

**Wembley Synagogue**

חֲקֻקֹת

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Chukat

זאת חֲקֻקֹת התורה... פְּרָה אֲדֻמָּה תִּמְיָמָה - This is the statute of Torah... and they shall take to you a red heifer. (19:2) Why does it say "*Zot chukat haTorah*" — "This is the statute of the Torah" — instead of "*Zot chukat parah adumah*" — "This is the statute of the red heifer"? The laws concerning the *parah adumah* are contradictory. On the one hand, when the mixture is sprinkled on the defiled person he becomes cleansed. On the other hand, those who are involved in the preparation of the *parah adumah* become defiled. The people appointed to prepare the *parah adumah* may rationally argue, "Why should we become defiled for the sake of those who were not careful to avoid contact with a dead body?" Through the statute of *parah adumah* the Torah is teaching that a Jew must help another Jew even if it requires sacrifice. This is "*chukat haTorah*" — "a basic principle of Torah" — and though we may not easily comprehend it, we must practice it in our daily lives. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

The Ba'al Haturim writes, "The *pasuk*, '*Zot chukat haTorah*' — 'this is the decree of the Torah' — follows the final *pasuk* of *Parshat Korach*, which states, '*Beharimchem et chelbo mimenu*' — 'When you raise up its best from it' — to hint that Torah was given to those that ate the manna." How is this derived from these two *pesukim*? The word "*mimenu*" — "from it" — has the numerical value of 136, and the word "*chelbo*" — "its best" — adds up to 46. When one "raises up" (*beharimchem*), i.e. subtracts "*chelbo*" (46) from "*mimenu*" (136), the remainder is 90, the numerical value of the word "*mann*" — "manna."

וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם - And Miriam died there and she was buried there. (20:1) If she died, obviously she was buried. Why does the verse mention it? When the spies returned from their journey to *Eretz Yisrael* and incited the people against it, Hashem was very angry. As a punishment, all the people who had left Egypt between the ages of twenty and sixty perished during the forty years they sojourned in the wilderness. Every year, on *Erev Tisha B'Av*, the people dug graves for themselves and slept in them throughout the night. Those who were supposed to die that year passed away, and those that survived returned to their tents (*Bava Batra 121a*, Rashbam). Accordingly, throughout the forty years, the people were first buried and then died. Miriam was the first person to die and be buried *after* her death. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם... וְלֹא הָיָה מֵיִם לָעֵדָה - Miriam died there, and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly. (20:1,2) The Kli Yakar explains that there is a distinct connection between Miriam's death and the subsequent lack of water. The Torah does not record that the assembly wept at Miriam's death, as they did for Moshe and Aharon. She was not eulogised properly, because they did not appreciate what they had received due to her merit. They knew that Moshe was the intermediary through which they received the Torah from Hashem. Aharon engendered harmony and unity among the people. Miriam had "long ago" helped save Jewish infants in Egypt. No one remembered that because it had occurred long ago. Therefore, Hashem dried up the well, so that the people would realise that the water that had previously sustained them was in the merit, of Miriam.

קח אֶת הַמַּטֵּה... וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֵל הַסֵּלַע... וְנָתַן מִמֶּינִי - Take the staff...and speak to the rock before their eyes that it shall give its waters. (20:8). Which staff was Moshe instructed to take? What purpose was the staff to serve, and what was Moshe to say to the rock? Aharon and Moshe each had his own staff. When Hashem wanted Moshe or Aharon to take his own staff, He would say "*matecha*" — "*your staff*" (see *Shemot 7:9*). Since in this *pasuk* it says "*hamateh*" — "*the staff*" — obviously it was a special one with unique qualities. In *Parshat Korach*, Moshe told the leaders of each tribe to bring a staff to be put in the Tabernacle. On each would be written the name of the tribal leader, with Aharon's name written on the staff of the tribe of Levi. The staff belonging to the one who was Divinely-chosen would blossom. The staff of Aharon blossomed and produced almonds and eventually was put next to the holy Ark for posterity. It was *this* staff that Moshe was to take. This corresponds to the verse, "Moshe took the staff from before G-d" (20:9).

The purpose of taking the staff was to show it to the rock as if to say, "Learn this lesson; just as this dry piece of wood suddenly became moist and alive in order to sanctify Hashem's name, so should you sanctify Hashem's name by giving water, even though it is not your nature."

Why did Hashem now instruct Moshe to speak to the rock whereas in Rephidim (*Shemot* 17:6), when they thirsted for water and complained, Hashem told him, "You shall strike the rock and water will come forth"? Hashem said to Moshe, "When the child is young his teacher hits him and teaches him. Once he becomes older, he reprimands him with words. Similarly, when the rock was small you hit it, but now you shall speak to it. Teach it and it will bring forth water" (*Yalkut Shimoni*). This may be further expounded: The rock is analogous to people who at times seem to be "hard as rock" and obstinately refuse to direct their lives morally and ethically as a Jew should. The incident in Rephidim occurred before the Torah was given. The only method available then to guide a Jew in the right path was to strike him harshly. The episode in our *parshah* however, took place after the Torah was given. The way to reach a Jew now, is not through striking him, but through talking to him with sincerity and warmth. The Torah assures that with such an approach one will successfully penetrate and "*venatan meimav*" — "he shall give *his* waters." One will eventually bring to surface the beautiful spark of Judaism hidden within.

וַיִּכּוֹת אֶת הַסֵּלַע בְּמִטְוֵהוּ פַּעַמַּיִם - And he struck the rock with his staff twice.(20:11)

Why did he strike the rock twice? The letters of the word "*sela*" — "rock" — spelled out in full are *samech, lamed, ayin*. The middle letters of the name of each letter spell the word "*mayim*" — "water." Thus, in a rock — "*sela*" — there is hidden water — "*mayim*." Moshe, by striking the rock *twice*, knocked off the first letters as well as the last letters, leaving the middle letters (*mayim*), and water flowed forth abundantly.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן לְמַעַן לֹא תִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי וְאַתֶּם - (G-d said to Moshe and to Aharon), because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me (in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them. (20:12)

Why didn't Moshe speak to the rock? Had he done so, Hashem would have indeed been sanctified. Every Jew would have come to the conclusion: "If a rock, which does not speak and does not hear, performs Hashem's will, how much more so are we required to listen to Him!" However, Moshe thought to himself that this logic could also be used by Satan against the Jewish people when they sinned. He would come before the heavenly tribunal as a prosecutor and say to Hashem, "Your children, the Jewish people, 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." Not wanting to give Satan any ammunition against the Jewish people, Moshe jeopardised his life and future, and decided not to speak to the rock.

וַיִּבְכּוּ אֶת אַהֲרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל - And they wept for Aharon thirty days, all the House of Israel. (20:29) Aharon's special relationship with all people earned him the love of everyone. When he passed away, every Jewish man, woman, and child grieved. Aharon extended himself to promote harmony among his fellow man and between husband and wife. The vacuum caused by his death was acutely felt by everyone. We see that Moshe - the teacher who devoted his life to educating the Jewish people, was not as universally mourned. As the Yalkut explains, Moshe's responsibility was to judge and reprimand a function that was not always accepted by everyone. Thus, the love that everyone had for him was, at times, minimised. How did Aharon reach out to others? The Rabbis tell us that he would greet all Jews with a bright hello. Afterwards, if a person desired to sin, he felt ashamed, since he would not be able to face Aharon after having done wrong. Consequently, Aharon's good cheer for everyone brought about a positive rise in the spiritual climate of the Jewish people. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.28pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson
 Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html