

Torah Weekly

ט"ב

7 July – 13 July, 2019

4 Tammuz – 10 Tammuz, 5779

Torah: Numbers 19:1 - 22:1

Haftorah: Judges 11:1-33

PARSHAT CHUKAT

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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Where There's A Will There's A Why

Why do certain people find satisfaction in Judaism while others are bored stiff? Why is faith exciting for some and irrelevant for others, a joy for one guy and an absolute burden for the next? One fellow cannot imagine going to work without first putting on his tefillin and the other hasn't seen his tefillin since his bar mitzvah 40 years ago. This woman can't wait to get to shul and the other can't wait to get out. Why?

This week we read about the ultimate mitzvah of faith, the Red Heifer. It is a statutory commandment whose reason still remains a mystery. I must admit, to take the ashes of a red heifer and sprinkle them on a person so he may attain spiritual purification is, indeed, rather mind-boggling.

According to the Midrash, the Almighty promised Moses that to him He would reveal the secret meaning of this mitzvah, but only after Moses would initially accept it as a Divine decree. If he would first take it on faith, thereafter rational understanding would follow. The truth is that there are answers to virtually every question people may have about Judaism. Intelligent skeptics I meet are often amazed that what they had long written off as empty ritual is actually philosophically profound, with rich symbolic meaning. But the skeptic has to be ready to listen. You can hear the most eloquent, intellectual explanation but if you are not mentally prepared to accept

that listening may in fact be a worthwhile exercise, chances are you won't be impressed. Once we stop resisting and accept that there is inherent validity, suddenly Judaism makes all the sense in the world.

It is a psychological fact that we can grasp that which we sincerely desire to understand. But if there is a subject in which we have no interest, we will walk into mental blockades regularly. The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, says this explains why some very astute businessman may sit at a Talmud class and find himself struggling to grasp basic principles of rabbinic reasoning. Why is it that the same person who can concoct brilliant schemes in the boardroom fails to follow straightforward logic in the Talmud class? The answer, says the Rebbe, is that this businessman is really not that interested in the subject. But if it was half as important to him as making money, he might well become a rosh yeshiva!

So, in the same way that G-d told Moses that he could come to comprehend the meaning of the Red Heifer but only after he accepted it, similarly today, those who genuinely wish to understand Judaism will succeed, but only if they buy into the product on some level first.

When I was studying in yeshiva, I would always try to attend the annual "Encounter with Chabad" weekends for university students. These were organized to expose

Jewish students to Judaism over a Shabbat and there were lectures by leading Rabbis and religious academics. Once a young man shouted back at the lecturer, "How can you expect me to put on tefillin if I don't believe in G-d?!" The speaker calmly replied, "First put on tefillin, and I promise you will see that you really do believe in G-d."

We all have a G-dly faith inside us. It just needs to be revealed. As illogical as it may sound, if we start by observing a mitzvah, we find that our faith will follow through and begin to blossom. It has been shown to be true again and again. If we are not interested, no answer will be good enough. If we are genuinely searching for truth and we are objective, there are ample and meaningful answers.

by Rabbi Yossy Goldman

How To Live Like Ash And Water

It is the most difficult law in the Torah to understand. It defies logic, and it inherently contradicts itself. King Solomon, the wisest of all men, could comprehend every commandment except this one (Tanchuma, Chukat 6). It is the law of the red heifer. Yet, all you need to know for your spiritual life lies in this one law.

The opening words of the law of the red heifer, whose ashes were mixed with water and sprinkled to purify the ritually impure, are: "This is the decree of the Torah." This law captures the essence of all that the Torah wants to teach. We

can't just ignore this law and move on to more "exciting" and "relevant" parts of the Torah. This is the decree of the Torah. But how is it relevant to us? We have no Holy Temple, no actual offering of a red heifer. What does this law have to do with our modern, 21st-century lives? The purifying waters have two primary ingredients: the ashes of the red heifer and spring water. The ashes are the byproduct of fire, the polar opposite of water. In essence, the law is telling us that our approach to spirituality must contain two opposing forces. On the one hand, we must be like fire, which always reaches upward, expressing our yearning to escape the confines of the physical reality and reach a higher place. On the other hand, we must be like water, which flows downward, expressing the "return" from spirituality to the physical world, imbuing the physical existence with spirituality.

Conventional wisdom teaches that to connect to the Divine, one must escape to a sanctuary or a mountaintop to meditate and pray, abandoning the challenges of materialism that present themselves in everyday life.

"Not true!" cries the red heifer. "You must also have water, which nourishes all life on earth. If you want to connect to G-d, you must find Him on this earth." We must balance both extremes, mixing ashes into the water, cultivating our spiritual life in order for our material life to become holy. Only by yearning to escape the confines of the earth can we imbue our life on earth with meaning.

Two people are on a flight home from their vacations. Both are returning to a similar home, job, and lifestyle. The first person went on vacation to escape everyday reality. On the flight home, realizing that the paradise of vacation is over, facing the prospect of falling from the intense pleasure of vacation to the mundane reality, she is devastated. The vacation did nothing to improve her daily existence. In fact, she would have been better off taking the money spent on vacation and using it to improve some part of her normal existence. The second person went on vacation, not to escape his life, but rather to enhance it. He realized that if he took some time off, he would return to his routine with greater focus and passion.

The same is true for our lives. We need to "go on vacation." We need to devote some time every day to escape from the mundane and immerse ourselves in spirituality. We need ashes, which represent the flame yearning to escape its wick. But our intention in going on our spiritual vacation is not to escape the world, but rather to get recharged—to better accomplish our mission of mixing fire and water, of connecting heaven and earth.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

July 7, 2019 – 4 Tammuz, 7779

Passing of R. Mendel Futerfas (1995). As a young man, R. Mendel Futerfas (1906–1995) studied in the underground network of Yeshivat Tomchei Temimim in Soviet Russia. He subsequently was given the task of obtaining the funds necessary to maintain the network of hidden classes, a mission fraught with danger of tremendous proportions. He later risked his life once again to oversee the clandestine escape of hundreds of Lubavitcher Chassidim from the U.S.S.R. via Lemberg in 1946. As a result of these latter efforts, R. Mendel was caught and sent to work in the Siberian gulags for eight years. After finishing his sentence, he was denied exit from Russia for an additional eight years, until his request was finally granted in 1963. He lived in London and then in Brooklyn until his passing. R. Mendel was a legend in his time. His dedication to the sixth and seventh Lubavitcher Rebbes, R. Yosef Yitzchak and R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, were unsurpassed, as were the lengths he was ready to go to assist a fellow Jew. He was known for his sharp wit and humor, and his well-attended farbrengens were interspersed with life-lessons creatively deduced from his experiences in Siberia.

July 8, 2019 – 5 Tammuz, 5779

Ezekiel's Vision of the "Chariot" (429 BCE). On the 5th of Tammuz of the year 3332 from creation (429 BCE), Ezekiel, among the only prophets to prophesy outside of the Holy Land, beheld a vision of the Divine "Chariot" representing the spiritual infrastructure of creation.

July 10, 2019 - 7 Tammuz, 5779

Passing of Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (1805). Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz of Nikelsburg (1730-1805) was the rabbi of Frankfurt and the author of *Sefer Hafla'ah* and *Sefer HaMikneh* -- commentaries on the Talmud -- and *Panim Yafot*, an exegesis on the Torah. Rabbi Pinchas and his brother Rabbi Shmuel Shmelke were students of the Mezritcher Maggid. They were amongst the first adherents to the Chassidic movement to hold rabbinic posts in Germany. The famed Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Chatam Sofer, considered Rabbi Pinchas to be one of his main teachers.

Purim Ostroh (1792). The Jewish community of Ostroh (in what is now western Ukraine) was miraculously spared when a Russian army led by General Suvorov attempted to breach its walls, claiming Polish insurgents were present inside. To commemorate the miracle, the day of 7 Tammuz was established as a local day of rejoicing, and a special scroll in which the story was inscribed was read each year on this date. According to legend, two cannons that struck the great Maharsha synagogue caused no harm. The two cannons were thereupon displayed in the synagogue for all to see. (Yalkut Volhynia, issues 2–3)

Friday, July 12, 2019 - 9 Tammuz, 5779

Jerusalem Walls Breached (423 BCE). The Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem on the 9th of Tammuz in the year 3338 from creation (423 BCE); King Ziddikiah of Judah was captured and taken to Babylon (Jeremiah 39:5). A month later, the capture of Jerusalem was completed with the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile of all but a small number of Jews to Babylon). Tammuz 9 was observed as a fast day until the 2nd breaching of Jerusalem's walls (by the Romans) on the 17th of Tammuz, 3829 (69 CE), at which time the fast was moved to that date. (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah and Tur Orach Chaim 549)