

Torah Weekly



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Parshas Chukas

For the week ending 3 Tamuz 5755 (10 Tamuz 5755)*

30 June & 1 July 1995 (7 & 8 July 1995)*

*week ending dates for locations outside of Israel

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Binyamin Ben Moshe (Bernard) Burnham, O.B.M.

Summary

The laws of the *Parah Adumah* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws of ritual purification are to be used when someone has come into contact with death. After the nation “wanders” for nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam passes away and is buried at *Kadesh*. The people complain about the loss of their water supply which until then has been provided for them miraculously in the merit of Miriam’s righteousness. Aaron and Moshe pray for the people’s welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at *Merivah*, and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth from it. Distressed by the people’s lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem’s power over the world which would have resulted if the rock had produced water as a result of him only speaking to it. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron that they will not bring the people into the Land. The *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of *Eisav*, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to *Eretz Yisrael*. When they reach *Mt. Hor*, Aaron passes from this world and his son *Elazar* is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aaron was beloved by all the people, and they observe a national mourning period of 30 days. The *Bnei Yisrael* battle *Sichon* the Amorite, who fights against them rather than allow them to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that *Sichon* had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Commentaries

“This is the decree (*chok*) of the Torah...” (19:2).

An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man’s failure to comprehend truth does not make it untrue.

The mitzvah of the Parah Adumah (red heifer) is the quintessential ‘chok’ or decree which defies human understanding.

If we were asked why we eat, we would answer that we must eat in order to live. If we were questioned further as to why we eat bread and not stones, we would answer that stones don’t contain the necessary nutrients to sustain life, but why humans need these nutrients, and why we

can’t extract them from stones — that we would not be able to explain, for that only Hashem knows. Even though we eat to stay alive, Hashem created the world in such a way that our food also has a pleasing taste and aroma. But that taste should never be confused with our *reason* for eating.

Mitzvos are spiritual food for the *neshama*. Why or how a particular *mitzvah* sustains our soul, we cannot know, anymore than we know why a particular protein sustains our body. Hashem wanted the *mitzvos* to be palatable to us, so he infused them with taste — ideas and lessons — that we can understand. However, we should never confuse the *taste* of a *mitzvah* with its real *reason*, as we should never eat merely to satisfy our taste buds.

(Adapted from Shiurei Bina, Rabbi Zev Leff)

"...pure red heifer" (19:2).

The Talmud relates the story of a non-Jew, Dama ben Nesina, who possessed a precious jewel needed to replace a stone missing from the breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*. The Sages came to him and offered him a fortune for the stone, but he would not sell it to them because the key to the safe in which the jewel was kept, lay under his father's sleeping head. He would not wake his father, even for a king's ransom. Because he was prepared to give up so much to honor his father, he was rewarded that a red heifer was born into his flock, and he sold that animal to the Sages for the same amount that he had forfeited.

(Talmud, Kidushin 31a)

"...pure red heifer" (19:2).

Why, in the above story, was it that Dama ben Nesina was rewarded specifically by a *Parah Adumah* being born into his flock? The role of the Jewish People is to be a nation of priests and a holy people, singled out from the rest of the nations by their exemplary behavior. So, when Dama ben Nesina, a non-Jew, demonstrated such self-sacrifice to honor his father, it awakened an accusation in the heavenly courts against the Jewish People, for here was a non-Jew whose devotion to the *mitzvah* of honoring his father was at least equal to that of the Jews, and where was the exemplary behavior of the Jewish People? Thus, the red heifer which was bought from him by the Sages, demonstrated that even though Dama ben Nesina was capable of giving up a fortune for a *mitzvah* that logic dictates, the Jewish People are capable of giving up an equal fortune for a *mitzvah that is infinitely beyond the grasp of human logic*, merely because it is the Will of their Father in Heaven.

(Chidushei HaRim)

"...that is without blemish, upon which a yoke has not been laid..." (19:2).

Someone who sees himself as having already reached his appointed perfection, and has rid himself of defect and blemish can be certain that he has not even begun to take upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. For, if but once he had experienced this yoke, he would have realized that as yet he consisted mostly of blemishes and imperfections.

(The Seer of Lublin)

Haftorah: Shoftim 11:1-33

An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to comprehend truth does not make it untrue. Just as in the Parsha this week, Man is left uncomprehending the law of the *Parah Adumah* — the workings of the spiritual world — so too are the workings of history mysterious to all except He who writes history. Thus, the Haftorah depicts the 'unhistorical' rise of Yiftah to the position of chief despite his lowly beginning in life.

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Pirkei Avos

Perek 5

A Matter of Time

There were ten generations from Adam to Noach to teach us how long-suffering Hashem is, for all those generations angered Him until He finally brought the Flood upon them."

(Avos 5:2)

This teaches us not to wonder how Hashem allows the nations to oppress us for so long. Remember that Hashem waited 1656 years from the creation of the world before bringing the Flood. When the time comes those who oppress us will receive what they deserve just as the Generation of the Flood received their just deserts. Just wait patiently for it's only a matter of time...

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