



Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHAH

ISSUE 15

24th January 2015

BO

4th Shevat 5774

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 10, verses 1 - 11

- ✚ Moshe and Aron warn Pharaoh that a plague of locusts are on their way if Hashem's people are not set free.
- ✚ Pharaoh's advisers implore with Pharaoh to say yes. Pharaoh tells Moshe, that he will release all the men only so they can honour their God.
- ✚ Moshe disagrees with the terms and insists that everyone including all their cattle and sheep must be set free too. Pharaoh refuses and throws both Moshe and Aron out of his palace.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 10, verses 12 - 23

- ✚ Moshe stretches out his staff and an east wind blows over the whole of the land of Mitzraim (Egypt); bringing with it swarms of locusts destroying everything in its path.
- ✚ Pharaoh admits that he has sinned against Hashem and begs Moshe and Aron to pray on his behalf to end the plague. Once Hashem sent down a west wind to remove the locusts, Pharaoh once more went back to his original stance and refused to let the people go.
- ✚ Moshe stretched out his hands this time towards heaven and darkness enveloped the land for three days, however wherever the Jewish people lived or went they had plenty of light to see.

Sh'lisi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 10, verse 24 - Chapter 11, verse 4

- ✚ Pharaoh tells Moshe to take everyone and leave, Moshe demanded not without their cattle and sheep as they are needed for korbanos (sacrifices).
- ✚ Enraged Pharaoh refuses and decrees that the next time Moshe sees him, he will be killed.
- ✚ Moshe is informed by Hashem that one final plague is on its way but first Bnai Yisrael must go to their Egyptian neighbours demanding for all the gold and silver vessels in their possession, so they will depart as a wealthy nation.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 11, verse 5 - Chapter 12, verse 20

- ✚ Moshe warns Pharaoh that Hashem, at approximately midnight, will smite down every first born, man and beast leaving the whole of Mitzraim crying out in grief.
- ✚ Hashem informs Moshe that the month of Nissan will from this day forward be the first month of the Jewish calendar year.
- ✚ Hashem then commanded that Bnai Yisrael to each sacrifice a lamb on the fourteenth day and consume it along with matzah and bitter herbs that night. The blood from the lambs must then be painted on their doorposts so Hashem will pass over them at midnight sparing their firstborns from death.

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 12, verses 21 - 28

- ✚ Moshe relayed Hashem's instructions to the elders of Israel, emphasizing that in the future when their children and descendants will ask what is the meaning of all this. You can answer This is the Pesach sacrifice when Hashem passed over your houses, saving them from having to mourn for their beloved firstborn

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 12, verses 29 - 51

- ✚ The death of the firstborn takes place. Pharaoh seeks out Moshe, ordering him that everyone must leave now, immediately
- ✚ The exodus begins with over 600,000 men and their families along with their livestock, departing Mitzraim for good.

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 13, verses 1 - 16

- ✚ Hashem tells Moshe that this festival of Pesach is to be commemorated every year in the spring time in honour of remembering this exodus; and issues the laws relating to the Korban Pesach. Furthermore upon arrival into the land of Israel, all firstborn males of all kinds of animal must be given to Hashem but any firstborn boy will be redeemed by giving money to the Kohen.
- ✚ Finally the words of the Torah dealing with the exodus are to be enclosed into Tefillin (along with the first two chapters of the Shema) and are to be worn to serve as a constant sign and reminder of what has taken place.

Haftorah – YERMEYAH (JEREMIAH) Chapter 46 verses 13 to 28

OVERVIEW:

- ✚ This week's Haftorah continues with the same subject of last week's relating to Yechezkel's (Ezekiel) prediction of Nebuchadnezzar defeating the might of the Egyptians.
- ✚ Hashem tells Yermeyah (Jeremiah) to convey the message to the king of Bavel, (Babylon) that the time has come to attack Mitzraim and that Hashem himself will see to it that the Egyptians will be defeated and be totally at their mercy.
- ✚ Yermeyah reassures the Jewish people that Hashem has once more secured their survival and will one day soon end their golus (exile) so they can reclaim the land of Israel for themselves.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ Just like in this week's Sedra, there is a reference found in the Haftorah relating to the plague of locusts which Hashem used to punish the Egyptians for the atrocities committed against the Jewish nation.
- ✚ The Haftorah, concludes with Klal Yisrael's liberation from golus (Exile) which mirrors the end of the Parsha, where B'nai Yisrael are now freed from their bondage and are beginning their journey towards receiving the torah and entering the land of Israel.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

Although it is clearly written in this week's Sedra, one of the rarest and largely unknown Mitzvot is mentioned. The Torah commandment of redeeming a firstborn donkey from a Kohen, What's unique about this Mitzva is the fact the donkey is the only non-Kosher animal whose firstborn is sacred upon birth, and therefore belongs to the Kohen as Hashem's agent, until redeemed.

Our commentators explain the reason is because of this particular species invaluable participation in the Exodus from Mitzraim, assisting Bnai Yisrael with carrying their belongings out of slavery, and through the desert during the course of their years of wandering.

To commemorate the great event of saving the Jewish firstborn in Mitzraim from the final plague. Hashem instituted that all Jewish bechoros (firstborn) would be sanctified, and must be redeemed by giving the value of five selaim (calculated to be the value of approximately 96 grams of pure silver) to a Kohen, which we know today as a 'pidyon haben'. It's also customary to adorn the baby with jewellery and precious gem stones for the ceremony. This is also linked to the Exodus as it represents all the wealth Bnai Israel accumulated from the Egyptians; fulfilling Hashem's covenant with Avraham.

This Mitzva applies to animals too. Any bechor from a kosher animal that is owned (wholly) by a Jewish person also contains a high level of Kedusha within it and therefore must be handed over to a Kohen to be redeemed also; to be offered up to Hashem, as a korban shelamim (peace offering)

The ceremony actually takes only five minutes, and basically involves the Kohen verifying (1) that this is in fact a firstborn and (2) that it belongs 100% to the Jewish owner (who themselves are not Kohanim or Levi'im). Then, the owner takes the firstborn animal and recites a couple of blessings including a Shehechianu beracha on a new fruit before handing it over to the Kohen, who then pronounces the animal redeemed and blesses the owner that he / she will merit to fulfil many more Mitzvot.

As I mentioned before the only exception when this mitzvah applies to a non-kosher animal is when a Jewish-owned donkey gives birth to a first-born male. This is known as a 'Peter Chamor'. In this situation because a Kohen is forbidden to offer up any form of non-kosher animal, the only way an owner can redeem the donkey is by exchanging it with a sheep or a goat. This will then transfer the Kedusha from the donkey to the sheep / goat, which is then given to a Kohen in the donkey's stead who may use it as he wishes.

Since not many of us I'm guessing own donkeys today, it is rare to have the opportunity to perform this mitzvah I therefore feel it's important to learn that if a modest donkey can be forever recognised by Hashem by performing such a kind service, supporting our cause. How much more so will Hashem show his appreciation to us all by doing the same.

