**SALT – PARSHAT CHUKAT**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

**Motzaei Shabbat**

The Torah in Parashat Chukat tells of the passing of Aharon, whereupon “the entire House of Israel wept for Aharon for thirty days” (20:29). Rashi notes the Torah’s emphasis on the fact that “*kol Beit Yisrael*” – “the entire House of Israel” – mourned Aharon’s death, which suggests that he was beloved and missed by all members of the nation, without exception. The reason, Rashi explains, is because Aharon “pursued peace and brought love between quarreling parties, and between husband and wife.” Aharon’s intensive efforts to resolve conflicts and help quarreling parties restore their relationships earned the esteem and affection of the entire nation, and so his death was mourned by all. Similarly, *Torat Kohanim* (10:4) comments that Aharon never directly criticized people’s behavior, in contrast to Moshe, who occasionally reprimanded the people. For this reason, *Torat Kohanim* states, the Torah tells that “the entire House of Israel” mourned Aharon’s death, whereas after Moshe’s passing, he was mourned by “*Benei Yisrael*” (Devarim 34:8), but not by the entire nation.

Rav Meir Simcha Ha-kohen of Dvinsk, in *Meshekh Chokhma*, makes an interesting observation about the Torah’s emphasis on the entire nation mourning Aharon’s death. As we read later in Sefer Bamidbar (35:28), when a person accidentally kills somebody and is required to relocate in an *ir miklat* (city of refuge), he must remain there until the death of the *kohen gadol*. Therefore, the passing of the *kohen gadol* was, at least in some sense, a joyous occasion for unintentional murderers, as they were now free to return from their exile, to their homes. In fact, the Mishna (Makkot 11a) relates that the *kohen gadol*’s mother would give gifts to those who had been exiled to an *ir miklat*, so that they would not pray for her son’s death. Rav Meir Simcha writes that the fact that “the entire House of Israel” mourned the death of Aharon – the *kohen gadol* at that time – would seem to indicate that nobody during the years of *Benei Yisrael*’s travels through the wilderness accidentally killed. If someone had accidentally killed, he would have been required to relocate in the camp of the *Leviyim*, which paralleled the cities of refuge once *Benei Yisrael* entered the Land of Israel, which were the cities inhabited by the *Leviyim* (Bamidbar 35:6). The killer would have to remain there until the death of Aharon, the *kohen gadol*, and he would have thus rejoiced when Aharon passed away. That the Torah speaks of the entire nation grieving seems to indicate that no one had been exiled to the Levite camp throughout the nation’s forty years of desert travel.

One might, however, challenge this line of reasoning, and contend that even if there were inadvertent killers who were freed from their exile by Aharon’s passing, they would nevertheless have joined in the national mourning for Aharon. The Gemara in Masekhet Berakhot (59b) establishes that if a person’s father died, leaving him an inheritance, he recites the *berakha* of “*Dayan Ha-emet*” to express his grief over his loss, but also recites the *berakha* of “*she-hechiyanu*” over the money or assets he has now received. (This *halakha* is mentioned in the *Shulchan Arukh*, O.C. 223:2.) This ruling demonstrates our ability to experience conflicting emotions simultaneously, that a person can both grieve over the loss of a loved one, even while appreciating the good fortune received as a result. Recognizing and celebrating the blessings that stem from a tragedy does not in any way undermine one’s pain and grief; one can feel at that moment both anguish over what he has lost and joy over what he has gained, and neither emotion contradicts the other. Accordingly, it is quite possible that there were, in fact, people who had been forced to exile to the Levite camp due to their having inadvertently killed, but even they mourned the passing of Aharon, the *kohen gadol* who was beloved by all, notwithstanding their celebrating the freedom they gained as a result.

**Sunday**

Yesterday, we noted the theory advanced by the *Meshekh Chokhma* that throughout the years *Benei Yisrael* spent in the wilderness, there was not a single incidence of accidental murder. The *Meshekh Chokhma* makes this comment in reference to the Torah’s description of the entire nation – “*kol Beit Yisrael*” (20:29) – mourning the death of Aharon. Already *Chazal* (*Torat Kohanim* 10:4) understood this to mean that Aharon was beloved by all *Benei Yisrael*, and his death was thus mourned by all members of the nation. The *Meshekh Chokhma* notes that if there had been an accidental killer who was forced to find refuge in the camp of the *Leviyim* – which would have served as the *ir miklat* (city of refuge) in the wilderness – then this killer would have, at least to some extent, celebrated Aharon’s death, because the death of the *kohen gadol* allows accidental killers to leave their cities of refuge and return home.

The Tolna Rebbe questions the *Meshekh Chokhma*’s theory in light of the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Makkot (12b) that during *Benei Yisrael*’s sojourn through the wilderness, accidental killers would be exiled to the Levite camp. The *Meshekh Chokhma*, apparently, understood this as a theoretical statement – that if someone had accidentally killed, that person would have relocated to the camp of the *Leviyim*, which took the place of the *arei miklat* in the wilderness, though this never actually happened. The plain reading of the Gemara, however, is that there were, unfortunately, instances where individuals needed to relocate in the Levite camp because of an accidental murder.

The Tolna Rebbe references in this context the Gemara’s discussion earlier (Makkot 11b) concerning the situation of a *kohen gadol* who was replaced during his lifetime. According to one view in the Gemara, if a former *kohen gadol* is still alive, then accidental killers may not leave their cities of refuge until both he and the current *kohen gadol* die. The Tolna Rebbe notes that this was the situation in the wilderness, because during the seven-day *miluim* period, when Aharon and sons were consecrated as *kohanim*, Moshe served as *kohen gadol*, as the Gemara discusses in Masekhet Zevachim (101b). Aharon and his sons brought special offerings, while Moshe performed all the rituals involved in these sacrifices, like a *kohen*, and the Gemara states that he had the formal status of *kohen gadol* during that week. Accordingly, it would seem that those who were forced to relocate in the Levite camp in the wilderness needed to remain there even after Aharon’s death, until after Moshe’s death seven months later. The Tolna Rebbe suggests that this might be another reason why the Torah speaks of “the entire House of Israel” mourning Aharon’s death, whereas Moshe’s passing was mourned just by “*Benei Yisrael*.” After Moshe’s passing, those who had been living in exile, in the Levite camp, did not mourn, because there were finally allowed to return to their tribes. Therefore, whereas the entire nation mourned Aharon’s death, not everyone mourned Moshe’s death.

**Monday**

We read in Parashat Chukat of the Emorite kingdom’s military attack against *Benei Yisrael*, who succeeded in not only fending off the assault, but vanquishing the kingdom and seizing its territory. In this context, the Torah digresses onto the history of this region, explaining that it had been part of the territory of Moav, until it was captured by Sichon, king of the Emorites. The Torah tells that a special poem was composed celebrating Sichon’s triumph, which the Torah introduces by stating, “*Al kein yomeru ha-moshelim: Bo’u Cheshbon*” – “Therefore, the poets say: Come to Cheshbon!” (21:27).

The Gemara (Bava Batra 78b), in a famous passage, comments that the word “*moshelim*” (“poets”) in this verse can be interpreted as a reference to “*ha-moshelim be-yitzram*” – “those who rule over their evil inclination,” meaning, the righteous who restrain their negative impulses. These individuals successfully withstand temptation because they say, “*Bo’u cheshbon*,” which the Gemara understands to mean, “*bo’u ve-nechasheiv cheshbono shel olam*” – “let us make the calculation of the world.” The Gemara explains that the righteous calculate the damage and harm caused by sin against the temporary, fleeting benefits they provide, and this is the way they “rule over their evil inclination” and avoid wrongdoing.

Netziv, in *Hercheiv Davar*, offers a novel reading of the Gemara’s comment. In his view, the Gemara here speaks of those who initiate conflict and strife for the sake of protesting and objecting to inappropriate conduct. Specifically, the Gemara refers to “*ha-moshelim be-yitzram*” – those who are in full control of their inclinations, and subdued their instinctive craving for prestige and for feelings of superiority. Igniting conflict for egotistical purposes, to advance a personal agenda, or for the vain thrill of controversy, is wrong. Such actions cannot be considered legitimate unless they are undertaken by “*ha-moshelim be-yitzram*,” by people driven solely by genuine, pure motives. And even such people, Netziv writes, must carefully “calculate” the benefits of their actions against their harmful repercussions. Even when protesting wrongful conduct is, inherently, warranted, one must determine whether it will produce desirable results that outweigh the undesirable byproducts of controversy. The Gemara here instructs that even “*ha-moshelim be-yitzram*” – those who are capable of involving themselves in controversies purely for altruistic reasons, without any tinge of condescension or arrogance, must “make the calculation of the world,” weighing the benefits of the controversy against the damage is causes. Protesting wrongful behavior is appropriate, Netziv writes, only if both conditions are met – one is driven by perfectly sincere motives, and he has determined that the protest will yield more benefit than harm.

**Tuesday**

Parashat Chukat begins with the laws related to the *para aduma*, the “red heifer” which was slaughtered and then burned to produce ashes which were used for purifying people and objects that had come in contact with a human corpse. The Torah stipulates that the *kohen* who burns the slaughtered *para aduma* is *tamei* (impure), as are the garments he wore during the burning. He and the garments both require immersion in water in order to regain their status of *tahara* (purity.) The Torah commands, “And the one who burned it shall launder his clothing in water and wash his flesh with water, and then be impure until evening” (19:8).

The *Sifrei* takes note of the fact that the Torah in this verse repeats the word “*ba-mayim*” (“with water”). Rather than simply state that both the *kohen* who burned the *para aduma* and his garments must be immersed in water, it says that the *kohen* “shall launder his clothing in water” and that he must “wash his flesh with water.” To explain this seeming redundancy, the *Sifrei* explains that the Torah seeks to emphasize that the garments must be immersed in the same kind of *mikveh* (body of water) as the individual. Rabbeinu Tam, in *Sefer Ha-yashar* (57), understands the *Sifrei* to mean that the *kohen*’s garment must be immersed in a *mikveh* consisting of at least forty *se’a* of water. Normally, utensils or garments which had become impure may be immersed in any quantity of water large enough to cover the utensil or garment. In the case of the *para aduma*, however, the garments worn by the *kohen* who burned the cow must be immersed in a *mikveh* that is suitable for the immersion of human beings – namely, one which consists of at least forty *se’a* of water. (Malbim suggests a different reading of the *Sifrei*.)

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in *Oznayim La-Torah*, offers an additional explanation for the repetition of the word “*ba-mayim*” in this verse. He notes that in the previous verse, the Torah speaks of the status of impurity that befalls the *kohen* who, after the cow is burned, casts into the ashes the wood, hyssop and crimson string which must be added to the ashes. This *kohen*, too, becomes *tamei*, along with his garments, but in this context, the Torah does not repeat the word “*ba-mayim*,” and states simply that the *kohen* and his garments are to be immersed in water. Rav Sorotzkin offers a surprisingly simple reason for this distinction. When the *kohen* burns the cow to produce ash, invariably, his clothing become filled with soot, such that when these garments are immersed, ashes of the *para aduma* enter the water of the *mikveh*. The Torah repeats the word “*ba-mayim*,” Rav Sorotzkin writes, to instruct that the *kohen* must immerse in a different *mikveh*, and not in the same water in which his garments had been immersed. As these ashes are the source of his impurity, he cannot be in contact with them at the time he immerses to divest himself of his *tum’a* status, and so he may not immerse in water containing these ashes. However, the *kohen* who throws the wood, hyssop and string into the ashes does so while standing at a distance, as the Mishna teaches (Para 3:10). Therefore, his clothing do not contain any ashes, and so he may immerse in the same *mikveh* in which his clothing is immersed. For this reason, in reference to this *kohen*, the Torah does not repeat the word “*ba-mayim*,” because there is no need for two separate bodies of water for the *kohen* and his garments.

**Wednesday**

The opening section of Parashat Chukat describes the procedure for the preparation of the “purifying waters” which were used to purify people and objects that had become *tamei* through contact with a human corpse. The process began with the slaughtering of a *para aduma* (red heifer), after which the carcass was burned. The ashes were then mixed water.

*Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*, in translating the text, mentions that after the *para aduma* was slaughtered, the carcass was inspected to ensure that it had none of the *simanei tereifa* – conditions which are considered fatal, and which render an animal forbidden for consumption. Before the cow’s body was burned, according to *Targum Yonatan*, it needed to be examined to ascertain that it was not a *tereifa*, as if it were, it would be disqualified for the preparation of the purifying waters.

Many writers noted that *Targum Yonatan*’s comments contradict the Gemara’s discussion in Masekhet Chulin (11a), where the Gemara states explicitly that the *para aduma* was not inspected after it was slaughtered. The Gemara states that the carcass needed to be burned whole, which precluded the possibility of dissecting it to ascertain it was not a *tereifa*. This was allowed, the Gemara comments, because of the principle of *rov*, which permits relying on a statistical majority for halakhic purposes. As most animals do not have any *simanei tereifa*, those preparing the purifying waters were permitted to assume that the cow was not a *tereifa*, and was thus valid, even without inspection. The Gemara thus points to the procedure of the *para aduma* as one of the Biblical sources for the principle of *rov*. *Targum Yonatan*’s remarks clearly contradict those of the Gemara, as *Targum Yonatan* writes explicitly that the cow was inspected after its slaughtering.

One of the theories advanced to explain *Targum Yonatan*’s view is based upon a passage in a treatise called *Chiluf Minhagim Bein Benei Eretz Yisrael Li-vnei Bavel*, which appears in the Maharshal’s *Yam Shel Shelomo* (end of Bava Kama). This treatise documents the differences in halakhic practice between the communities of *Eretz Yisrael* and those in Babylonia, one of which (18) involves the inspection of *tereifot*. Babylonian communities would not inspect animals for *tereifot* after they were slaughtered, with the exception of the lungs, which were inspected because of the frequency of lesions on the lung which qualify as a *tereifa*. In *Eretz Yisrael*, however, the custom was to ascertain the absence of all eighteen *simanei tereifa* after an animal was slaughtered. Rav David Hildesheim, in his *Va-yevareikh David* (pp. 177-178), notes that when the Gemara allows relying on the statistical majority, and assuming an animal’s halakhic validity without checking for *tereifot*, this reflects the custom in Babylonia. In *Eretz Yisrael*, this leniency was not accepted, and the communities there required inspecting a slaughtered animal before partaking of its meat to ascertain that it was not a *tereifa*. It thus stands to reason that the communities in *Eretz Yisrael* did not accept the Talmud Bavli’s statement that the *para aduma* needed to be burned whole, because the carcass first needed to be inspected. Accordingly, Rav Hildesheim writes, we might assume that *Targum Yonatan* follows the tradition of the communities in *Eretz Yisrael*, according to which the *para aduma* required inspection.

This theory assumes, however, that the practice in *Eretz Yisrael* reflects Torah law, and not a measure of stringency that was adopted later. Otherwise, *Targum Yonatan* would not have mentioned this practice in reference to the Torah’s commands regarding the *para aduma*, because at this point, it was still unnecessary to check for *tereifot*. However, some, including Rav Yehuda Leib Graubart (*Chavalim Ba-neimim*, 3:109), asserted that this practice was not required by Torah law, even according to the tradition in *Eretz Yisrael*,and was adopted at some later point as a measure of stringency.

**Thursday**

The Torah in Parashat Chukat outlines the procedure required to eliminate the status of impurity which befalls a person or object that comes in contact with a human corpse. The special waters prepared with the ashes of the *para aduma* (red heifer) must be sprinkled upon the person or object on the third and seventh days, and at the end of the seventh day, the person or object becomes *tahor* (pure).

The Gemara in Masekhet Sota (38b-39a) addresses the case of one who intended to sprinkle the purification water in one direction, but mistakenly sprinkled it in a different direction – for example, he meant to sprinkle forward, in front of him, but the drops were accidentally cast backward, behind him. Even though the water reaches impure objects, the Gemara states, the sprinkling is ineffective. Rashi explains that this *halakha* is based on the Torah’s formulation in describing the procedure of purification with the *para aduma* waters: “*Ve-hiza ha-tahor al ha-tamei*” – “The pure one shall sprinkle upon the impure one” (19:19). *Chazal* understood this to mean that the one sprinkling the water must have intention to sprinkle the water upon the specific person or object for the sprinkling to be effective in eliminating the status of impurity. Therefore, if one sprinkles the water intending to purify one person or object but ends up sprinkling the water on a different person or object, the sprinkling is not effective.

Significantly, Rashi writes in explaining this *halakha*, “*...de-ba’inan kavana* ***le-tahara***” – “for we require intention **for purification**.” It appears from Rashi that in his view, the person sprinkling the water must intend not only for the water to reach the particular individual or object, but that the sprinkling should have the effect of bringing *tahara*. This is also the opinion of the Rambam, who writes in *Hilkhot Para Aduma* (10:7), “The one sprinkling must intend and sprinkle upon the impure person to purify him.” According to these *Rishonim*, it seems, the verse “*Ve-hiza ha-tahor al ha-tamei*” implies that the person sprinkling the water must have in mind to bring purity upon the individual or utensil, and otherwise, the sprinkling is ineffective.

The Ra’avad, however, disagrees. In his critique of the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*, the Ra’avad writes that intention for the sake of *tahara* is not required when sprinkling the *para aduma* waters, and it suffices to have intention to sprinkle upon the particular person or object. Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, in his *Arukh Ha-shulchan Ha-atid* (71:3), notes that this view appears to have a source in the *Sifrei Zuta*, which comments, “The pure one shall sprinkle upon the impure one – and not when he does not intend for the impure one.” This appears to suggest that all that is needed is for the one sprinkling to intend to sprinkle upon this particular *tamei* (impure person or object), and not that he must have in mind to sprinkle for the purpose of divesting the *tamei* of his or its impure status.

The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* adds that Rashi and the Rambam likely felt that once the Torah established this requirement – that the person performing the sprinkling must intend to sprinkle upon the particular person or object – it stands to reason that he must have in mind to sprinkle for the sake of purification. After all, there would be no other reason to sprinkle these waters on somebody or something if not for this purpose. Hence, once the Torah requires intention for the particular person or object, this necessarily requires intention also for the purpose of purification.

**Friday**

The opening verses of Parashat Chukat describe the procedure for the preparation of the *mei chatat* – the purifying waters which were used to purify people and objects that had become *tamei* (impure). This process involved a *para aduma* (red heifer) which was slaughtered and then burned, after which its ashes were mixed with water.

In instructing that the slaughtered cow be burned, the Torah commands, “He shall burn the cow…its skin, its flesh and its blood, with its dung shall it be burned” (19:5). The *Sifrei* notes the seemingly redundant expression “*yisrof*” (“shall it be burned”) at the conclusion of this verse. Once the verse began, “He shall burn…” there seems to be no reason for the Torah to repeat, “*yisrof*” after emphasizing that all the different parts of the cow are to be burned. One explanation presented by the *Sifrei*, cited in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, is that the Torah here emphasizes that the *kohen* who burns the cow should not limit the amount of firewood used; to the contrary, Rabbi Yehuda comments, branches of hyssop would be added to the firewood in order to increase the amount of ash produced by burning the cow.

The Rambam cites this passage from the *Sifrei* in his commentary to the Mishna (Para 3:11), proving from the *Sifrei*’s remarks that the ashes from the firewood were included with the ashes of the *para aduma* in the preparation of the *mei chatat*. Generally, mixing other ash with the ash of the *para aduma* disqualified the ash for use for the *mei chatat* (Para 9:7). However, the Rambam maintained that the ash of the firewood used for burning the *para aduma* was to be included with the ash of the cow itself. This seems to clearly emerge from Rabbi Yehuda’s comment in the *Sifrei*, that branches were added to increase the ash. If there was an interest in increasing the amount of ash produced during the burning of the cow, we must seemingly conclude that this ash was included in the preparation of the *mei chatat*.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznayim La-Torah*, suggests that the source for this *halakha* – that the ash of the firewood is included with the ash of the *para aduma* – might be a later verse (19:17), which tells that the *mei chatat* were made from “*afar* ***sereifat*** *ha-chatat*” – “the ash of **the burning of** the sin-offering [the red heifer].” Rather than simply requiring taking the ash of the cow, the Torah requires taking the ash “of the burning of the” cow. This might indicate that the waters were prepared with all the ash produced by the process of burning the cow, including the ash of the firewood.

Moreover, Rav Sorotzkin adds, the Torah in this verse refers to the ash with the word “*afar*” (with an *ayin*, instead of an *alef*), which normally means “earth.” Rav Sorotzkin proposes that this word was perhaps used to instruct that the earth from the ground where the fire was made is also included together with the ash of the *para aduma*. As this earth, too, was involved in the process of burning the *para aduma*, it was taken together with the ashes for the preparation of the purifying waters.