

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 37

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CHUKAT

10th Tammuz 5775

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 19, verses 1 - 17

- ✚ Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron to explain the purification function of a Red Heifer.
- ✚ A free ranged, unblemished red cow is given to Elazar the Kohen for slaughter. Elazar then sprinkles its blood seven times towards the Mishkan (tabernacle) before completely burning the carcass on the Altar.
- ✚ A pure person gathers up the ashes and places them in a designated place for safekeeping. Both he and the one who burned the heifer are now considered Tamei (Impure) and must immerse themselves along with their clothing in a Mikveh and wait until evening to become Tahor (pure) once more.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 19, verse 18 - 23 Chapter 20, verse 6

- ✚ The red heifer's ashes are mixed with water and are sprinkled over anyone who has been in contact with a human corpse in order to become pure again.
- ✚ Miriam passes away in the fortieth year of Bnai Yisrael's sojourn in the Midbar (desert).
- ✚ The water which flowed miraculously to quench Bnai Yisrael's thirst in Miriam's honour dried up and the people confront Moshe, complaining about the lack of water.

Sh'lishi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 20, verses 7 - 13

- ✚ Hashem instructs Moshe to take his staff, gather Aaron and the people and speak to the rock to resume the flow of water once more.
- ✚ Instead of talking to the rock, Moshe lifts up his staff and strikes it twice. Water pours out of the rock and everyone, including their animals gets enough to drink.
- ✚ For disobeying Hashem command Moshe and Aaron are barred from leading the people into the promised land of Israel.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 20, verses 14 - 21

- ✚ Moshe sends out messengers to the king of Edom asking permission to pass through his land.
- ✚ The King went out to meet Moshe armed with a large contingent of soldiers, refusing entry.
- ✚ Left with no choice, Bnai Yisrael circumvent Edom and approach the land of Canaan from the east.

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 20, verse 22 - Chapter 21, verse 9

- ✚ Upon arriving at Mount Hor. Hashem orders Moshe, Aaron and Aaron's son Elazar to go ascend the mountain.
- ✚ Aaron removes his priestly garments and dresses Elazar in them, making him the new Kohen Gadol.
- ✚ Aaron dies and the whole of Bnai Yisrael mourn him for thirty days.
- ✚ Amalek disguised as Canaanites launch an attack on Bnai Yisrael, so they prayed to Hashem and were victorious.
- ✚ Bnai Yisrael become frustrated and start complaining about the Mann they are eating. Hashem sent venomous snakes to bite the people, the nation cries out admitting their sins. Moshe fashions a copper serpent wrapped around a pole and whoever looked at it were cured. However many died.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 21, verses 10 – 20 and

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 21, verse 21 - Chapter 22, verse 1

- ✚ Bnai Israel continue their journey towards the eastern bank of the river Jordan. Moshe sends messengers to the king of the Amorites, Sihon, requesting permission to cross his land; but Sihon sends his troops to attack Bnai Yisrael instead and is defeated.
- ✚ Og, king of Bashan along with his army also attack and are destroyed as well.

Maftir – Bamidbar, Chapter 28 Verses 9 – 15

- ✚ The Korbonos (Sacrifices) which are required to be offered up to Hashem on Rosh Chodesh during the times when the Mishkan and the Beis Hamikdash stood are discussed here.

Haftorah – Yishayah (Isaiah), Chapter 66, Verses 1 – 25

- ✚ Yishayah describes the ultimate downfall of all our enemies during the war of Gog and Magog. The Navi forewarns that insincere expressions of devotion are synonymous to those who offer up blemished korbonos (sacrifices) to Hashem for because of this lack of sincerity and devotion, will be ultimately punished for it.
- ✚ Nevertheless, Yishayah's message, those who truly mourn for the absence of the Bais Hamikdash will merit and rejoice in its future redemption and reconstruction and will once again be able to witness the Rosh Chodesh offering and service, and fully participate in expressing their devotion and commitment to Hashem.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ Yishayah explains that this world is the manifestation of Hashem's presence and glory. Yet, we are incapable and sometimes unwilling to properly recognize his visible presence.
- ✚ In this week's sedra, Even though during the whole time in the Midbar (desert) Bnai Yisrael, witnessed countless of miracles daily, they failed to appreciate their opportunity to be close to Hashem, be thankful and serve Him correctly.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

Death flows like a stream throughout Parsha Chukkas, commencing with the laws about re-purification after contact with a corpse, to passing of both Miriam and Aaron. Thinking about these deaths, I realized that Apart from Moshe, the remnants of the entire generation that had left Mitzraim had now passed away in the Midbar. And yet until the episode of striking the rock instead of speaking to it to produce water; Moshe's own fate was not yet determined if he would follow suit and die in the midbar or fulfil his destiny of leading the people into Eretz Yisrael?

Reading an article recently, I was intrigued what was written about this week's Parsha; and seem to concur and understand the event's which took place with better clarity than I had previously and I would like to share it with you.

Immediately following Miriam's death, the well that miraculously followed the people in the midbar disappeared; leaving Moshe facing once again the same dilemma as he was presented with thirty eight years earlier, with a nation complaining of thirst.

Seemingly out of character, in place of heeding to Hashem's instructions to speak to the rock to produce water, Moshe struck it with his rod instead.

The Article pointed out that when Miriam died, the Torah did not record that the nation mourned her death properly with the respect she deserved. Instead, in the very next verse, they immediately started complaining to Moshe about the loss of the water they had to drink, that had benefited them on account of Miriam's zechus. (Merit) during her lifetime. Moshe is dumbstruck as no one seems to care about his own grief of losing his beloved sister, and because he was not tuned into listening to Hashem's instructions with his regular clarity, Moshe just went into mechanical mode and hit the rock before realising that he was supposed to talk to it instead.

I believe this is why when later in the Sedra, when Aaron passed away, the people had learnt their lesson and this time mourned alongside Moshe for thirty days, Bnai Yisrael realised that it is necessary to share the grief and empathize in the emotions of what Moshe or any other family are going through when they have lost a loved one.

People cope with grief in many different ways. Some need to "move on" as quickly as possible, turning with intensity of purpose to whatever task readily presents itself. Others respond in anger, lashing out at those who remain alive. Some can find no outlet for their grief and like Moshe, strike out against the rock, because they are unable to cope with their loss.

Parsha Chukkas is softly asking us to confront our own feelings about mortality and to find ways to comfort ourselves and others during that emotional difficult time. Honoring the physical and spiritual remains of those who have passed on can inspire us to live righteously ourselves. In conclusion, just like Miriam and Aaron, our own death might bring teshuva and healing to our world from those left behind.

