

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Chukat	23 June 2018	10 Tammuz 5778	Num. 19:1-22:1	Jdg. 11:1-33	John 19:38-42

This week's Torah portion consists of the Red Heifer (Red Cow) which bring attacks from many corners of the religion. It also contains Hashem's declaration that Moshe will not enter the Promised Land. Let us review of Hashem's commands before we go any further. There are three categories of laws Hashem gave us. They are: 1. *Mishpatim* are laws that are simple, common sense. We don't have think too much into it. For example, "You shall not murder".<sup>1</sup> 2. *E•dut* (עדות / testimony) are types of mitzvot for something that happened. For example, "You may tell it in the ears of your son and of your son's son..."<sup>2</sup> It is a testimony of past events, such as Pesach. 3. *Chukim* (decrees / statues) are the *mitzvot* (commands) that doesn't make sense. For example, a Red Heifer, or to eat certain food.

Many heathens use the decree of the Red Heifer to question Hashem and His commandments. How could a priest become impure (טָמֵא *tamei*) when he sprinkles cow ashes mixed with water upon an impure person to become pure (טָהוֹר *tahor*)? The answer is "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? [Is He] not One?" (Job 14:4) The Midrash<sup>3</sup> responds that the pure (righteous) Abraham descended from the impure (wicked) Terah. Hezekiah descended from Ahaz; Josiah descended from Amon, Mordechai came from Sim'i, etc. The Midrash continues with a rebuttal: Who decreed that it be so? Is it not Hashem, the Unique One of the world?

Hashem gave us the Torah, that contain two parts: hidden Torah and revealed Torah which corresponds to love (*Ahavah*) and awe (*Yireh*) attribute of Hashem. The attribute of *Yireh* is finite because when we observe His wonders we fear him, and the aspect of His might and greatness places His yoke over our heads which is the revealed aspect of the Torah. The attribute of *Ahavah* is infinite because when someone compliments you, your heart soars and brings joy to you. So, the revealed has boundaries and finite because one cannot be in a state of fear, whereas love has no such limits.<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of "This is the decree of the Torah" is same as "For YHWH Elohim is a Sun and Shield" (Psa. 84:11). The sun's brightness is infinite, while a shield represents boundary, like a partition placed before the sun to shield us and block out its light. Love is like the sun – infinite, with no boundary and fear is finite. Therefore, the Torah is given in two forms: hidden and revealed. If all the laws in the Torah is revealed, then it would be finite (limited). The hidden part of the Torah allows us to interpret them with our own understanding, thereby making the Torah infinite.<sup>5</sup>

The law of the Red Heifer, as mentioned previously, cannot be embraced by one's understanding mind. Rather, it must be accepted on faith, with unquestioning trust that Hashem's wisdom will guide us for our best interest. So, the law of the Red Heifer is teaching us to accept His judgment and bow to His will even though it does not agree with common practicality.

Aside from Moshe, King Shlomo (Solomon) was one of the wisest men, but he exclaimed, "I said, I am wise; but it was far from me." (Eccl. 7:23) The sages explain that Shlomo with his wisdom would be able

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:13

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 10:2

<sup>3</sup> Midrash Rabbah 19:1

<sup>4</sup> Noam Elimelech, p. 246

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 247

to understand the reason for the Red Heifer. But he did not succeed. Moshe was the only one to whom Hashem explained. Shlomo found a verse which says **לְטָמֵא, מֵעֵפֶר, שֶׁרֶפֶת הַחֵטְאֹת** (*la•ta•me me•a•far s're•fat ha•cha•tat*, for the contaminated person / some of the ashes / of the burning / of the purification)<sup>6</sup>. While studying the Torah, he found a portion that alludes to his name – highlighted above. He arranged these letters as (ה.מ.ל.ש.), he believed with due diligent study he could understand the meaning of the Red Heifer. An angel came to Shlomo and said, “That which is written in the “proper order” is the “words of truth.””<sup>7</sup> The acronym says “to Moshe” alluding that the secret of the Red Heifer is only revealed to him.

Now, we will return to the Red Heifer and discuss its meanings in detail. The number “seven” is hidden in Numbers chapter 19:<sup>8</sup>

1. Cow mentioned 5 times (vs. 2, 5, 6, 6, 10) and the word “purification” (vs. 9, 17; **חֵטְאֹת**, *cha•tat*) related directly to the Cow.
2. Seven burnings using: hide, flesh, blood, waste, a cedar wood, a hyssop, and a crimson thread. (vs. 5-6)
3. Seven sprinklings: the blood of red heifer sprinkled seven times toward the Temple. (v. 4)
4. Seven immersions of clothing:
  - a. Preparation stage: (1) slaying of heifer (v. 3); (2) sprinkling of blood (v. 4); (3) throwing in the cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson thread (v. 6) burning of heifer (v. 5)
  - b. Purification stage: (4) the one who burns the heifer (v. 8); (5) the one who gathers ashes (v. 10); (6) the one who sprinkles ash water (v.19); (7) the one who carries the water of sprinkling water (v. 21)
5. Seven references to impure objects:
  - a. Anyone who enters the tent in which lies a corpse
  - b. Anyone who is already in the tent when the corpse was brought in
  - c. Any open vessel that is in the tent
  - d. Anyone who touches one who is slain by the sword
  - e. Anyone who touches one who died naturally
  - f. Anyone who touches a human bone
  - g. Anyone who touches a grave.
6. Seven objects that are render pure by being sprinkled:
  - a. The tent in which the corpse lay
  - b. The vessels that were within the tent
  - c. The people who were within the tent
  - d. One who touched a human bone
  - e. One who touched someone who was slain
  - f. One who touched someone who died
  - g. One who touched a grave.
7. Seven priests: mentioned “kohen” five times (vs. 3, 4, 6,7 [2x]) plus Moshe and Aharon (Psa. 99:6)

Hashem said, “Because you have believed Me not, to set Me apart in the eyes of the children of Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.” (Num. 20:12) This was told to Moshe when he struck the rock instead of talking to it. Let’s review this chapter together.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers 19:17

<sup>7</sup> Vedibarta Bam, Bamidbar, Chukat, p. 146-147

<sup>8</sup> Midrash Rabbah 19:2

Miryam, beloved sister to Moshe and Aharon died in Kadesh. In verses 2-5, the people arose against them for lack of water.

The Talmud<sup>9</sup> explains that Miryam, Moshe, and Aharon were excellent leaders. And because of them, gifts were bestowed upon the Israelites – the well for Miryam, the pillar of cloud for Aharon, and manna for Moshe. When Miryam died, there was no water to drink because the Well dried up. And it returned in the merit of Moshe and Aharon. When Aharon died, the pillar of cloud disappeared. And the Canaanite, the king of Arad (Num. 21:1-3) attacked when he heard the cloud of Glory disappeared. And the cloud of Glory returned in the merit of Moshe. When Moshe died, all three gifts returned as well.

Moshe and Aharon were grieving for their sister's death when the people came against them. Instead of mourning for the death of Miryam, the people demanded for water because the well was dried up when she died. Moshe, despite his grief, he went to Hashem as he always did and asked Him what he should do. Hashem told him to "speak to the rock before their eyes."

The Talmud explains that it has not been even two hours after the death of Miryam when the people demanded water. The sages explain "the rock" traveled with the Israelites in the wilderness providing water for them. When she died, "the boulder" dried up.<sup>10</sup> When Moshe looked for "the rock" but he could not find it. The people began to grumble and complain against him (20:3-5).

"The rock" mentioned in Numbers 20:8 was translated from סֵלָה (*sela*). In Exodus 17:6 also mentions "the rock" which was translated from צִיָּר (*tzur*). When Miryam died *tzur* vanished as its existence was by her merit. Abraham's wife, Sarah also had similar merit. The Zohar teaches that when Sarah died, the light vanished from her tent. It returned only when Rivka married Yitzchak. Moshe was looking for *tzur* but he could not find it. And the Israelites began to complain challenging his authority as a leader for them. So, he struck *sela* and the water gushed out. (20:11) This was one of the explanation provided by the commentators.

We have to remember this is not the first time the Israelites complained about water. The first time they complained was when they shortly after leaving Mitzrim at Marah where all the water was bitter. Hashem told Moshe to throw a bitter tree branch into the water and it became sweet and made the water drinkable.<sup>11</sup>

The second time<sup>12</sup> was when the Israelites were in Refidim. Hashem told Moshe to strike a particular rock with staff and the rock split open and water gushed out. This rock became known as "Miriam's Well", for the miracle was done in her merit. For 40 years, this rock traveled with the people and provided water for them.<sup>13</sup>

There are so many explanations given as to why Moshe, the humblest, the most righteous would disobey Hashem by striking the rock. And what does it mean when Moshe said, "Here now, you rebels; must we fetch you *mayim* (water) out of this rock?" (Num. 20:11) Why did Hashem say, "Because you believed Me not, to set Me apart in the eyes of the children of Yisrael, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them." (Num. 20:12)

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<sup>9</sup> BT, Taanis 9a

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 15:22

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 17:1

<sup>13</sup> Tanchuma, Chukat 21

Rashi<sup>14</sup> says that the *tzur* rolled away and rested among other rocks. Moshe did not know to which rock he should speak, and when he spoke, nothing happened. The people began to mock Moshe, demanding that he draw water from any rock. Moshe got angry and told them, they (Moshe and Aharon) had the power to perform miracles where Hashem had not willed. Therefore, Moshe said, “Must we fetch you *mayim* out of this rock?” (Num. 20:11)

Rashi continues that their sin was so severe because it happened in public. Although they committed a minor infraction, they were punished severely because they desecrated the name of Hashem in the eyes of all. This teaches us how we seriously should take the desecration of Hashem’s name in public.<sup>15</sup>

Ramban says that Moshe did not sin for striking a rock as he was told by Hashem to take the staff with him. Because, the miracle was to be accomplished through either medium. Rather, their sin was “must we fetch you *mayim* out of this rock?” They are implying that they had the power to perform the miracle, and not that their power came from Hashem.<sup>16</sup> He supports his explanation when Hashem said to Moshe, “Because you believed Me not,” (Num. 20:12) implying that this was a failure of faith rather than disobedience or a surrender to anger.

Rambam says that it was Moshe’s anger that led to label the Israelites as “rebels”. Moshe who had been teaching and carrying the burdens of the Israelites for forty years, finally lost his temper and calls them, “you rebels.” The sages teach that the anger and his spoken language, curse was the reason behind Hashem’s proclamation. Moshe loved the congregation of Israel, but he did not have faith in them. Hashem says, “You curse the nation that I blessed!”

Abarbanel agrees that Moshe and Aharon’s sin was not enough for such severe punishment. He says that they were punished for other sins using this event. He says that Moshe was punished for sending spies, and Aharon for his involvement, albeit unwilling, with the sin of the Golden Calf.

The debate continues. Another question that we need to ask is a motive. Why would such a tzaddik disobey Hashem? The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe says in Tikunei Zohar: The rock represents Torah. If Moshe spoke to the rock, the Israelites would connect to Hashem easily and they would see His holiness openly. If everything comes easily, then they would not come out of their comfort zone and they would not have a real genuine connection with Hashem.

However, if the Israelites toiled in the study of Torah. They had to seek Hashem through their study as we do today to have better understanding of Hashem and the connection would be genuine. Moshe knew that that their presence made the Israelite to connect with Hashem easily. Therefore, they knew that they could not enter the Promised Land with them, so their plan was to create a strong bond between the people and Hashem. Thus, Moshe struck the rock, and the Torah descended into this world and its (Torah) light became hidden.

Another opinion is that Moshe struck a rock because he did not want Satan to accuse the Israelites by saying, “Your children, are even worse than an inert rock. The rock does what You want, and Your people for whom You do so much do not perform Your will.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, Moshe intentionally did not speak to the

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<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040 - 1105

<sup>15</sup> Likkutei Sichot, vol. 28, pp. 124-131

<sup>16</sup> Nachmanides, Numbers 20:8

<sup>17</sup> Vedibarta Bam, Bamidbar, p. 151-152

rock and instead he struck it, knowing that such ramification would cost entry to the Promised Land he desperately wanted to enter. But his love for the Israelites were greater than his desire and he made a sacrifice for *Klal Yisrael*. We find similar situation in John 11:47-53, Qayapha, being a Kohen Hagadol for that year prophesied that Yeshua “should die for the people, than for the entire nation.” (John 11:50) Like Moshe, Yeshua gave up his life “for the nation”.

The events occurred in chapter 20 and 21 when the Israelites came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month of their 40<sup>th</sup> year of leaving Mitzrayim (Egypt). Yerushalmi Talmud says that Miryam died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, 2488 after the Creation. When she died, the well dried up and the Israelites arose against Moshe and Aharon. And Aharon died on Mount Hor (Deut. 10:6). He died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Av, four month after the death of Miryam on Mount Hor (Num. 33:39). When he died, the clouds of Glory vanished and the king of Arad waged war against the Israelites (Num. 21:1-3). The Israelites retraced their steps and returned seven stops or eight stops if counting Mount Hor. The people wanted to return to Egypt and began retracing their steps until they were stopped by the tribe of Levi who killed eight families of them, and they in turn killed four families of Levi. “From there they journeyed to Gudgodah; and from Gudgodah to Yotvath, a land of rivers of mayim.” (Deut. 10:7) There are eight families of Israel that are counted at the Exodus but they do not appear in the census of the 40 year, after the conquest of Sihon and Og (Num. 26). On the other hand, there are four families of Levites mentioned in the census in the second year (Num. 3) that are missing in the census of Numbers chapter 26.<sup>18</sup> We will discuss more about their census later in parashat Pinchas.

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<sup>18</sup> Seder Olam, p. 92-95

# ISRAEL'S EXODUS FROM EGYPT AND ENTRY INTO CANAAN

MAP 2

