir Shapiro himself. It is mind-boggling to think of the zechus Rav Meir Shapiro has for coming up with Daf Yomi—now in their 14th cycle of daily Talmud study, completing Talmud Bavli once every seven-and-a-half years by synchronized study of a Daf a Day! Thousands and thousands of people worldwide learn Daf Yomi. Rav Meir Shapiro did not live 2,000 years ago or even 200 years ago. He lived in the 20th century. He came up with an idea that revolutionized the world. There are people like that.

There are others as well—Rav Aaron Kotler, the Vilna Gaon, the Ramban and the Rambam—people that revolutionized the Torah world. But even people like us can make a difference. One person can make a difference. For example—this is not a plug, but it comes to mind—The Ner Israel Rabbinical College, which many in my audience had the zechus to attend, started in 1933 with four students. Those four boys came to a nothing of a Yeshiva—it hardly even existed. But because four people came, it came into existence. Those four people who 'took the plunge' in 1933 can take at least partial credit for all the thousands of people who have passed through the portals of Ner Israel in all the subsequent decades of its flourishing development. They made a difference. This is what the Gemara means when Rav Yehoshua ben Kafsai says, "This I learned from the 'Otzros of Yavneh'." This is why one pure person can effectively purify many tameh individuals.

The Ultimate Battle Between the Sechel and the Lev

The pasuk in this week's Parsha says, "The Canaanite, king of Arad, who dwelled in the south, heard that Israel had come by the route of the spies, and he warred against Israel and captured a captive from it." [Bamidbar 21:1]. So, who is this? There is a very interesting Rashi here. He explains that this

Canaanite nation who lived just south of the southern border of Eretz Yisrael who attacks Klal Yisrael is actually none other than our old nemesis Amalek, because it says about Amalek [Bamidbar 13:29] that they dwell in the land of the South.

If this nation is Amalek, what does our pasuk mean when it calls its leader “the Canaanite”? He is not a Canaanite but is an Amaleki? Rashi explains: They disguised their language to speak the Canaanite language (rather than the Amalekite language) in order to trick the Jews. The plan was to mislead Bnei Yisrael to pray to Hashem “to deliver this Canaanite nation into our hands” when in fact they were not Canaanites! Their strategy was to deflect the prayers of the Jews by having them pray for the wrong thing!

Rashi, however, notes that there was a major flaw in their “battle plan”. The Jews noticed that they were dressed like Amalekites, even though they were speaking the language of Canaan. The Jews therefore became suspicious and were unsure whether they were dealing with Canaan or with Amalek. That is why, Rashi continues, Bnei Yisrael offered a generic prayer without mentioning a specific nationality: “If You will deliver this nation into my hand...” [Bamidbar 21:2].

Let me ask a question: These Amalekites are so wise and so perceptive that they realize that if a Jew davens to the Ribono shel Olam, it is going to be effective. They are even so knowledgeable that they know if a Jew davens to Hashem and he utters the wrong Tefilla, it is not going to be effective. They know the Almighty listens to prayer and that it is effective and how precise it must be. Furthermore, they knew that the Jews already did battle with Amalek once (at the end of Parshas B’Shalach) and they knew the Jews realized Amalek was a fierce enemy. The Jews recognized that defeating Amalek would require dedicated and focused prayer. Part of Amalek’s plan was to pretend they were only Canaanites. The Jews would think they were doing battle with a pushover nation, so their davening would not be as intense. Less intense davening will not be as effective.

One might ask: If Amalek knows all this, the power and effectiveness of prayer and the existence and omnipotence of Hashem, then why do they remain Amalek? Why do they persist in their evil ways? Why don’t they say, “Listen, Hashem Elokim Emes”? How can one remain an Amaleki if he knows all of this? Why not throw in the Amaleki towel and say “I give up. You are right” and convert to Judaism?

The answer is that their sechel (intellect) may have told them that, but whatever their tayvos (lusts) and lifestyle had been was not compatible with being a Jew or being a Shomer Mitzvos. I can see something as clear as day right in front of my hand, but there is a long distance from a person’s brain to his heart. They may have known it with their minds. The point could have been proven to them intellectually and rationally, but if it does not fit in with a person’s personal agenda, he may not make that final leap. He will twist and turn and rationalize and be in denial, but will refuse to honestly confront the truth.

This is not only the story with Amalek. This is the story with all of us. We know the Emes. We know that the Ribono shel Olam knows everything we do. We know what He expects of us. But from time to time, we do things that we should not be doing. Ay, we know the truth? We know that one day we will need to pay a price for this? But there is a big difference between the Sechel (intellect) and the Lev (heart).

We see another example of this in this week’s parsha. There is a big dispute among early authorities regarding the exact aveira (sin) of “Mei Meriva.” What did Moshe do wrong? Rashi and other commentaries learn that he hit the rock, when he should have spoken to it. The Rambam in Shmoneh Perakim offers a different explanation. He says the aveira was that Moshe Rabbeinu lost his temper. He said “Hear ye, you rebels.” [Bamidbar 20:10]. There must be fifteen different interpretations as to what the aveira was. The Ramban here cites an explanation of Rabbeinu Chananel, which he endorses. He explains that their aveira was in verbalizing the question “Shall WE EXTRACT for you water from this rock?” implying that it was within their power, not that of the Almighty, to perform such a miracle. Moshe’s

aveira was giving the nation an opening by which they might not fully believe in the powers of Hashem.

Let us ask the following question: Chazal say that all of Klal Yisrael, which numbered in the millions of people, all stood around the rock and saw the rock. But how could that be? It is impossible to fit two million people into a ten square foot area. Rashi explains that it was a miracle. “This is one of the places where a small area (miraculously) held a great number of people.” Furthermore, Chazal say that once this Rock opened up, all the rocks in the area began spouting water. Another miracle!

Thus, there could absolutely be no denying that they were witnessing miracles from Heaven. There was no way anyone could err and believe it was some kind of trick that Moshe was doing though sleight of hand. And yet, Chazal say that from the fact that Moshe used the expression “WE SHALL EXTRACT for you water” – people could rationalize and say “It is not from G-d, it is from Moshe Rabbeinu.”

This is yet another example of the phenomenon that something undeniable can be staring a person in the face, and yet, if the person wants to rationalize and wants to ‘make a mistake’ and deny, he can deny: “No! Moshe Rabbeinu had some kind of trick up his sleeve.” It is the same principle: Something can be as clear as day, but if for some reason psychologically we don’t want to believe and we don’t want to accept, we will find an excuse.

I once said over the following story, but it bears repeating. It is another classic example of this same idea:

A story occurred with Rav Yechezkel (Chatzkel) Levenstein, the mashgiach of Yeshivas Mir in Europe, and later of Ponevezh in Eretz Yisrael. An irreligious cab driver who was driving Rav Chatzkel remarked that he had once witnessed an open miracle.

When secular Israelis complete their army service, they typically unwind by touring some exotic location. After his army service, this cab driver decided to tour a mountainous region in Africa with some of his army buddies. One night, they awoke to hear one of their friends screaming in terror. The young man was enveloped by a huge boa constrictor, which was squeezing the life out of him.

They had no idea how to free their friend, and they were afraid to do anything to the snake, lest they antagonize it and make it squeeze even harder. Facing what seemed to be the inevitable, one of the friends said, “I know that when Jews are about to die, they recite Shema. Maybe you should recite it now.”

As soon as the ex-soldier screamed, “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad,” the snake unwound itself and slithered away into the darkness of night.

“That miracle changed my friend’s life,” the cab driver concluded. “He vowed to become a baal teshuvah, and he kept his word. He traveled directly back to Israel and is now a thoroughly religious Jew.”

Rav Chatzkel turned to the cab driver and asked, “U’mah itcha—and what about you?” “Me?” the driver responded in a quizzical tone. “The Rav doesn’t understand. The snake wasn’t wrapped around me; it was wrapped around my friend. “He had the snake around his neck – what does that have to do with me? Let him become frum. Why should I change my lifestyle? What do you want from me?”

Now, you might think that if someone witnesses such an event, it should have a personal impact on him. He should react. He should say “Look at this!” The answer is that if someone wants to deny, he can be staring at a miracle and still deny. A person can see two million people in a small area, a person can see water coming out of stones, a person can believe in the power of prayer like Amalek did – but if a person wants to continue living the life that he has been living, then he will continue to do so no matter what.

This is the ultimate battle between the Sechel and the Lev. Our job is to see to it that our Sechel overpowers our Lev.

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subject: Miriam, Moses' Friend (Chukat 5781)

Miriam, Moses' Friend

Chukat (Numbers 19:1-22:1)

Jun 13, 2021

by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l**

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20:10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (Num. 20:12)

The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I proposed in an earlier Covenant & Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17:6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some, but it tasted bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet. (Ex. 15:22-26)

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained.

Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what he should do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17:1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why now on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different?

The answer is stated explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20:1) Immediately after this we read: "Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron." A famous Talmudic passage<sup>1</sup> explains that it was in Miriam's merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam's death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses' response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses' own mother Yocheved. Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Num. 12:1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest prayer on record – five Hebrew words – "Please, God, heal her now." Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week's parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on their own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18:18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him; (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate; and (3) a soulmate or soulmates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, "The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well."<sup>2</sup> Leaders need confidants, people who "will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena." A confidant cares about you more than about the issues. They lift you when you are low, and gently brings you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, "Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through."<sup>3</sup>

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship.<sup>4</sup> He calls it the “friendship of trust” [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom “you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded,” hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses’ early life suggests that Miriam was Moses’ “trusted friend,” his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God Himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right, she was also one of her brother’s sources of strength.

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from: Chabad.org <learntorah@chabad.org>

reply-to: feedback@chabad.org

date: Jun 16, 2021, 12:12 PM

subject: TORAH STUDIES: **Parshat Chukat**

Chukat

**Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks;** From the teachings of **the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

Chukat begins with an account of the Red Heifer, a strange practice whose object was the purification of those who had become contaminated through contact with the dead. The heifer was burned, and its ashes, mixed with water, sprinkled on those who had become defiled. But the paradox was that though it purified them, it made impure all those who were involved in its preparation. Thus it is called, in the Sidra’s second verse, a chukah (“ordinance”)—a technical term meaning, “law for which no reason can be given.” Rashi gives this explanation for the word, but his comment has some unusual features which the Sicha first points out, and then explains, showing that it is intelligible only if we distinguish two different kinds of chukah.

#### 1. Rashi’s Comment Analyzed

“And the L-rd spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: This is the ordinance (chukat) of the Torah which the L-rd has commanded....”<sup>1</sup>

Rashi interprets the phrase, “this is the ordinance of the Torah” thus:

“Because Satan and the nations of the world provoke Israel, saying, ‘what is the meaning of this commandment to you and what is its reason?’, therefore it is described as an ‘ordinance’ it is a decree about which you have no right to speculate.”

But there are difficulties here:

(i) From the words of Rashi—“therefore it is described as an ‘ordinance’”—it is apparent that he intended not to explain the meaning of the word “ordinance” itself—which he has already done previously on many occasions.<sup>2</sup> (And even though he has not done so previously in the book of Bamidbar, it is not as if he suspected that readers of his commentary would have forgotten his earlier explanation, because the word “ordinance” occurs earlier in Bamidbar<sup>3</sup> and passes without comment from Rashi.) Rather, Rashi wants to explain the fact that it appears to be superfluous, since the phrase “this is the law” would have been sufficient.

And if this is so, since the reader already knows the meaning of “ordinance,” a brief explanation would have served. Why then does Rashi add, at length, the comments about Satan and the nations of the world, which he has already made several times previously?

(ii) Also, there are several differences between Rashi’s answer here, and in earlier places, which require understanding.

In earlier comments the agent provocateur is the “evil inclination”; here it is “Satan.”

In these earlier places, he is represented as “raising objections”<sup>4</sup> or “caviling”<sup>5</sup>; Here, as “provoking.”

And in one earlier comment, one is said to be forbidden to “exempt oneself”<sup>6</sup> from the ordinances; here one is forbidden to “speculate about them.”

(iii) If our earlier reasoning is correct, Rashi’s comment applies only to the seeming superfluity of the word “ordinance.” Why then should it bear the heading<sup>7</sup> “this is the ordinance of the law,” as if Rashi intended to explain the whole phrase?

#### 2. Within Reason and Beyond

The explanation is as follows:

The wording of the phrase, “this is the ordinance of the law” suggests that the law of the Red Heifer is the only ordinance in the Torah. But surely there are other ordinances (mentioned as such by Rashi), like the prohibition of eating the meat of pig or wearing clothes made of a mixture of wool and linen.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we are forced to say that there is a special class of ordinance, of which the Red Heifer is the only example; that is, that there are two kinds of ordinance:

(i) those which could in principle be understood by human intelligence, but details of which are beyond comprehension;

(ii) those which are entirely beyond the scope of human understanding.

The phrase “this is the ordinance of the law” is thus intended to indicate that the law of the Red Heifer is alone in belonging to the second category. Therefore when Rashi brings examples (in Vayikra<sup>9</sup>) of ordinances, he mentions the prohibitions of the meat of the pig and of clothes made of wool and linen mixture, and the waters of purification, but he does not include the Red Heifer, since that belongs to an entirely separate category.

The “waters of purification” (water mingled with the ashes of the Red Heifer) is something whose principle can be understood rationally. For, just as purification through immersion in a Mikvah is a notion which Rashi never classifies as an “ordinance,” because it is quite reasonable that waters of the Mikvah have the power to cleanse spiritually; similarly, the “waters of purification” can have equal effect. Their only peculiarity lies in the detail that only a few drops of it suffice to purify, whereas the Mikvah requires total immersion.

Hence the waters belong to the first class of ordinances—decrees which are partially intelligible.

But the laws of the Red Heifer itself are entirely beyond understanding. It cannot be construed simply as a kind of burnt offering, since:

(i) no part of the Red Heifer was offered up at the altar;

(ii) all the actions involving the Red Heifer were to be done “outside the three camps”;<sup>10</sup> whereas all the offerings were made specifically within them;

(iii) the Red Heifer is not even analogous to the goat of Azazel<sup>11</sup> which, (besides its preliminaries being conducted within the camp,) was something for which a partial explanation was given (“and the goat shall bear forth on it their iniquities unto a desolate land”<sup>12</sup>).

And it has the following exceptional features that the goat of Azazel did not:

(i) it was to be carried out by the Deputy High Priest;<sup>13</sup>

(ii) its blood was to be sprinkled seven times towards the front of the Ohel Moed;<sup>14</sup>

(iii) it was called a “sin offering” to show that it was similar to holy things.<sup>15</sup>

In short, the Red Heifer does not belong to the first category of ordinance for it cannot be even partially understood.

#### 3. G-d and Man

In the light of this, we can understand why Rashi uses expressions here (“Satan” as opposed to “evil inclination”: “Provokes” in place of “raising objections”; and “forbidden to speculate” instead of “forbidden to exempt oneself from them”) which do not occur in his other explanations of the word “ordinance.”

It is clear that G-d’s intellect surpasses man’s, so that if we are told by G-d that a given commandment cannot be humanly understood, there is no ground on which the evil inclination can argue from its unintelligibility to its

non-Divine origin. For, why should finite man be able to comprehend infinite G-d?

But when a commandment is partially open to human understanding, the evil inclination and the nations of the world do have (albeit fallacious) grounds for “arguing” or “raising objections” that it is not Divine: For how could G-d command something which on the one hand was accessible to human reason and on the other hand was inaccessible to it? They would therefore argue that they are not Divine, and not binding on the Jew.

But since the Red Heifer is entirely inaccessible to reason, it cannot be “refuted” by the evil inclination or the nations of the world. All they can do is to “provoke” the Jew by saying “what meaning has this commandment for you, and what is its reason?” Admittedly you have to obey the word of G-d, but in doing so you are doing something which to the human mind is completely meaningless and irrational.

Thus Rashi uses the word “Satan” instead of the “evil inclination”—for the skeptical voice seeks here only to trouble<sup>16</sup> a Jew at the moment of acting, not to dissuade him from it at all.

And thus he does not say, “it is forbidden to ‘exempt yourself’ from the command” (for a case cannot be made out for exemption); but, that “it is forbidden ‘to speculate’ about its rationale,” and instead perform it with joy as if one understood it completely.

The reason is (as Rashi continues), that the Red Heifer is a “decree” of G-d: That is, that G-d Himself is telling us not to be perturbed by the absence of a rationale, and to do it simply because G-d so decrees. This is the only way that it can be properly fulfilled.

We can now understand why Rashi cites the whole phrase “this is the ordinance of the law” as his heading: For it is this phrase which makes it clear that this ordinance is different from all others; and this is what underlines the nuances of Rashi’s explanation.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VIII pp. 123-7)

FOOTNOTES 1. Bamidbar 19:1-2. 2. E.g., Bereishit 26:5; Shemot 15:26; Vayikra 18:4. 3. E.g., Bamidbar 9:3,12,14; 15:15. 4. Bereishit 26:5; Vayikra 18:4. 5. Shemot 15:26. 6. Vayikra, Ibid. 7. Rashi’s comments are prefaced only by the word or phrase in the text which he wishes to explicate. 8. Cf. e.g., Rashi, Bereishit 26:5. 9. Ibid. 10. Cf. Rashi, Bamidbar 19:3. 11. Cf. Vayikra ch. 16. 12. Ibid., v. 22. 13. Cf. Rashi, Bamidbar 19:3. 14. Ibid., v. 4. 15. Rashi, Ibid., v. 9. 16. The word satan means to trouble, to make uncomfortable (cf. Bamidbar 22:22; Ibid., v. 32; I Kings 11:14).

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from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org>

to: rabbiwein@torah.org

date: Jun 17, 2021, 8:03 PM

subject: Rabbi Wein - Handing Over the Mantle

Parshas Chukas

Handing Over the Mantle

The fate of the generation that left Egypt and came to the Sinai desert is finally sealed in this week’s Torah reading. Even though we already read in last week’s Torah portion about the disaster and eventual demise of that generation because of the slanderous report of the Spies that visited the land of Israel, Moshe somehow was convinced that he himself would escape their fate. He appears to be confident that he will yet lead his beloved people into the promised land of Israel.

However, as we read in the Torah, the Lord informs Moshe that he also will not enter the land of Israel. The Torah does give us a reason for this harsh decree against the greatest of all prophets and leaders. Moshe chose to strike the rock to bring forth water instead of complying with the heavenly order speak to the rock. At first glance, we are certainly troubled by this seemingly asymmetrical form of judgment and punishment. The retribution for this sin seems to be far too harsh, especially when we consider the decades of service, sacrifice and loyalty that Moshe previously exhibited in his relationship with the Almighty. Simply put, it seems unfair. The punishment does not seem to fit the crime.

This issue has vexed Jewish minds over the ages. It is almost as though the Torah is purposely writing a real cause-and-effect relationship regarding Moshe and the land of Israel. Because of this intuitive feeling of uneasiness about the true nature of this incident, many varied explanations and commentaries have been offered over the ages.

Maimonides described the real crime as being the tendency to become angry, and anger always leads to a ruptured relationship with the Almighty and eternity. Others have pointed out that it was not so much the behavior of Moshe, as it was that this was the appropriate time when Joshua should have taken over the mantle of leadership. Every generation has its leaders, and leaders of previous generations, no matter how great they may have been, are not destined to serve as leaders of later generations.

It is this rule of history and of human nature that governs this situation. The fact that Moshe struck the rock is not the essential reason that some commentators believe that a new generation demanded new leadership to be successful. Another nuance added to this explanation is that the leader of each generation is responsible for what happens to that generation. Therefore, it is obvious that if the generation that Moshe redeemed from Egypt and led through the desert of Sinai was not going to merit entering the land of Israel, then its leader, no matter how great and noble a person he may have been, must share the same fate of the generation that he so faithfully led.

Shabbat Shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>  
to: [weekly@ohr.edu](mailto:weekly@ohr.edu) subject: Torah Weekly Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights For the week ending 19 June 2021 / 9 Tamuz 5781

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

**Parshat Chukat**

**Show Me the Waze To Go Home**

“Come to Cheshbon” (21:27)

I well remember, before setting off on a trip, pulling out my somewhat dog-eared maps and carefully planning my route. I carefully considered the prevailing traffic at my estimated times along journey, and committed to memory the route, jotting down the names or numbers of the highways that I would need to take.

Who'd a-thought that that just a few short years later, my maps would be gathering mold at the bottom the trunk of my car, and a satellite miles above me in the sky would be guiding me to my destination on a screen in my car? And not only that, but if the traffic situation changed, it would reroute me as I was driving!

Waze sure is a wonderful invention. Only problem is if the satellite doesn't work, or your phone can't pick up the signal.

A few years ago, one of my sons was attending a Yeshiva in the south of Israel, and my wife and I made several trips to visit him. I jumped in the car, fired up Waze, and off we went. We must have made the journey at least five or six times, when one day I realized that Waze had gone “on the blink.” I suddenly started to pay attention to the road signs and cast my eyes to the left and the right, trying to recognize the scenery.

I had absolutely no idea where I was.

Or how to get to where I wanted to get.

Our lives are full of labor-saving devices that can make our lives full of labor.

When the personal computer first came out, I suggested that every computer that left the factory should have a little sticker on it saying, “You can waste your life saving time.”

One of the most dangerous things in life is to travel through it on “auto-pilot.” Although we may have traveled through similar situations in the past, life choices require constant reevaluation. The “Negative Drive” is a master

of misrouting. And what may have been a necessary strategy in the past — or even a mitzvah — now, on this particular journey, the road that we are on may take us far from our goal.

“Come to Cheshbon.”

The Talmud (Bava Batra 78b) expounds this verse in this manner:

“Therefore, the allegorists say, ‘Come to Cheshbon.’ ... Those who rule over their negative drive say, ‘Come and evaluate the cheshbon (“balance sheet of the world”) — the loss of a mitzvah versus its gain — and the gain of a transgression versus its loss...’ ”

When we fail to do life’s essential map work, we may find ourselves far “awaze” from where we want to be.

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from: Daniel Keren <keren18@juno.com>

date: Jun 16, 2021, 8:41 AM

subject: **Shabbos Stories** for Parshas Chukas 5781

The Local Rav and the Vilna Gaon

**Rav Moshe and the Ridiculous Question**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Choueka**

A story is told of a group of mischievous boys who decided to make some prank phone calls to various Rabbis. One of the boys was given the “assignment” to call Rav Moshe Feinstein very late at night and to ask him a totally ridiculous halachah question.

When he called Rav Moshe in the middle of the night and woke him up, he asked his question expecting the Rabbi to get annoyed and simply hang up. But instead, Rav Moshe calmly answered the question, and then started a conversation with the boy.

He asked him what school he was in and which Gemara he was learning. When the boy mentioned that he wasn’t doing so well in school, Rav Moshe stayed on the phone with him and reviewed the Gemara with him, explaining it to him from beginning to end until he fully understood it.

Rav Moshe then gave encouragement to the boy and told him, “I am going to tell you a very strong question that was asked on this Gemara, and I’m going to give you the answer. Tomorrow I want you to ask your Rebbe this question, and if he doesn’t know the answer, you can tell him the answer that I told you.”

The next day, the boy asked the question and his Rebbe was amazed that this student, who never even participated in class, was now asking such a powerful question. When the boy then said the answer to the question, the Rebbe began to see him in a different light and gave him encouragement to put more effort in his learning. In the end, the boy became one of the top students in the class.

And this all came about because Rav Moshe treated him with patience and dignity. This was a true kidush Hashem. Instead of reacting harshly when the boy woke him up and asked him a silly question, he succeeded in turning the boy around simply by showing him respect and speaking kindly to him.

While we are not on the level of Rav Moshe, we all have opportunities to bring glory to Hashem’s name. If we study Torah and do misvot, we are often viewed by others as representatives of the Torah. Our actions are often scrutinized, and any slight misstep can lower the value of Torah study in their eyes. Our behavior is not just a reflection on us, but it is a reflection on the entire Torah and its values.

Whether we like it or not, we are ambassadors of Hashem. We should be conscious of this and do our best to always greet others with a smile and treat them with respect. This will help to sanctify Hashem’s name and bring glory to those who serve Him. May we always succeed in sanctifying Hashem’s name in everything we do.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

*Shema Yisrael Torah Network*

*Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Chukas*

פרשת חקת תשפ"א

ותמת שם מרים ותקבר שם ולא היה מים לעדה

**Miriam died there, and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly. (20:1,2)**

*Chazal (Taanis 9a)* explain the juxtaposition of *Klal Yisrael’s* lack of water upon Miriam’s death with the miraculous well that accompanied them throughout their forty-year journey. This well, duly dubbed *be’eirah shel Miriam*, Miriam’s well, gave water in the *zechus*, merit, of Miriam *HaNeviah*. Thus, when she died, the well dried up. The *Zohar HaKadosh (Emor 103B)* attributes the miracle of Miriam’s well to her standing at the banks of the Nile River to ensure the safety of her infant brother, Moshe (*Rabbeinu*), who had been placed in a reed basket, hidden from the Egyptian soldiers who were bent on murdering Jewish male infants. Due to this one act of caring, Hashem miraculously provided the Jewish nation with water for forty years in the wilderness.

Another woman performed a heroic act at the same time that Miriam stood at the river. Bisyah, Pharaoh’s daughter, saw the basket containing the infant Moshe in the water, and she stretched out her arm to pull it in. She went on to raise Moshe in the palace. She named him Moshe to bring to mind that he was *mashui*, drawn from the river. *Chazal* teach that Moshe had as many as ten names. Yet, the name by which he is recognized for all posterity is Moshe, the name Bisyah gave him. She saved Moshe’s life. Thus, she receives the naming rights for the young Moshe. By comparison, Miriam’s reward seems to eclipse the reward received by Bisyah. The question that confronts us is: Whose act deserves greater recognition? Bisyah, for saving Moshe? Or Miriam, who waited patiently by the water’s edge?

Understandably, actually saving a human life should be viewed on a higher level than merely standing by and watching what would occur. If so, why did Miriam warrant such an outstanding reward?

*Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, derives from this that when Bisyah saved Moshe, she had no idea of the infant’s identity. All she knew was that a child needed to be saved. She stepped in and did what was expected of her. Miriam’s concern was for *Klal Yisrael*. Therefore, one can say that she was waiting to see how things would play out – how Moshe would be saved growing up in Bisyah’s home. Miriam was able to see things that others did not. Thus, she was privy to Moshe’s illuminating their home at birth; she knew from day one that Moshe was destined to be the redeemer who would take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Miriam was not merely watching a Jewish child (which certainly, in its own right, warrants distinctive merit); she was waiting to see how things would materialize for the future leader of the Jewish people. Bisyah, on the other hand, was acting on behalf of one Jewish child. Given her pedigree, this was an amazing act of selflessness, of courage and self-sacrifice for Judaism. At the end of the day, we have two women standing by the water: one is acting to ensure the survival of the entire Jewish Nation; the other is protecting one Jewish child.

*Rav Weinberg* underscores their discrepant intentions, and the consequent future ramifications. Bisyah’s intent was to save one Jewish child. She succeeded, and the name that he carried was the name she gave him. This was her reward. Miriam’s intent transformed her individual deed into a much greater act. She was thinking of *Klal Yisrael*, thus the nation was provided with water for their forty-year journey, compliments of the well/rock that carries her name.

Our intentions define our actions. *Rav Weinberg* posits that his idea is especially relevant with regard to prayer. When one prays, he should broaden the scope and focus of his prayer. Rather than pray for himself and his immediate family, he should pray for his community, for all of *Klal Yisrael*. One’s intentions are transformative, having the ability to alter himself. One whose deeds are focused inward will become a better person, but he will remain a singular individual who lives for and transforms himself. This is wonderful. It does not, however, compare to the individual who acts on

behalf of *Klal Yisrael*, whose every activity is intended globally. He becomes a *Klal Yisrael mentch* – like Miriam, like all the leaders of *Klal Yisrael*. We do not live for ourselves. We live for – and serve at – the pleasure of Hashem. Thus, our intentions should focus on the larger picture – *Klal Yisrael*.

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם שְׁמַעוּ נָא הַמְּרִים הַמֵּן הַזֶּה נוֹצֵיא לָכֶם מַיִם.

**"Listen now, O rebels, shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" (20:10)**

Miriam *HaNeviah* passed away. The water that had sustained *Klal Yisrael* for forty years was in her merit. Following her death, the water stopped flowing. When people have no water to drink, they react. They complained to Moshe *Rabbeinu* that they were thirsty. Moshe struck the rock, and it provided the necessary water. Hashem told Moshe, "Since you have not trusted in Me to sanctify Me before the People... you will not lead them in the Land."

Imagine, the quintessential leader of *Klal Yisrael* made one wrong decision, which is beyond our ability to comprehend, and he received a most harsh punishment. His dream of entering *Eretz Yisrael* was shattered. Had he led the people to the Land, we would never have lost the *Bais HaMikdash*, no exile – nothing – but an idyllic life in *Eretz Yisrael*. One error, and everything was forever changed. The commentators struggle to find a suitable reason for such an onerous punishment. The reasons that they give obviously only touch the surface, because Moshe's "sin" is such only on the most elevated spiritual level that he had achieved, and on this level every action is studied under the scrutiny of a powerful spiritual microscope.

*Rashi* asserts that it was because he struck the rock, rather than speak to it – as Hashem had instructed him. *Rambam* contends that it was because he became angry and spoke harshly to the people. *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* writes that Moshe referred to the people as *ha'morim*, fools/rebels, which denigrates the descendants of the Patriarchs. *Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchev, zl*, observes that, on the surface, these explanations do not concur. If one delves deeper into the matter, however, the two infractions are one and the same, since one catalyzed the other. He explained that two forms of rebuke exist: gentle; and not so gentle. When one reproaches gently, he shows the sinner the great privilege of being a member of *Klal Yisrael* and the ensuing special relationship that he has with Hashem. He is told that his soul is a spark of the Divine, hewn from the *Kisei HaKavod*, Throne of Glory. He is given to understand the immense satisfaction that Hashem derives whenever the simplest Jew scrupulously performs a *mitzvah*. He is told of the great joy that permeates all of Creation when a Jew fulfills his destiny in this world. When someone hears such "rebuke," he is only too happy to return to Hashem's embrace with all his heart. A person who rebukes in this manner truly deserves to be a leader of the Jewish people. The other form of rebuke is sharp and harsh. Its purpose is to shame the sinner into submission, to break his arrogance, to get him to fulfill his obligations. This type of rebuke is not based on coddling, but on telling it like it is and having the sinner experience the full wrath of what his actions have spawned. A person who rebukes in this manner does not bring the people to the fulfillment of their destined roles; rather, this rebuke is based upon browbeating and arm twisting, when, in fact, the sinner's heart is not in it. Such a person does not meet the requirements demanded of a Jewish leader.

When Moshe spoke with anger at the Jewish People, he was not inspiring them to return to Hashem. They had erred. Their behavior left much to be desired. When a people acts recalcitrantly, however, they will not be convinced to change with brow beating and stern rebuke. The rock was not willing to give up its water willingly. When Moshe spoke harshly to the people, the rock picked up on his tone. As a result, it refused to give up its water willfully. Consequently, Moshe had to strike the rock to give up its water. Had he spoken kindly to the people, it would have left an impression on the rock. When he spoke in anger, it likewise left an impression on the rock – a negative impression. In this manner, the various explanations coincide.

A student of the revered *Bobover Rebbe, zl*, *Horav Shlomo Halberstam*, related the following story (quoted in "Stories that Warm the Heart"). At ten years of age, this student studied in the *Bobover Yeshivah* under the guidance of the *Rebbe*. Urban *yeshivos* were situated in urban areas which were populated by various cultures and establishments that catered to these diverse cultures. What is entirely acceptable to the non-Jewish liberal world is frequently an anathema to the Orthodox Jewish world. Thus, areas that were frequented by non-Jewish young men and women who were expressing their right to be non-Jewish liberals, unrestricted by the moral code and compass which exemplifies our young men and women, are understandably prohibited to our children. Nonetheless, as young boys will do, a small group of boys from the *Bobover Yeshivah* spent a half hour in a park that was on their yeshivah's restricted list. They had a grand time and returned to the *yeshivah* laughing – thinking that they had broken one of the *yeshivah's* rules and gotten away with it. How shocked they were to be greeted by the *Rebbe* himself. The young boy who (now as an adult) related the story was the defacto leader. The *Rebbe* sternly beckoned him to his office. As the leader, he would be the sacrifice for the group. Trembling, he entered the *Rebbe's* office.

The *Rebbe* sighed, "I am sorry, Avraham, but I will have to give you a *potch*, slap, for disobeying the rules. Avraham swallowed deeply, closed his eyes and waited for the slap (I must interject at this point. The boy did not fear the pain of the slap nearly as much as the accompanied shame of being slapped by the *Bobover Rebbe*.)

Avraham stood there and waited for the slap to come, squeezed his eyes tightly shut (as if that would relieve the pain). Suddenly, he felt the *Rebbe's* soft hand caress his face. He opened his eyes and looked at the *Rebbe*, who was looking at him with the love and compassion of a father to a son (which he was to all of his *chassidim*).

"This is your *potch*. Now go back to class and learn well!"

This was a "slap" that Avrohom remembered his entire life. It was this form of rebuke, couched in fatherly love, that personified the *Bobover Rebbe*.

וַיַּךְ אֶת הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים וַתִּשְׂתּוּ הָעֵדָה וּבְעִירָם.

**And he struck the rock with his staff twice; abundant water came forth, and the assembly and their animals drank. (20:11)**

Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to speak to the rock. He also told him to fetch his staff – which he had earlier used to strike the rock that had previously provided the nation with water. Who knows? Clearly, whatever infraction was involved in Moshe's striking the rock is beyond us. The mere fact that so many early commentators weigh in concerning the sin is a clear indication that the sin was esoteric and of the minutest form of misconduct. In other words, when one must search, dispute and delve into the action that represents the sin, it demonstrates that it is on a level which is beyond our comprehension. Nonetheless, we may derive powerful lessons from this incident. Indeed, *Horav Moshe Tikuchinsky, zl*, observes that the one who was baffled most by the Heavenly reaction to the incident is none other than Moshe *Rabbeinu*. He certainly would not have deviated from Hashem's instructions had he felt that doing so would be a violation. What should we say?

*Horav Reuven Dov Dessler, zl*, takes a *Kelmer* approach (which focuses on perfection and how something imperfect is deficient) towards the sin and its effects. Hashem instructed Moshe to speak to the rock. Rather than speak, he struck the rock. When we think about it, striking a rock or speaking to the rock which then produces enough water to quench the thirst of five million men, women and children is a miracle by any standard. Does it really make a difference if one speaks to the rock or strikes it? Does the magnitude of the miracle make the difference irrelevant? *Rashi* explains that had the rock been spoken to rather than struck, the nation would have drawn the intended lesson, "If a rock which does not speak or hear and that does not require sustenance, carries out the word of G-d, so should we."

*Rashi's* statement is baffling. Imagine if the people would not have derived this lesson, would they have had license not to serve Hashem? Certainly not!



Furthermore, the people of that generation were so spiritually elevated that the simplest woman was on a higher level of prophesy than Yechezkel *HaNavi* who described the workings of the Heavenly Sphere. Was the nation's obligation to Hashem for saving and sustaining them until that moment not sufficient reason for them to serve Him? Would a simple lesson make that much of a difference in the obligation to the Almighty? The answer is, explains *Rav Dessler*, it could have been *better* – manifesting greater *shleimus*, perfection. Perhaps one Jew out of the entire five million might have been increasingly inspired. This is what did not transpire as a result of striking the rock: perfection. It could have – and should have – been perfect.

We can accept that perfection is a requisite that must not be ignored, but does this warrant that Moshe received such a harsh punishment? He carried forty years of leadership, often under the most difficult and trying conditions, with challenges to his authority, constant complaining and bickering, a lack of appreciation and even less gratitude – and, to boot, he was not allowed to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. Does the punishment correspond to the sin? A relationship should exist between crime and punishment, whereby the disciplinary action one receives in some way, on some level, coincides with the infraction. On the *surface*, this criterion appears to elude us. Moshe *Rabbeinu's* dream was to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He offered his prayers to Hashem that the decree against him be rescinded, thus permitting him to enter the Land. Let us imagine the following dialogue that hypothetically ensued between Moshe and Hashem. Hashem asked, "What is it that you lack in the *Midbar*, wilderness? You are sustained by the *manna*, drink water from Miriam's well, study Torah every waking moment, are the quintessential *Rebbe* who teaches Torah all the time to *Klal Yisrael*. You have achieved the highest level of prophesy, crowned as the king of the Jewish nation. You are the most praised and fortunate Jew. What else could you have? What do you lack?"

"It is all true... but in *Eretz Yisrael* it will all have greater *shleimus*, perfection."

"If so – if it is all about perfection, if this is your concern, can you say emphatically that your action of striking the rock, rather than speaking to it, was an act of *shleimus*?"

We can have no counter response to this question. In situations in which one seeks perfection, he must put in the effort towards achieving that perfection. Ostensibly, the above is not presented *chas v'shalom* as a critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, but of ourselves. When we think about it, what really is the primary focus of our supplication of Hashem? We ask that what we already have be better, more perfect. We want to be healthier, have greater sustenance, greater peace, lasting relationships. We ask for *shleimus*. Can we say that our prayers and spiritual activities represent *shleimus*? Does our *tefillah* have perfect *kavanah*, intention/devotion, without talking? Is our learning that perfect? In other words, to ask for and hope for and expect perfection, it must at least be *tit for tat*. One cannot expect something in return for that which he did not give.

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Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of

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Sneaky Snake

...Moshe made a snake of copper and placed it on the pole; so it was that if a snake bit a man he would stare at the copper snake and live (21:9).

This week's parsha recounts a fascinating incident, one unlike any other in the Torah: Bnei Yisroel are exasperated about retracing their steps and

subsequently moving further from entering Eretz Yisroel. They begin to attack Hashem and Moshe, and complain bitterly about the manna and lack of water. This in and of itself doesn't seem particularly unusual; after all Bnei Yisroel tested Hashem's patience time and time again while in the desert. What makes this story unique is what happens next.

Hashem sends incredibly venomous snakes to attack Bnei Yisroel and many die. Almost immediately, the people go to Moshe, beg his forgiveness, and ask him to pray for them. Moshe acquiesces right away, at which point Hashem tells Moshe that he should fashion a snake and place it on a pole and that those who had been bitten can look at the snake and live. Moshe created the snake, and so it was that anyone who had been bitten and would stare at the copper snake would live. Rashi (ad loc) explains; could a snake (made by Moshe) cause death or give life? Rather, as long as Bnei Yisroel casts their eyes upward and subjects their hearts to their Father in heaven, they would be cured and if not they would waste away.

There is also a similar story at the end of Parshas Beshalach; when the Amalekites came to attack Bnei Yisroel Moshe lifted his hands toward heaven and as long as his hands were raised Bnei Yisroel were winning, and when his hands lowered Bnei Yisroel faltered. Yet, if all Bnei Yisroel needed was Moshe to lift his hands towards heaven, why didn't he simply do the same here? Why did Hashem instead tell him to fashion a snake and have people stare at it to be cured? Creating a snake that cures seems contrary to our Torah values. In fact, the very same snake that Moshe created was later called Nechushtan and used as idol worship in the time of King Ahaz (before being eventually destroyed and burned by the righteous King Hezekiah). Seemingly, Moshe could have accomplished the same here by simply pointing his fingers heavenward once again.

The Torah uses a curious word to express the concept of "staring" at the snake: "Vehibit el Hanachash." Rashi (in his comments on Bereishis 15:5) explains that the word *yabit* refers to looking downward. Hashem is expressing a profound lesson for Bnei Yisroel to internalize. They are being asked to examine the snake within themselves – the part of them that desires to be independent from Hashem. That is what it means to look down at the snake: examine this internal conflict and understand that it is causing a separation between the individual and Hashem. Once one chooses to sublimate the *yetzer hora* within, Hashem provides a cure for the snakes on the outside.

A Giant Debt

...Og, king of Bashan, went out against them, he and his entire people, to do battle in Edrei. Hashem said to Moshe, "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him..." (21:33-34)

This week's parsha ends with the tale of the remarkable encounter between Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Og, the giant-king of Bashan. Og had been one of the "Nephilim" (those that fell – "fallen angels" see Rashi on Bereishis 6:4); a race of giants from the time before the "great flood." He was known as "the escapee" because he survived the destruction of the "great flood" (see Rashi on Bereishis 14:13). The *possuk* tells us that Moshe was worried about meeting Og in a war.

At first glance, this seems a little odd. Bnei Yisroel had just soundly decimated Sichon king of Cheshbon, who had a reputation as one of the mightiest warriors in the world. Why was Moshe suddenly worried about fighting Og? Rashi (21:34) explains that almost 500 years prior Og had done a favor for Avraham Avinu. Moshe was afraid that the merit of this kindness to Avraham Avinu would stand for him and, perhaps, render him invulnerable.

What kindness had Og done for Avraham? In Parshas Lech Lecha (Bereishis 14:1-12), the Torah relates some of the details of the epic war that embroiled nine kingdoms. Four kings went to war against five kings and soundly defeated them and many other nations that were in their path. One of the nations that was utterly destroyed was the Rephaim, a nation of giants, and Og was the lone survivor ("fugitive"). In addition, one of the five kings who was defeated was the king of Sodom, where Avraham's nephew, Lot,

resided. Og came to Avraham to inform him that his nephew had been taken captive by the four kings. This was the kindness that Og did for Avraham Avinu, which had Moshe concerned about meeting Og in battle. However, this is difficult to comprehend. Rashi (Bereishis 14:13) very clearly states that the reason Og came to inform Avraham what had happened to Lot was for his own selfish reasons. He desired to marry Sarah; one of the most beautiful women to have ever lived, according to the Gemara (Megillah 15a). Og hoped that Avraham would feel impelled to enter the war, and in the course of the fighting he would be killed; thereby clearing a path for Og to be with Sarah. Thus, Og had very selfish reasons for giving Avraham Avinu news about his nephew – so how is this act considered such a great merit for him?

Imagine for a moment that someone is attacked by a mugger and struck upon the head. Following this unfortunate event, the victim heads to the nearest hospital to be examined. The doctors decide to perform a CT scan of his head to be sure that there isn't any more extensive damage. Miraculously, the CT scan reveals that while there is no permanent damage from the mugger's blow, there is a tumor that is slowly growing inside the skull that must be removed. This tumor might have very likely killed this person and perhaps not have been caught in time had he not been mugged. Does this victim now owe a debt of gratitude to the mugger?

Of course not. In the case of the mugger, the victim never wanted to suffer a severe blow to the head. That it, providentially, happened to work out is really just the hand of Hashem. However, in the case of Og, Avraham was well aware of risks he was taking by entering a war with the four kings. Yet, Avraham desired to have the information that Og was providing. The fact that Og had his own agenda doesn't lessen the kindness to Avraham; Og was providing Avraham a service that he wanted. Doing a kindness for someone as great as Avraham Avinu was reason enough to give Moshe pause. Hashem therefore had to reassure him.

The Torah is teaching us a remarkable lesson in hakaras hatov, as well as in something most of us strive hard to avoid. We see from this story that we must feel indebted to someone who does us a kindness even if he has his own reason for doing it. Often, we work very hard to try to ascribe a motivation to a benefactor that would seem to paint them as self-serving, or in the very least as not totally altruistic. Naturally, we do this to lessen our feeling of obligation to this person. This is wrong. The Torah is teaching us that we must appreciate any kindness that is done for us, irrespective of the benefactor's motivation.

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Ohr Somayach

### **Insights into Halacha**

#### **Rabbi Yehuda Spitz**

Ohr Somayach :: Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 19 June 2021 / 9 Tamuz 5781

#### **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 niftar, after a prolonged and painful battle with cancer R"L. Never one to complain, Reb Chaim M'Yerushalayim (as he was commonly known) 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, reflected this as well, including how he wanted his own levaya, kevura, 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 won him 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 Yedid Nefesh of almost 40 years, he enigmatically exclaimed 'Zos Chukas HaTorah'! His intent was that the week of Parashas 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 Parashas Korach had ended and the week of Parashas 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 Parashas Chukas being one of tragedy, nor is it mentioned by the Rambam, Tur, or 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; a far earlier source than 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 Parashas Chukas. On that day, in the year 1242, twenty 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 of France.

Talmud on Trial

The pretext to this mass burning was a public debate (later known as "The Disputation of Paris") beginning in 1240 featuring Nicholas Donin, an apostate-Jew-turned-Franciscan-monk who petitioned Pope Gregory IX to prosecute the Talmud for 35 purported affronts to Christianity. The Pope ordered the banning and confiscation of all known manuscripts of the Talmud. King Louis IX, nicknamed "the monk king" due to his religious zeal, and later leader of the failed Seventh and Eighth Crusades, decided to put the Talmud 'on trial,' with Donin as the prosecutor.

Several of the most eminent rabbinical authorities in France were tasked to defend the Talmud: Rabbeinu Yechiel M'Paris, Rav Moshe M'Coucy (the SMA"G), Rav Shmuel M'Falaise, and Rav Yehuda M'Melun; the official verdict against them a foregone conclusion.[4] King Louis gleefully executed the "judgment" by publicly burning the 24 wagonloads of confiscated Talmudic literature on this "Friday of Fire." [5]

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.[6] In fact, this was considered such an enormous loss for Klal Yisrael, that the famed Maharam M'Rothenburg,[7] an eyewitness, composed an elegy for our loss, 'Sha'ali Serufa Ba'Aish', deemed so essential, that it is incorporated into the Kinos recited every Tisha B'Av (Kinah 41).[8]

I Had a Dream...

The great rabbis at the time, at a loss to understand 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 Onkelus) of the opening verses to Parashas Chukas, "Zos Chukas HaTorah, These are the decrees of the Torah" (Bamidbar Ch. 19:2). 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 Parasha that the tragedy transpired, and not the day of the month.[9]

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 Parashas Chukas. For those fasting, Asarah B'Teves would not be the only Taanis Tzibbur that practically occurs on a Friday.[10]

Retribution for the Rambam?

Rav Hillel of Verona, a talmid of Rabbeinu Yonah, and another eyewitness to these events, wrote a famous letter[11] 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.[12] 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 Montpelier, 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 Parashas Chukas.[13]

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".[14] 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[15] in 1648-1649, as recorded by the Shach.

Although most know of the Shach as one of the preeminent halachic authorities due to his extensive and authoritative commentary and rulings on the Shulchan Aruch, yet, few know that he also wrote a sefer titled 'Megillas Eifa',[16] 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 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.[17]

This was soon codified as public fast by the Vaad Arba Ha'Aratzos, the halachic and legislative body of all Lithuanian and Polish Jewry.[18] Indeed, the Magen Avraham concludes his passage 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,[19] 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 as being the date of one of the very first blood libels,[20] 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 recorded by an eyewitness to the atrocities, Rabbi Efraim of Bonn in his 'Sefer HaZechira', which was later appended to Rabbi Yosef Hakohen HaRofei of Avignon's sixteenth century 'Emek HaBacha', a chronicle of the terrible devastation of the Crusades (starting in 1096/4856; known as Gezeiras Tatn"u),[21] 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!'[22] The Selichos established for 20 Sivan, aside for the one mentioned previously which actually describes the horrendous pyre in Blois, were authored 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,[23] Rabbeinu Gershom (Me'or 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.[24] 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 Haltim', all written by eyewitnesses to the carnage and wanton destruction.[25] [26]

Although nowadays it seems not widely commemorated or even known about,[27] 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.[28] 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 years 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 assistance in clarifying much of the historical content of this article.

[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'Rothenburg. Nowadays, it is generally attributed to Rav Yecheil ben Rav Yekusiel M'Mishpachas Ha'Anavim, of the Chachmei Rome (see the recent Mossad Rav Kook edition of the sefer). 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 HaKavannos of Rav Chaim Vital, Drushei Tikkun Chatzos 1 and Pri Eitz Chaim, Shaar Tikkun Chatzos Ch. 3). [3] Indeed, the Biurei Maharsha'h (on the Tanya Rabbasi ad loc. 8) points out that there must have been a ta'us softer 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, Rabbeinu Yecheil ben Yosef, the Rosh Yeshiva in Paris and father-in-law of Rav Yitzchak M'Corbeil, author of the SMA"K, in a sefer titled 'Vikuach 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] For his leading role in this pivotal event amid a lifetime of royally advancing the banner of Catholicism, Louis IX is the only French king to have been posthumously canonized as a "saint." [Hence, there are many cities named after him around the world, including one with a famous "Gateway Arch" in Missouri.] The papal edict against the Talmud was overturned by Gregory IX's more tolerant successor, Pope Innocent IV in 1247. Disapproval from his peers notwithstanding, Innocent IV wrote letters to King Louis IX effectively ordering that henceforth the Talmud should be censored rather than burned. [6] See Shu"t Menachem Meishiv (vol. 2, pg. 262, 62; part of the sefer Tziyon L'Menachem) who cites that approximately 12,000 individual volumes were burned! [7] Aside for the Kinah he wrote, the Maharam referenced this great loss in his responsa (Teshuvos Maharam M'Rothenburg 250), citing the reaction of Rav Shmuel M'Falaise, one of the Rabbanim who unsuccessfully attempted to defend the Talmud from being burned. On a historical sidenote, the Maharam M'Rothenburg was niftar in captivity after being unjustly imprisoned for seven years in Ensinsheim Fortress, in order to force the resident Jews to pay an exorbitant ransom to fill the king's (Rudolf I of Germany) depleted coffers. The Maharam refused to allow himself to be ransomed, fearing that it would set a dangerous precedent of rulers holding Rabbanim captive and forcing the unfortunate Jews to pay the price. Indeed, a short while after his passing, the king attempted to do the same for the Maharam's prized pupil, the Rosh, who only narrowly avoided capture, escaping to Spain. Tragically, the Maharam's body was only allowed to be buried fourteen years later, when a ransom was paid by Alexander ben Shlomo Wimpfen, who was subsequently laid to rest beside the Maharam, in the Jewish cemetery of Worms, Germany (also known as "Heiliger Sand"), nowadays commonly considered the oldest surviving Jewish cemetery in Europe. [8] 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 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 "Hizharu 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?". [9] The Shibolei Haleket (263, Ha'arugah HaTishi' is Seder Taanis, Din Arba Tzomos; from whom other sources are ostensibly based on) cites this as well, albeit with slight variations. First of all, from which 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'Hagados', similar to the Maharam M'Rothenburg'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 Parashas 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 Haleket. 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. ukaif) 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'Rothenburg makes no mention of the she'eilaschalom 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'Rothenburg writes (Perushei HaTorah L'Rabi Chaim Paltiel, Introduction to Parashas Chukas, pg. 527; thanks are due to Rabbi Avrohom Goldstone of England for pointing out this source) that the minhang 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'eilaschalom, and Rav Paltiel understood that the fast to commemorate this tragedy was set as an actual date and not on the Erev Shabbos preceding Parashas 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'eilosChalomos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's Lekutei Eliezer (pg. 59-63) and Rabbi Mordechai Zev Trenk's recent Magic, Mysteries, and Mysticism: Illuminating Insights on Esoteric Torah Topics (pg. 76-78 and 235-239). [10] For more on this topic and why 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? - Asarah B'Teves: Not Your Ordinary Fast Day.'. [11] This letter is brought in Chemdah Genuzah (pg. 18), as well as Otzar HaGeDolim (vol. 7, pg. 105), and cited in Torah L'Daas (vol. 2, Parashas Chukas pg. 280-281) and Kuntress Peninei Gevuros Akiva (Parashas Chukas pg. 3). Perhaps somewhat apocryphal, but certainly evocative, Rav Hillel mentions that the ashes of the burnt sefarim of the Rambam mixed together with the ashes of the burnt Talmud. [12] 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.' [13] 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). [14] 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 (Parashas Korach Ch. 18, end 20), Midrash Tanchuma (Parashas Korach 11), and Kii Yakar

(Parashas Korach Ch. 16, 34 s.v. nasu). [15] A genocidal and bloodthirsty mass murderer who could have given Adolf Hitler ym'sh a run as most notorious Anti-Semite 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 scale of their atrocities was 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. [16] 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, 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! [17] 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 in 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 Beis Yaakov and as mentioned in the special alphabetic acrostic 'Keil Malei Rachamim' 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. [18] 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 Nosson Nota of Hanover's 'Yavein Metzulah', Rav Avraham ben Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi's 'Tzar Bas Rabbim' (Reshemos vol. 3, pg. 279), and the Tosafos Yom Tov's Hakkama to his 'Selichos L'Kaf Sivan'. See also Yad Shaul (Y"D 228, end 136), Daas Torah (O.C. 580, 4), Siddur HaShlah, Siddur Bais Yaakov (of the Yaavetz), Siddur Derech Hachaim (of the Chavas Daas), Yesod Veshoresh 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., end 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), Eshel Avraham (Butchatch, O.C. 580; at length), Mishna Berura (ibid.), and Kaf Hachaim (ibid.). [19] He was the son of the Shlah and Av Bais Din of Prague, as well as the author of Vavei Ha'Amudim. His Selicha was printed in the Siddur HaShlah. 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. [20] The ignominious distinction of 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 acclaimed 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. [21] For this reason alone, the Taz (O.C. 493, 2), although maintaining that one need only keep the restrictions of Sefirah 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 Tadin'u). See previous article titled 'Switching Sefirahs? - Understanding Your Minhang and its Ramifications'. [22] In fact, according to this source, the tragic events in Blois distressed Rabbeinu Tam so much that he passed away a mere 14 days later, 4 Tammuz 1171 (4931). However, Rav Shmuel Ashkenazi (Alpha Beta Tineyasa 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 Oheiv Yisrael of Apta (end Parashas Mattos) that 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 Parashas Ki Sisa (Shemos Ch. 17:16; "Ki Yad al Keis Kag" - Keis (Kaf-Samach) stands for Kaf (20) Sivan and Kah (Yud - Hei) stands for Yom Kippurim. [23] Rav Shlomo HaBavli is referred to by the Rishonim with great veneration. For example, he is quoted by Rashi (Parashas Terumah Ch. 26:15 s.v. v'aisa) and the Rosh (Yoma Ch. 8, 19). The Maharshah (Shu"t Maharshah 29) writes that Rabbeinu Gershon, teacher of all Ashkenazic Jewry, learned Torah and received his mesorah from Rav Shlomo HaBavli. [24] 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 Shebrushen's 'Tzok Haitim'. [25] Be forewarned: Much of the content is quite graphic and gruesome in its explicitness. The Cossacks' sheer depravity, cruelty, brutality, and bloodlust, was simply unprecedented in scale and scope, R"L. [26] 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, pg. 357-360), and Nitei Gavriel (on Hilchos Shavuos, Chelek HaBirurim 6, pg. 282-299). Especially of interest is Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff's recent article titled 'The Twentieth of Sivan'. [27] There are several theories raised to explain this. See Yad Shaul (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 Ha'Aratzos 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 'minhang 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 Ha'Aratzos; 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 responsa] both wrote that the takana to fast on the 20th of Sivan was only observed in those lands. [28] See Nitei Gavriel (ibid. pg. 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 Rachamim' 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 Rachamim' for the Kedoshei HaShoah (Ta'sh-Tah'h). 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. This article is dedicated L'Ilui Nishmasam shel R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi and Naftali Frankel, Gilad Shaar, and Eyal Yifrach Hy"d. This article was written l'zechus for Shira Yafra bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yetzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad! L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: [yspitz@ohr.edu](mailto:yspitz@ohr.edu). Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of M'Shulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Halacha, serves as the Sho'e'l U'Meishiv and Rosh Chaburah of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim.