

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**F**or there is no bread and there is no water, and our souls are disgusted by the insubstantial bread” (Bamidbar 21:5). This complaint about the "mun" (manna), the heavenly bread that fell six days a week to feed the nation, is puzzling. Why, after 39 years of eating it everyday, did they now despise it? Was it always underappreciated, with these feelings finally stated openly? Were their short tempers (see 21:4), which resulted from the trip away from Hor HuHur in the hot sun (see Chizkuni), responsible for bringing latent dissatisfaction to the surface? Or, were there other factors involved in bringing about this unhappiness with the mun?

Or HaChayim and Kli Yakar suggest that the nation was complaining that they needed to carbo-load (okay, maybe that wasn't the term they used, but you get the idea) before traveling, and the mun was digested too easily. This may seem strange, since they had done a lot of traveling in the desert throughout the 40 years on the same diet. Nevertheless, they had stayed in Kadesh for 19 years (see Rashi on Devarim 1:46), and the trip from Kadesh to Hor HuHur wasn't that long (compare Bamidbar 19:16 and 20:23; see also Torah Sh'laima, Bamidbar 20:171-172), so this was their first long trip in almost two decades (over which time the rest of the older generation had died). It is therefore not so difficult to suggest that the complaint was based on the nation's perception of how a diet of (just) mun affected travel.

Rashi, based on Yoma 75b, says that the nation was concerned that the mun created no waste, and were afraid that their innards would explode. This presents a similar problem, as they had been eating mun without creating waste, and without exploding, for 39 years. Several years ago (see <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/chukas.pdf> <<http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/chukas.pdf>>, page 4), I suggested that just as Moshe's body was cleansed during the six days that the "cloud" covered him on Mt. Sinai (see Yoma 4b), the nation assumed that they had no waste because of the "clouds of glory" that enveloped them in the desert. However, now that Aharon had died and the "clouds of glory" left (temporarily), they were afraid that the waste would start to build up inside them, and cause problems. Another

possibility is based on the notion that the nation purchased produce from merchants who brought real food out to them whenever they were near civilization (see Torah Sh'laima, Bamidbar 21:34). Since Kadesh is near the border of Edom (19:16), if the nation was buying real food from their "neighbors" (see Devarim 2:28-29), their bodies would have produced waste all those years. Now, after leaving Kadesh and for the first time in (almost) two decades not having waste, they were concerned that it was building up inside them.

Chizkuni, based on Bechor Shor, suggests that when Moshe asked Edom for permission to pass through their land (20:17), the nation became excited about the prospect of eating from the produce of the Promised Land. After Edom refused, the disappointment in being "stuck" with just the mun led to the complaint about it. It could be suggested that after being able to purchase real food from merchants while at Kadesh, moving away and being limited to only mun as they resumed their desert travels changed their perspective. Compared to having no food in the barren desert, the mun was greatly appreciated, but compared to a diet that included all the different foods available near Edom, being limited to just the mun triggered discontentment.

Another possibility is based last year's discussion (<http://RabbiDMK.posterous.com/parashas-balak-5770> <<http://RabbiDMK.posterous.com/parashas-balak-5770>>) regarding what would have happened had Edom given permission to cross through their land. The assumption most work with is that the Children of Israel would have gone straight into the Promised Land (from the south). However, in both Bamidbar (20:17-19) and Shoftim (11:17), no mention is made of entering the Promised Land after passing through Edom. The request of Sichon, on the other hand, includes passing through "until we cross the Jordan (River) to the land that Hashem our G-d is giving to us" (Devarim 2:29). In Shoftim as well (11:19), the request of Sichon was to "pass through your land until my place." It would seem, then, that the intention was never to enter the Land from the south; the plan had always been to enter across from Yericho, from the Plains of Moav. The problem was having to pass through Edom and Moav to get there, so Moshe asked both countries, at the same time, "while Israel lived at Kadesh" (see Shoftim 11:17), permission to do so. This is supported by maps (i.e. Atlas Daas Mikra, page 51), which place Kadesh directly south of the Dead Sea and just west of Edom.

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Crossing through Edom would then bring them further away from the Promised Land, not into it. If, on the other hand, they were trying to get to the Plains of Moav, crossing through Edom is much closer than going around it. The very fact that the nation had to go around Edom (21:4) indicates that Kadesh was west of Edom; otherwise, they wouldn't have to "go around" it, just move further north along its border.

The request to pass through Edom included a promise not to use their own food and drink, buying all of their sustenance from Edom instead (Rashi on 20:17). Would these purchases be paid for with public funds, or would each person/family have to buy whatever they wanted/needed? If each family had to buy their own provisions (despite not having to pay for the mun or for water), Moshe would have to get their approval first, or at least inform them of the game plan. Even if Moshe and the rest of the leadership would purchase it for the nation (a logistical nightmare, especially the distribution), the nation had to be made aware of what would happen if Edom agreed. This explains why, after Edom initially refused, the "Children of Israel" (as opposed to Moshe, or just plain "Israel," see Rashi on 21:21) asked again (20:19); they couldn't understand why Edom refused, so had to clarify for themselves that they really did, spelling out the conditions in other terms in case Edom didn't understand the original request.

Having been told that, if Edom and Moav agree, they would no longer have to travel through the desert, the nation was excited about eating only real food and traveling only through habitable territory. When they found out that permission was not granted, they were upset about having to travel through the desert (21:4) and about having to eat the same old mun. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha points out to us the inscrutable face, so to speak, of G-d and the difficulties embedded in our relationship with the infinite. The parsha opens with the famous commandment and ritual of the red heifer, which according to Jewish tradition defies all human rational understanding. It is the

ultimate "I told you to do it, so do it and don't ask any questions!" instruction in the Torah.

The ritual defiles the pure and purifies the defiled. It is technical and detailed in the utmost and requires an unblemished animal of red color without black hairs appearing on its body. The Mishna in tractate Parah labors to ferret out all of the details inherent in this ritual but the basic mystery that underlies all discussion of the matter can never be satisfactorily addressed.

We are brought face to face with the fact that finite humans cannot fathom the infinite Creator and truly understand His motives and reasons for the commandments of the Torah. The Torah warned us of this fact when it said: "... humans cannot see Me and live."

Our great teacher Moshe was rebuffed in his attempt to understand more than what mortals could achieve in understanding G-d's conduct, so to speak, in matters of this world. That is the great lesson of the red heifer—the clear divide between human rational understanding and the Divine will. It humbles us to think that there are things that we cannot understand, puzzles that we cannot solve, knots that we cannot unravel. But those are the facts of human existence.

In this week's parsha we are witness to another event that is not easily understood. Moshe is barred from entry into the Land of Israel. Though the Torah gives us the reason that he smote the rock instead of speaking to it at Mei Merivah, the commentators to the Torah searched for more substantial reasons to justify the punishment of this great person for what apparently is a relatively minor offense.

At the end of all of the explanations we are again faced with the reality that we just cannot understand the ways of the infinite Creator as He deals with humans. The men of the Enlightenment, both Jews and non-Jews, blinded by their own arrogance, rejected the Torah and eventually G-d since they could not rationally understand everything about it. Their motto was and is: "If I don't understand it then it does not exist or have relevance for me."

But all of us, even the most knowledgeable and intelligent among us, know that there are mysteries in life that are beyond our ability to find a solution. Moshe's fate is certainly one of those mysteries. And again, that is the reason that the Torah tells us of this incident so that we, like Moshe, realize that we cannot peer beyond the veil of Heaven.

The entire issue of the righteous suffering and the evildoers prospering gnaws at our faith and equilibrium. Yet the realization that we will never really understand these matters should serve as a solace and comfort for us. We must accept our finite state as we deal with the infinite Torah. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein—*Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the profoundest mysteries of the Torah is the law of the red heifer, in which an individual who has become ritually defiled by contact with a corpse is purified by a Kohen-priest, who sprinkles him with a mixture of burnt ashes of a red heifer with water, into which must be thrust a piece of cedar wood, branches of hyssop and a scarlet thread of wool (Numbers 19:1-6).

The strangest aspect of this ritual is the fact that while the impure person upon whom the mixture is sprinkled emerges purified, the Kohen-priests involved in the purification all become defiled. How can the very same heifer simultaneously be a purifying agent and a defiling instrument? It is no wonder that our Talmudic Sages applied the words of King Solomon, wisest of all mortals, to the mystery of the red heifer. "I attempted to be wise, but it only moved further away from my understanding" (Kohelet 7:23).

Further, why does the Torah record this particular ritual here, at the conclusion of the desert sojourn of the Israelites? Rav Abraham Ibn Ezra explains that these laws were also given at Sinai, but were included in this context because the ritual must be prepared and performed by the Kohen-priests. But the rules of the Kohen-priests belong much more to the books of Exodus and Leviticus than the book of Numbers. Why is the ritual of the red heifer sandwiched between the sins of the scouts and of Korah in the two previous portions and the transgression of Moses striking the rock in the segment immediately following? Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik suggested that the ritual of the red heifer may be compared to a hapless individual who is drowning in thick mud. Certainly, he must be rescued, but the rescuer who lifts the victim from the quagmire, will be soiled in the process. Likewise, those who prepare the mixture of purification are themselves defiled by it!

My revered teacher went one step further. "Is it fair," he asked, "that those who attempt to purify, themselves become impure in this fashion?" He explained that if we understand that it is the religious leadership who are responsible for purifying society, then had the priest-kohanim uplifted humanity to higher spiritual and ethical attainments, people would not have become contaminated by impurity in the first place. Therefore, it is only right that this same religious leadership take the risk of becoming defiled; when the nation as a whole is alienated from Torah and sanctity. The leaders must leave the ivory tower of the Bet-Midrash (Study Hall) and reach out to the masses of Jews wherever and in whatever state they may be. As G-d tells Moses, spiritually ensconced in the ethereal realms of the heavens receiving the Oral Law, "Go

down, descend from your supernal heights, because your nation is acting perversely with the golden calf; if your nation is sinning, what do I need you for?!" (B.T. Berakhot 32a).

Religious leadership must assume responsibility for the defection of the masses of Jews. The heifer or cow, usually a symbol of maternal concern, commitment and nourishment, is changed from the purity of white to the sinfulness of blood red in the detail of this ritual. Death in the pristine and primordial period of the Garden of Eden, is the result of transgression, a punishment for straying beyond the proper boundaries of conduct set by G-d. The materialistic and hedonistic worship of the golden calf, the lazy and apathetic sin of the scouts in the desert, are all acts of impurity which lead - at the very least - to spiritual death. And this is the destiny of the desert generation.

Why did these freed and empowered slaves who refused to conquer the Promised Land, opt to remain in the desert? First and foremost, because they did not wish to assume responsibility. Their lives in the desert were virtually free of responsibility; food in the form of manna descended from heaven, divine rays of splendor provided them with shelter, and a "cloud by day, pillar of fire by night" told them when to journey and where to settle. They lived free of worries and obligations.

Conquering Israel meant growing up, taking risks and assuming responsibility for our national destiny and mission to the world. Some thought they were on too high a spiritual level to get their feet dirty in the trenches (symbolized by the tall cedar tree); others thought they were incapable of acting with such courage and strength in the face of the unknown (symbolized by the lowly hyssop). Both groups are guilty of sin symbolized by the scarlet wool. Moses who had courageously struck a threatening Egyptian task-master at the beginning of his career is now reduced to striking an inanimate rock in displaced anger against his complaining and rebelling nation. The timeless message of the red-heifer to every Jewish leader in every generation is that you must learn to assume the risks of responsibility!

The Luubaviche Rebbe took responsibility for Jews all over the world. He inspired hundreds, if not thousands of his disciples to become his emissaries in communities throughout the world, each one assuming a small share of the enormously heavy burden carried with such grace and faith by their revered Rebbe.

The Rebbe provided a magnificent addendum to Rav Soloveitchik's interpretation of the ritual of the Red Heifer. Yes, those who prepare the mixture of purification become defiled in purifying those who are impure. However, the one who actually sprinkles the mixture upon the defiled individual and thereby effectuates the actual purification, himself remains pure. Hence the Rebbe made a promise to each of his

shlichim (emissaries) all over the world - to those individuals who did the actual purifying themselves, the junior partners of the Rebbe who took responsibility to perform G-d's work of purification that they and their families were guaranteed to remain pure, no matter how isolated they may be. It is through these emissaries that the Rebbe's legacy lives on © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There are differing opinions concerning the meaning of "hok" (commonly translated as statute), the type of law discussed at the beginning of this week's portion. (Numbers 19)

Some maintain that "hok" is a law that although not understood today, one day in the future will be understood.

The most mainstream approach to the meaning of "hok," is that it is a law that does not and will not ever have a reason besides the fact that it is a decree from G-d. For this reason alone, it must be kept. In the words of the Talmud "It is an enactment from Me, and you are not permitted to criticize it." (Yoma 67b)

The idea that a law must be observed even if it has no rationale, runs contrary to the modern, critical approach to law-that everything must have a reasonable explanation. However, this mainstream approach to hok is at the very core of the Jewish legal process.

That process is based on a belief in Torah mi-Sinai, the law given by G-d at Sinai to which the Jewish people committed itself. Torah mi-Sinai is a form of heteronomous law, a structure of law that operates independent of any individual or group.

Torah mi-Sinai reflects a system of ethics that comes from G-d. Halakha (from the root halakh, "to go,") is not random; it rather guides us, and is the mechanism through which individuals and society can reach an ideal ethical plateau. In the words of King Solomon: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." (Proverbs 3:17) One of the challenges of halakha is to understand how this law contributes to the repairing of the world (tikkun olam).

This system of G-d ethics differs from ethical humanism. Ethical humanism is solely based on what human beings consider to be proper conduct. Yet, this can be a dangerous approach to deciding law. Human thinking can be relative. What is unethical to one person is ethical to another. Freud is purported to have said, "When it comes to self deception, human beings are geniuses."

If however, the law at its foundation comes from G-d, it becomes inviolate. No human being can declare it null and void. Heteronomous law assures that one does not succumb to one's subjective notions or tastes when the law does not suit her or him. Therefore the

law ought to be kept even when its ethical underpinnings are not understood.

And this in no small measure is why the idea of "hok" is so central. It reminds us of the limits of the human mind. As Rabbi Elie Munk points out: "An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to understand truth does not make it untrue." © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Without water, life cannot survive. Nonetheless, millions of Jewish people survived in the parched and barren desert for forty years. How was this possible? Only through a miracle. During their travels through the desert, the Jewish people were accompanied by a rock from which an abundant supply of water constantly flowed. It was called Miriam's Well, because it existed in the merit of Moses' older sister Miriam, who was a righteous woman and a prophetess in her own right.

In this week's portion, we read about Miriam's death only months before the entry of the Jewish people into the Holy Land. The Torah also tells us that Miriam's Well ceased to function after she died, and the people were faced with a critical water shortage. They besieged Moses and demanded that he provide water for them, for otherwise they would die. G-d told Moses to take his staff in hand and speak to the rock. Instead of speaking, however, Moses struck the rock with his staff. The waters gushed forth again, but Moses forfeited the opportunity of entering the Holy Land. Because of his mistake, he passed away while the Jewish encampment was massed on the east bank of the Jordan River.

A number of questions come to mind. Why was the water given to the Jewish people only in the merit of Miriam? Why couldn't the water continue after her death without Moses speaking to the rock? Why didn't G-d want to leave the faucet open for the Jewish people?

The commentators explain that one of the most striking features of water is that its viscosity allows it to adapt perfectly to its surroundings; water will naturally assume the shape of any container into which it flows. Symbolically, Miriam represented this quality. She was able to adapt her faith and her steadfast fealty to G-d's will under any and all circumstances. Come what may, Miriam shone as the paragon of staunch faith.

Miriam was born during the darkest chapter of the Jewish bondage in Egypt. Her name, recalling the word marah, bitter, evokes the bitterness of the Jewish condition. When she was just a young girl, Pharaoh decreed that all male babies be thrown into the river.

Husbands and wives separated in order to avoid producing children who would be drowned, but Miriam persuaded her parents to have faith and remain together. As a result, her brother Moses, redeemer of the Jewish people, was born. Miriam was the famous midwife Puah, who crooned to the infants when they were born.

Like water, Miriam adapted to the oppression and the suffering and remained strong in her faith. Therefore, in her merit, G-d provided the Jewish people with miraculous water in the desert. And when she died, a new demonstration of supreme faith was required. G-d wanted Moses to draw water from the rock by speaking alone.

A man hired a wagon driver to take him to a distant city. As they traveled through dense forests and over craggy mountains, the passenger sat relaxed in his seat, enjoying the scenery.

Suddenly, a thunderstorm arose. The passenger told the wagon driver to pull over, but he insisted that they could not do so safely. They had to push on through the storm.

The passenger began to tremble with fear. "Don't worry," the wagon driver reassured him. "All will be well."

"But how do I know that?"

"Because I am telling you so," the wagon driver replied. "You were not afraid when we were traveling through dangerous forests and over steep mountain roads on the edge of sheer cliffs. You relied in my skills. Well, do you think I've never driven through a thunderstorm? You can trust me."

In our own lives, we find it easier to have faith when things are going reasonably well. When we seem to be on the road to success and encounter trials and struggles, we have faith that we will ultimately succeed. But what happens when things are falling apart, Heaven forbid? What happens when they become stormy? Those are the times that test our faith. Those are also the times when our faith can spell the difference between hope and despair. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Chukas. "Zos chukas haTorah asher tzivah Hashem (this is the 'chok' of the Torah that Hashem has commanded) [19:2]." The Torah is filled with many different types of commandments. There are those that make sense to us and those which do not. The understanding of the 'chukim' is beyond us. Our parsha begins with the laws of the para adumah- the red heifer that purified those who had become ritually impure by coming in contact with a corpse.

Why didn't the parsha begin by stating that this is the 'chok' of the para- adumah or that this is the

'chok' of taharah (ritual purity) or tum'ah (ritual impurity)? Why was this 'chok' labeled as the 'chok' of the entire Torah?

We've discussed previously that tum'ah comes to fill the void created by an absence of kedusha (holiness). A person's kedusha comes as a result of becoming a 'G-dly' person. How does one go about doing that? Only through connecting to Hashem through his Torah. Without that, anyone's guess is as good as anyone else's. No one has the moral high ground to declare what is morally correct or incorrect. The 'Toras Chaim'-the instructions for life- that Hashem gave us in the guise of the Torah is the only source of what is intrinsically good and intrinsically evil. Through that, one can become a 'G-dly' person. Through that one can attain a level of kedusha. Only through that kedusha did the entity of tum'ah (ritual impurity) come about.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that this is why the parsha began "Zos chukas haTorah" (this is the 'chok' of the Torah) as opposed to "this is the 'chok' of tum'ah". The Torah, with the opportunity it affords a person to ascend to dizzying spiritual heights, created that eventuality of tum'ah at the time of a person's death-the time when that opportunity is no longer available. "Zos chukas haTorah" is therefore the proper introduction to the laws of the para adumah-the procedure of purifying oneself from the tum'ah of coming in contact with a corpse.

The Ohr HaChaim also offers a different interpretation. "Zos chukas haTorah!" If a person adheres to this mitzva (commandment), the Torah equates that to adherence to all of the mitzvos. Keeping the 'chok' reveals a trusting decision to keep the laws of Hashem taught throughout the entire Torah. Not only the ones that make sense to us.

A 'chok' demonstrates the realization that I can't understand everything. The realization that our finite minds cannot come close to fathoming the depths of our Creator's understanding. We all realize that a three year old child can't possibly understand all of the calculations that go into a directive given to them by a mature adult. We must also realize that the gulf between the understanding of a three year old compared to that of an adult is infinitesimal compared to the gulf between our understanding and the understanding of Hashem. "Zos chukas haTorah"-this is the litmus test for the entire Torah.

As we mentioned above, the Torah is called 'Toras Chaim'-instructions for life. The idea is for a person to take these Torah concepts and apply them to everyday life. A 'chok' teaches us that we don't truly understand any of the mitzvos. Even those such as: don't steal, don't murder, that we think we understand, in fact we only have a minute and shallow understanding of what the Creator actually had in 'mind'.

That concept must then be applied to our everyday happenings, even those removed from the realm of mitzva observance. To have the understanding

that if I'm stuck in traffic and therefore late for an appointment, I'm exactly where Hashem wants me to be. Even if it doesn't make sense to me and I think I'd have been much better off arriving on time to my job interview. "Zos chukas haTorah"-accepting that life's happenings aren't haphazard. Everything is with a plan from above. It's better to miss that interview if the hashgacha pratis (Divine providence) has arranged things in such a way. This also applies to the more harsh realities of life...

This past week was the yahrtzeit (a yearly observance of the Hebrew date of a person's death) of my sister, Devorah Pesel bas Asher Chaim, a"h. Living in Israel, I usually don't get to visit the cemetery on her yahrtzeit. This year, having been visiting the States I was able to. The pain of a sister leaving this world at the age of twelve isn't erased even after twenty five years. One always thinks of the different, meaningful stages of life that were never reached and the relationship that didn't develop...

We are so 'locked up' in this world that it is extremely hard to see past it. Marriage, parenting, relationships seem so crucially important to us. It's hard to accept a life that didn't have them. But our vision, as a result of being so 'locked in', is very skewed.

Imagine a person who took a child to a playground. The child had a pleasant time going on the swings, the monkey-bars and the carousel but missed out on the see-saw. Imagine that person having a burning anger that the child missed out on the see-saw. That would clearly be a case of overreacting. It would have been nice if the child would have had a chance to go on the see-saw, but in the overall scheme of life, it's really not all that important.

Many of the aspects of life that we see as being so essential, are nothing more than a ride on the see-saw in the overall scheme of eternity. Each person experiences those aspects of life which are needed to contribute to their eternity. Any stage that a person didn't reach would have been as unessential and extraneous as that ride on the see-saw.

"Zos chukas haTorah." It's not simply a mitzva. It's a way of life. It's a key to happiness-to dealing with and understanding the world. Without it, the world is a jungle. With it, a perfectly synchronized orchestra. "Zos chukas haTorah." © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, reveals to us a secret dimension of this significant date. In fact, as we will discover, Rosh Chodesh possesses the potential of assuming a greater personality than ever seen before. Its heightened effect will be so powerful that it will be likened to the impact of one of our three Yomim Tovim.

The prophet opens the haftorah with a fiery message regarding the privilege of sacrifice in the Bais Hamikdash. Yeshaya declares in the name of Hashem, "The heavens are My throne and the earth is My foot stool. What home can you build for Me and what is an appropriate site for My Divine Presence?" The Radak explains that Hashem was rejecting the notion of His requiring an earthly abode wherein to reside. Even the span of the universe barely serves as a throne where upon Hashem rests, how much more so our small Bais Hamikdash. But the purpose of His earthly abode is in order for us to experience His Divine presence. And it is in this uplifting environment that we offer sacrifices to Hashem and commit ourselves to fulfilling His will.

Yeshaya continues and expresses Hashem's view of the Jewish people's sacrifices at that time. Hashem says, "One who slaughters the ox is likened to smiting a man; he who sacrifices the sheep is akin to slashing a dog's neck; a meal offering is like swine's blood.....(66:3) The Radak explains Hashem's disturbance and informs us of the attitude of those times. The people would heavily engage in sin and then appear in the Bais Hamikdash to offer their sacrificial atonement. However, this uplifting experience was short-lived and they would return home and revert to their sinful ways. Hashem responded and rejected their sacrifices because the main facet of the sacrifice was missing, the resolve to elevate oneself. From Hashem's perspective, a sacrifice without an accompanying commitment was nothing more than an act of slashing a useful animal.

The prophet continues and notes the stark contrast between the above mentioned and the humble and low spirited people. Hashem says, "But to this I gaze, to the humble and low spirited and to the one who trembles over My word." (66:2) These humble people do not need the experience of the Bais Hamikdash. They sense the Divine Presence wherever they are and respond with proper reverence and humility. Unlike the first group who limits Hashem's presence to the walls of the Bais Hamikdash, the second views the earth as Hashem's footstool and reacts accordingly. In fact we are told earlier by Yeshaya that they are actually an abode for His presence as is stated, "So says Hashem, "I rest in the exalted and sanctified spheres and amongst the downtrodden and low spirited ones."(57: 15)

In a certain sense we resemble the first group when relating to our Rosh Chodesh experience. Rosh Chodesh is a unique holiday because its entire festivity consists of a special Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. There are nospecific acts of Mitzva related to Rosh Chodesh and there is no halachic restriction from productive activity. However, the first day of the month provides the opportunity for introspect. After our serious contemplation over the previous month's achievements we welcome the opportunity of a fresh start. We offer a sacrifice in atonement for the past and prepare

ourselves for the challenges of the new month. Unfortunately this new opportunity is met with trepidation and is always accompanied by mixed feelings of joy and remorse. Because each Rosh Chodesh we realize how far we have strayed during the previous month and we look towards the next month to be an improvement over the past.

This is the limited status of our present Rosh Chodesh. However, as we will soon learn, a greater dimension of Rosh Chodesh was intended to be and will eventually become a reality. The Tur in Orach Chaim (417) quotes the Pirkei D'R'Eliezer which reveals that Rosh Chodesh was actually intended to be a full scale Yom Tov. The Tur quotes his brother R' Yehuda who explains that the three Yomim Tovim correspond to our three patriarchs and that the twelve days of Rosh Chodesh were intended to correspond to the twelve tribes. This link reveals that each Rosh Chodesh truly has a unique aspect to itself and that one of the Biblical tribes' remarkable qualities is available to us each month. However, as the Tur explains, due to an unfortunate error of the Jewish people this opportunity has been, to a large degree, withheld from us.

But in the era of Mashiach this error will be rectified and the experience of Rosh Chodesh will actually reach its intended capacity. Yeshaya reflects upon this and says at the close of our haftorah, "And it will be that from month to month.... all will come and prostrate themselves before Hashem." (66:23) The Psikta Rabbsi (1:3) explains that in the days of Mashiach we will have the privilege of uniting with Hashem every Rosh Chodesh. All Jewish people will come to the Bais Hamikdash each month and experience His Divine Presence. During the illustrious era of Mashiach sin will no longer exist and Rosh Chodesh will be viewed exclusively as an opportunity for elevation. Each month will provide us its respective quality and opportunity which we will celebrate through the Rosh Chodesh festivities. The sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh will reflect our great joy over being with Hashem and will no longer contain any aspect of remorse or sin. In those days, the experience of His Divine Presence in the Bais Hamikdash will be perpetuated throughout the month and the entire period will become one uplifting experience.

This, according to the Maharit Algazi is the meaning of our Mussaf section wherein we state, "When they would offer sacrifices of favor and goats as sin offerings.... May you establish a new altar in Zion.... and we will offer goats with favor." With these words we are acknowledging the fact that the goats which had previously served as sin offerings will now become expressions of elevation. Without the need to reflect upon our shortcomings of the previous month, Rosh Chodesh will be greeted with total happiness, and we will welcome with great joy the uplifting spiritual opportunity of each respective month. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
HARAV YEHUDA AMITAI ZT"l

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“G-d said to Moshe and to Aharon, 'Since you did not believe in Me, to sanctify before the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the land which I have given to them.'" (Bamidbar 20:12)

Three main explanations are offered for the sin of Mei Meriva:

1. The Rambam, in the fourth chapter of his "Shemonah Perakim," explains that Moshe's sin lay in his unjustified anger at Am Yisrael: "Hear now, you rebels..." (Bamidbar 20:10).

2. Ramban cites the opinion of R. Chananel that the problem was that Moshe said, "Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?" Obviously, the miracle was an act of G-d and not attributable to Moshe or Aharon.

3. Rashi understands Moshe's sin as having struck the rock rather than having spoken to it.

According to the first two explanations, we can understand why Moshe was punished. Although his misdeed was relatively minor, we know that "the Holy One, blessed be He, is exacting with the righteous to the extent of a strand of hair," and according to both understandings he did something wrong.

Rashi's explanation, on the other hand, is a different matter. Every time we reach this week's parasha and I read Rashi's explanation, I am startled and shaken anew: Moshe was not punished because he did something wrong, but rather because he could have acted in a better manner and he failed to do so!

The Gemara tells us about two instances in which a verse from the Torah caused one of the Tannaim to weep. We learn: "It is written: 'He who does these shall never be moved' (Tehillim 15:5). When Rabban Gamliel would reach this verse he would weep, saying: 'Whoever does all of these shall not be moved, but whoever is deficient in (even) one of them-shall be moved.'" (Makkot 24a)

A similar anecdote is recorded in Kiddushin 81b: "Although he was not aware of it, he is still guilty, and shall bear his transgression' (Vayikra 5:17). When Rabbi Akiva would reach this verse he would weep: If the Torah says, concerning a person who meant to eat permitted fat but actually ate chelev (forbidden fat), 'Although he was not aware of it, he is still guilty, and shall bear his transgression', how much more so concerning one who meant to eat chelev and actually ate chelev!"

The verses describing the sin of Moshe, at least according to Rashi's interpretation of them, should similarly lead us to weep if we internalize the message

which they convey to each and every one of us. Not only an improper act is considered a transgression that is deserving of punishment, but even merely refraining from performing a good and proper act! This should be a strong incentive for us always to consider what is the best and most appropriate thing we can do, and to act accordingly.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“Let them take for you a Red Heifer” [Bamidbar 19:2]. Rashi comments, “Let them take for you-it should belong to them. Just as they removed their golden rings for their calf, so they should bring this as atonement, from their own possessions. ‘A red heifer’-this can be compared to the son of a maidservant who dirtied the king’s palace. So they decreed: Let the mother come and clean up the filth left by her son. In the same way, let the heifer come and atone for the sin of the calf.” [19:22].

The Torah teaches us that the heifer purifies a person from the “tum’a” of contact with a dead body. But how could the sages transform the concept of purification into one of atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf?

In the Hagadda we say, “If He had brought us to Mount Sinai but had not given us the Torah, it would have been sufficient.” This is a remarkable declaration-what good would it have done to arrive at Mount Sinai without receiving the Torah?

The answer is that the arrival at Mount Sinai alone provided great benefits. The sages taught us, “When the serpent had relations with Chavah, it impregnated her with filth. When Bnei Yisrael stood at Mount Sinai, the filth was removed.” [Sabbat 145b]. That is, when the people approached Mount Sinai the shame of Adam’s sin was removed, and the concept of death that had been decreed as a result of his sin was cancelled. And this is what the sages meant when they declared, “Engraved on the Tablets” [Shemot 32:16] -- do not read this as ‘engraved’ (charut) but rather ‘freedom’ (cheirut), freedom from the Angel of Death” [Shemot Rabba 32:2].

However, there was a problem. Like a bride who committed adultery under the wedding canopy, Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Golden Calf, and they were once again sentenced to death. The sages linked this to the verse, “I say that you are Divine, and you are all elevated beings” [Tehillim 82:6]. “G-d says, I thought to give you the Torah since you were like the angels, but in the end ‘You will die like Adam’ [82:7], since you corrupted your deeds like he did” [Rashi]. That is, death once again returned to the world because of the sin of the calf. And that is why the Red Heifer was instituted-in order to allow purification from the impurity of death and

removal of the shame of death. And that is how the mother, the cow, atones for the filth of her child.

One factor remains for us to explain. How is this atonement an expression of the relationship between the cow and the calf? Is it only because of the way a mother is responsible for her child, or is something deeper involved? This can be understood from the words of the Maharal, who writes that “this is a hint of a remarkably wise factor.” In the sin of the Golden Calf the people worshipped an idol, thereby disconnecting the prime force from the created objects-the world from the Creator-as if to say that the created world itself is the prime mover. For this reason Bnei Yisrael created the calf using a machine. This is meant to imply that something can be created without a prime force to give it birth-corresponding to their statement, “This is your god, Yisrael” [Shemot 32:4]. The Torah therefore declared: let the mother come and clean up the mess left by her child. The heifer will show everybody that she gave birth to the calf, that it was not created out of a void. And when we return to once again attach ourselves to the true source of all life, then death will no longer reign.

“The Red Heifer is a source of atonement, and it also purifies from contact with the dead. This is related to the eradication of death from the roots, raising the world from the depths of its sin-from the sin of the land and from the complaint by the moon.” [Orot, page 26].

RABBI ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

“Take the staff, and you [Moses] and Aaron should assemble the people. Speak to the rock and it will bring forth its water...” (Numbers 20:8)

Why did Hashem want Moses to speak to the rock? Hashem wanted to teach us a lesson, which would not have been apparent, had the rock brought forth its water only after being hit. If a rock, which doesn’t hear or speak, still obeys Hashem without being coerced, then we, who are alive and sentient, certainly should listen to our Creator of our own free will (Ramban elaborating on Rashi). © 1995 Rabbi Z. Itzkowitz

