

RED ALERT!

Chukat

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DIVREI TORAH

- The opening chapter of Chukat gives us the perplexing law of the Red Cow. This law is the epitome of the Hebrew term CHOK, an incomprehensible Torah Halacha. My wife and I once spent a Shabbat in Rechovot, Israel, and we ate dinner Friday night at the house of HaRav Simcha HaKohen Kook, the chief rabbi of the city. HaRav Kook passed away in 2022 at the age of 92; he was a great nephew of HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, chief rabbi of Israel, died 1935. After dinner that Friday night, HaRav Kook stated that every Torah mitzva has to be understood as a CHOK. You have to keep studying that law until you will reach something incomprehensible, making us realize that every law is from Hashem. His example was the law of Do Not Kill. It seems very comprehensible. Until you reach the following. A suspected murderer is judged by a court of 23 judges. If the judges vote 22 to 1 to find him guilty, they may execute him. But if they vote 23 to 0 guilty, they may not execute him. Seemingly illogical, but the vote would indicate that no one argued for his defense.

- For the past several decades there has

been a serious effort to develop a Red Cow. As recently as 2022, five candidates were exported to Israel from America as possibly being a Halachically acceptable Red Cow. The real problem will arise when they succeed in developing one. The world's leading rabbis will weigh in on the question. Is it really a kosher Red Cow? And then what will we do with it now?

It would really be a shame if this effort will result in a major Halachic disagreement, but we can see it happen this way. And there is a time limit on the discussion, because the Cow will quickly become ineligible when it reaches a relatively young age.

- Having a law like a Red Cow will bring about many questions from religious doubters, like “What kind of law is this? What reason is there for this?” To this the Dubnov Maggid (Rav Yaakov Krantz, 1741-1804, great preacher and master of parables) told a story. An ignorant Jewish businessman struck it rich and succeeded to marry off his son to the daughter of the chief rabbi of the city. After the wedding this rich man noticed that the rabbi was deliberately distancing himself from his Mechutan.

When the wealthy man asked the rabbi about this, the rabbi responded that there is nothing to talk about. The application of the story is that after Hashem gave us the Torah, we would expect some explanation for all these Halachot, but such is not the case. We

only accept these laws, and admire and be satisfied that Hashem has chosen us above all other nations of the world.

- The expression “this is the CHOK of the Torah” appears twice in the Torah. Once is here with the Halacha of the Red Cow. The second place is in Parshat Matot when the Torah describes the method of kashering the utensils that Bnei Yisrael took in the war with the Midianites. Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany) wrote that both these laws, one here dealing with the purity of the body, and there, dealing with the kashrut of your home, serve as the introduction and the necessary conditions of all 613 Torah Mitzvot. This definitely fits well with what Rav Kook stated in paragraph one quoted above. The bottom line is back to what Rashi wrote: Don’t think about it. It will only confuse us. Be comfortable where and what we are in Hashem’s world.

- Miriam dies in the beginning of chapter 20. (Between chapters 19 and 20, there is a gap of some 38 quiet years. Nothing happened during that time except the slow dying out of the generation of male adults that left Egypt, with the exception of the women and members of the tribe of Levi.) Now in the fortieth year of travel, Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe will die. Miriam dies on the 10th of Nissan. Aharon will die on the first of Av. And Moshe will die on the 7th of Adar. In the span of 11 months, the top 3 religious leaders will expire, preparing the nation

for the new reality to accompany the people into Canaan. Miriam and Aharon die in this Parsha.

The Kli Yakar (Rav Shlomo Efrayim of Luntzitz, 1550-1619, Poland and Prague) notes that there was no crying or eulogies associated with Miriam’s passing. Hence the people suffered from thirst immediately after her departure.

- The Abravanel weighs in on the reasons that Moshe and Aharon are decreed to die in this Parsha. According to him (Rav Yitzchak Abravanel, 1437-1508, Portugal, Spain, and Italy), neither Moshe nor Aharon died because of the hitting of the rock. Aharon’s sin was his involvement with the construction of the Golden Calf. Moshe’s sin was his approval of the spy mission to Canaan. The reason that Hashem did not decree their real punishment for their sins was to allow the entire nation that left Egypt to die out naturally over the course of some 40 years. Now with their departure, Hashem will lead these two most righteous men to their departure as well. (The subject of Miriam’s death is not discussed by anyone. Maybe it was just her time to leave.)

- According to the straight forward reading of the text, Moshe and Aharon do not enter the Promised Land due to the sin of hitting the rock. Our commentators over the course of years all ask the same questions. Moshe hit the

rock, not Aharon. What did Aharon do to warrant his dying in the desert?

According to most, the answer is quite textual. The Torah records that Moshe hit the rock twice. Had he hit the rock just once, Aharon would have not been guilty of any wrong doing. He could have been surprised. But after Moshe hit the rock once, Aharon could have and should have said something to stop his brother from hitting the rock a second time. The fact that Aharon said and did nothing indicated that he was in agreement with Moshe's actions. Hence, Aharon did deserve a similar punishment.

Questions by RED

From the Text

1. Why is the law of the Red Cow so perplexing? (19:9,10)
2. For how long did the Kohen who prepared the Red Cow remain impure? (19:8)
3. Which two Jewish people died in this Parsha? (Ch. 20)
4. How many times did Moshe hit the rock to bring forth water? (20:11)
5. What countries did Sichon and Og rule when they went to war against Bnei Yisrael? (21:21 and :33)

From Rashi

6. Which Kohen was the one who prepared the Red Cow? (19:3)

7. The ashes of the Red Cow were divided into three parts. Where were they kept? (19:9)

8. How do we derive the idea that the source of water (from a well) in the desert was in the merit of Miriam? (20:2)

9. Who was the Mal'ach (messenger) sent by Hashem to liberate Bnei Yisrael in Egypt? (20:16)

10. Who was the captive that Bnei Yisrael lost in the battle with the Canaanites of Arad? (21:1)

From the Rabbis

11. How many years passed between chapter 19 and chapter 20?

12. According to the Malbim who really suffered from the sin of the rock?

13. In the Talmud (Rosh HaShana 3a) our Sages state that the well was supplied by Hashem in the merit of Miriam. What stopped as a result of Aharon's death?

From the Midrash

14. Yazeir was a city close to Sichon's kingdom. Who conquered it on behalf of Israel?

From the Haftara (Sho-f'tim)

15. Why did Gilad's sons expel Yiftach from their house?

Relationships

- a) Miriam - Aharon
- b) Elazar - Nachshon

- c) Moav - Lot
- d) Avraham - Ammon
- e) Gilad - Menashe

ANSWERS

1. The impure person became pure, but the Kohen who helped him become pure became impure.
2. Until the end of the day.
3. Miriam and Aharon.
4. Twice
5. Sichon: Amori. Og: Bashan
6. The vice Kohen Gadol. In this case, Elazar.
7. One was stored on Mt. Olives for future use. A second portion was divided among the 24 divisions of Kohanim for purifying people. A third part was stored for safe keeping next to the wall of the Courtyard.
8. Because right after Miriam's death, there was a lack of water for the people.
9. Moshe was the messenger.
10. A non-Jewish maid servant.
11. About 38 years.
12. Bnei Yisrael suffered the most by losing Moshe as their leader.
13. The pillar of cloud that led them and protected them in the desert.
14. The spies that Moshe sent there.

15. Because Yiftach was from a different mother.

Relations

- a) Sister & brother
- b) Uncle & nephew
- c) Son & father
- d) Great Uncle & great nephew
- e) Grandson & grandfather