

## PARSHAT CHUKAT

3 - 9 Tammuz 5785  
29 June - 5 July 2025

Torah: Numbers 19:1-22:1  
Haftorah: Judges 11:1-33

PSALMS DAILY

### Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

*Psalm 117*

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

### Positive Mitzva 126 The Priestly Tithe

We are commanded to separate from our harvest Terumah Gedolah [the "great tithe."] This tithe is given to the priest. This biblical precept only applies in the Land of Israel.

### Positive Mitzvah 129 The Levite's Priestly Tithe

The Levites are commanded to separate a tenth from the tithe that they receive from the Israelites, and to give it to the priest. The Levites are commanded to give this tithe from the choicest of the produce.

## RED HEIFER

One of the most mysterious Mitzvahs in the Torah is the Parah Adumah, the red heifer, which was used for ritual purification. There have been only nine such heifers in history, and our tradition tells us that there will be one more in the future. Here is an overview of the mysterious red heifer, which left even King Solomon, the wisest of all men, scratching his head in wonderment.

### What Was It Needed For?

Before we can discuss the actual red heifer, we need a bit of background information on the biblical laws of ritual purity. There is a common misconception that the biblical notion of impurity implies filth or susceptibility to infection. Maimonides writes, however, that it's a Gezeirat Hakatuv, a supra-rational mandate of the Torah - it has no rationale that we can comprehend.

One form of impurity is contracted by touching, or being under the same roof as, a corpse. Once defiled, one could not enter the Holy Temple or partake of the sacrificial offerings or other sacred foods. In order to be purified, one had to be sprinkled with a special mixture of spring water and ashes from the burned remains of the red heifer.

### The Ritual

The laws of the red heifer are presented at the very beginning of the Torah portion of Chukat:

*"This is the statute of the Torah which the L-rd commanded, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid.'"*

The sages infer that the red heifer must be completely red - even two black hairs would render it invalid. And it must not have done any work in its lifetime - even having a yoke placed on its back, or having mated, would disqualify it.

Once a candidate was found, and there was need for more purifying ash water, the cow would be slaughtered and burned on a pyre, along with a cedar branch, hyssop sprig and crimson wool. The ceremony took place on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, opposite the Temple Mount.

The ashes would then be mixed with carefully guarded water drawn from the Shiloach spring. Those who came in contact with the dead would be sprinkled with the ash water on the third and seventh days after their defilement. On the seventh day, they would immerse in a Mikvah, and that night they would revert to their original pure status.

Since there is no longer a Temple in Jerusalem, the rituals of the red heifer - as well as most of the laws surrounding ritual purity - will be applicable only in the messianic era.

### Does It Make Sense?

When introducing this Mitzvah, the Torah states, "This is the statute of the Torah." The word "statute," Chok, denotes a law that defies reason. Since the Torah prefaces the Mitzvah by calling it "the Chok of the Torah," it appears that this Mitzvah must somehow be more mysterious and supra-rational than any other law.

Rashi elaborates: "Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, 'What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?' therefore the Torah uses the term 'statute.' 'I have decreed it; you have no right to challenge it.'"

In reference to the red heifer, King Solomon famously stated, "I had said I would become wise - but it is far from me." The Midrash expounds, "With all other [laws of the Torah] I held my footing, but when it comes to the teaching of the heifer, I analyzed, I asked, and I researched [without understanding]."

There are other laws in the Torah that do not have a comprehensible rationale. What is so strange about this particular law?

The red heifer presents a great paradox: the priest who is involved in the preparation of the heifer himself becomes impure through the process. Strange indeed.

But that leads us to a greater puzzle. Why would G-d give us a law that no one can understand? Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if He would give us a mitzvah that resonates with our mortal minds, so that we could fulfill it with deep appreciation?

Chassidic philosophy answers thusly: We do the Mitzvahs not because we understand them, but because they are His will. And this also extends to the mitzvahs we think we understand: we need to do these mitzvahs simply

because they are G-d's will, not because they make sense to us.

Conversely, the Midrash also tells us that G-d did reveal the secret of the red heifer to Moses. Why? Because we are intelligent beings who crave understanding. The very knowledge that someone out there understood these laws makes them more palatable to us and allows us to appreciate them as much the mitzvahs we ourselves understand.

### The Quest for the Red Heifer

It appears that finding an appropriate heifer was quite challenging. For example, the Talmud tells the story of a gentile named Dama who dealt in precious gems. At one point, the sages of Israel approached him to purchase a replacement gem for the breastplate of the high priest. Since, in order to retrieve the stone, Dama would need to wake his sleeping father, he refused to show them the stone. Even when the sages raised the price, he did not budge. Eventually, his father woke up, and Dama made the sale (insisting on the original, lower price). As a reward for the exemplary lengths he went to honor his father, Dama merited to have a red heifer born in his herd, which again fetched him a pretty penny from the Temple treasury.

Even today, one occasionally hears of the birth of a perfectly red cow, and speculation is raised as to whether it is a harbinger of the messianic era. After all, Maimonides himself codifies the following as Jewish law: "Nine red heifers were offered from the time that they were commanded to fulfill this mitzvah until the time when the Temple was destroyed a second time. The first was brought by Moses our teacher. The second was brought by Ezra. Seven others were offered until the destruction of the Second Temple. And the tenth will be brought by the King Moshiach; may he speedily be revealed. Amen, so may it be G-d's will."

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### CHUKAT IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Chukat," means "Statute" and it is found in Numbers 19:2.



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Moses is taught the laws of the red heifer, whose ashes purify a person who has been contaminated by contact with a dead body.

After forty years of journeying through the desert, the people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Zin. Miriam dies, and the people thirst for water. G-d tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water. Moses gets angry at the rebellious Israelites and strikes the

stone. Water issues forth, but Moses is told by G-d that neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

Aaron dies at Hor Hahar and is succeeded in the high priesthood by his son Elazar. Venomous snakes attack the Israelite camp after yet another eruption of discontent in which the people "speak against G-d and Moses"; G-d tells Moses to place a brass serpent upon a high pole,

and all who will gaze heavenward will be healed. The people sing a song in honor of the miraculous well that provided them water in the desert.

Moses leads the people in battles against the Emorite kings Sichon and Og (who seek to prevent Israel's passage through their territory) and conquers their lands, which lie east of the Jordan.

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, 3 Tammuz 5785 - 29 June 2025**

### **Joshua Stops the Sun (1273 BCE)**

On the third of Tammuz 2488 (1273 BCE), Joshua was leading the Jewish people in one of the battles to conquer the Land of Israel. Victory was imminent, but darkness was about to fall. "Sun," proclaimed Joshua, "be still at Giv'on; moon, at the Ayalon valley". The heavenly bodies acquiesced, halting their progress through the sky until Israel's armies brought the battle to its successful conclusion.

### **6<sup>th</sup> Rebbe Released from Prison (1927)**

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (5640-5710, or 1880-1950), who was arrested on 15 Sivan 5687 (1927) by agents of the GPU (Soviet secret police) for his work to preserve and disseminate Jewish learning and observance throughout the Soviet Empire. Held in the notorious Spalerno prison in Leningrad, he was repeatedly interrogated and beaten. Initially sentenced to death, international pressure compelled the Soviet regime to first commute the sentence to ten years hard labor in Siberia, and then to a three-year term of exile in Kostrama, a town in the interior of Russia.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tammuz, 18 days after his arrest, he was released from prison and allowed six hours at home before reporting to the Leningrad train station to embark on his exile. Many gathered at the station to see him off. Though he knew that there were GPU agents present, he spoke to the assembled crowd, encouraging all to persist in the very activities for which he had been arrested. "This," he proclaimed "all the nations of the world must know: Only our bodies were sent into exile and subjugated to alien rule; our souls were not given over into captivity and foreign rule. We must proclaim openly and before all that any matter affecting the Jewish religion, Torah, and its mitzvot and customs is not subject to the coercion of others. No one can impose his belief upon us, nor coerce us to conduct ourselves contrary to our beliefs!"

(On the 12<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, after serving only nine days of his three year term, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was informed that he was free to return home. Shortly thereafter, he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union and resettled in Riga, Latvia.)

### **Rebbe's Yahrzeit (1994)**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory (b. 5662, or 1902) passed away in the early morning hours of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Tammuz, of the year 5754 (1994).

**Monday, 4 Tammuz 5785 - 30 June 2025**

### **Passing of Rabbeinu Tam (1171)**

Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir of Ramerupt (born circa 4860, or 1100), known as "Rabbeinu Tam", was a grandson of Rashi, and one of the primary authors of the Tosafot commentary on the Talmud; the Bet-Din (rabbinical court) he headed was regarded as the leading Torah authority of his generation. He passed away on 4 Tammuz 5931 (1171).

### **Maharam Imprisoned (1286)**

Rabbi Meir ben Baruch ("Maharam") of Rothenburg (4975-5053, or 1215-1293), the great Talmudic commentator and leading Halachic authority for German Jewry, was imprisoned in the fortress at Ensisheim on 4 Tammuz 5046 (1286). A huge ransom was imposed for his release, and the money was raised, but Rabbi Meir refused to allow it to be paid lest this encourage the further hostage taking of Jewish leaders. He died in captivity after seven years of imprisonment.

### **Passing of Reb Mendel Futerfas (1995)**

As a young man, Reb Mendel Futerfas (born 5676, or 1906) studied in the underground network of Lubavitch Yeshivot 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 USSR via Kiev in 5706 (1946).

As a result of these latter efforts, Reb 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 5723 (1963). He lived in London and then in Kfar Chabad, Israel, until his passing.

Reb Mendel was a legend in his time. His dedication to the sixth and seventh Lubavitcher Rebbes, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak and Rabbi 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.

### **Tuesday, 5 Tammuz 5785 - 1 July 2025**

#### **Ezekiel's Vision of the "Chariot" (429 BCE)**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz 3332 (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.

#### **Wednesday, 6 Tammuz 5785 - 2 July 2025**

#### **Entebbe Rescue (1976)**

Over 100 Jewish hostages held by Arab terrorists at Entebbe Airport in Uganda, were rescued by

Israeli commando units on 6 Tammuz 5736 (1976), in a daring mission thousands of miles from Israel. During the operation, three hostages were killed, in addition to one hostage, Dora Bloch, who was in a hospital at the time, and was later ordered killed by Idi Amin, Uganda's dictator. The officer leading the operation, Yonatan Netanyahu, was killed in the operation, which was retroactively named Operation Yonatan in his memory.

#### **Friday, 8 Tammuz 5785 - 4 July 2025**

#### **Spanish Inquisition Abolished (1834)**

On 8 Tammuz 5594 (1834), the Office of the Spanish Inquisition was abolished by the Queen Mother Maria Christina, after nearly three and a half centuries. However, the right of public worship (including permission to mark places of worship and advertise religious services) was not granted to the Jews until 5727 (1967).

#### **Shabbat, 9 Tammuz 5785 - 5 July 2025**

#### **Jerusalem Walls Breached (423 BCE)**

The Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar breached the walls of Jerusalem on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz 3338 (423 BCE); King Ziddikiah of Judah was captured and taken to Babylon, and 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. 9 Tammuz was observed as a fast day until the second breaching of Jerusalem's walls (by the Romans) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz 3829 (69 CE), at which time the fast was moved to that date.

#### **Talmud Burned in France (1244)**

Twenty-four wagonloads of Talmudic volumes were publicly burned by Christian church officials in Paris. Many works of Jewish scholarship were forever lost as a result, and some fast on Friday in the week of Chukat to lament this tragedy.

#### **Passing of the Sanz-Klausenburger Rebbe (1994)**

Born in Poland in 5675 (1905), he became the rabbi of the Jewish community in Klausenburg, Romania, in 5790 (1930). During the Holocaust, he and his family were separated, and he was subjected to forced labor in various camps, tragically losing his wife and nine of his children. He relocated to the United States and reestablished his court in Brooklyn in 5706 (1946), where he married Chaya Nechama Ungar and fathered seven more children. His notable contributions include founding the Kiryat Sanz community in Israel and the Laniado Hospital. Upon his passing in 5754 (1994), his sons Zvi Elimelech and Shmuel Dovid assumed leadership of the Sanzer Hasidim in Netanya and Brooklyn, respectively.