

## PARSHAS CHUKAS 5778

This week's parsha is a break of 38 years between the events of the first two years in the midbar and the series of events that lead to the final approach to Eretz Yisroel. It is striking when you realize that there is a total black-out in the Chumash regarding the years of wandering. No incidents were recorded. Nothing was communicated by Hashem. They lived with the mon and the miraculous well of water and the annanei hakovod and lived an elevated life with Moshe Rabbeinu—disconnected from normal human living and disconnected from the rest of the world.

As the old generation which left Mitzrayim died out, a new generation grew up—not experiencing Yetzias Mitzrayim and Ma'amad Har Sinai first-hand—except for a few individuals who were under 20 at the time, and Shevet Levi who never experienced the shibbud of Mitzrayim.

What did they spend 38 years doing? Learning Torah with Moshe Rabbeinu day-in day-out, until the Torah became absorbed into the very fiber of their being.

All of a sudden, after about a 38-year black-out, Miriam died and the be'er stopped giving water. Klal Yisroel immediately started to panic and say they prefer to die by plague instead of an agonizing death by thirst. They complain: why have we been brought to die in this wilderness—we and our flocks? But this is very difficult. They have been living with Shechinoh and with miracles for 38 years and they know of Hashem's promise to bring Klal Yisroel into Eretz Yisroel. How could they seriously think Hashem was going to let them die of thirst in the wilderness after all this time?

Why did they mention their animals? What we see from this is that really they knew they would survive the midbar. What they were really concerned about was their animals and their wealth. Because they were so focused on and so connected to their material possessions, they just lost perspective and thought if their animals will die, they are going to die with them.

Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon in the beginning of this parsha about the laws of poroh adumoh. But it could have been placed in any parsha just the same. Why here? Doesn't it really belong together with all the halachos of tumoh and taharoh in Shemini or Tazria-Metzora?

There are many reasons, but one reason is that it poroh adumoh is the quintessential chok of the Torah. It has inherent contradictions and no human being can fully understand it. Chazal tell us that even Shlomo Hamelech despaired of penetrating its secret. Hashem wants us to understand the Torah He gave us, but at the same time, be aware that the Torah is not subject to human logic and human comprehension. No one has a complete grasp of the wisdom of the Torah—not even the greatest minds in history. Shlomo Hamelech and Rabbi Akiva. Mori veRebbi told me in the name of my grandfather, Rav Moshe, zatzal, the reason that not all questions are resolved

in Shas. Why did Chazal record discussions that raised problems that they didn't resolve and end with "teku"? It is because Chazal want to teach us humility. We need to know that there are problems that do not have a satisfactory answer. Not all problems are solvable. Our minds are limited in the face of the wisdom of Hashem.

That is our approach to limud HaTorah. We approach it with humility and know our place. The wisdom of the entire cosmos is a derivative of the Torah—so of course it contains infinite wisdom and complexity.

This week in Jewish history is a tragic one. During the week of Parshas Chukas in France during the 13th century, the King of France decreed that all copies of Shas in all of France be brought to a major street in Paris to be burned. The main yeshiva led by Rav Yechiel in Paris had talmidim like Rabbeinu Yonah and Maharam Miruttenburg who were scattered as a result. In the kinos on Tisha B'av we include a kinoh about the destruction of the Torah in France that ensued. It was a tragedy which spurred a serious introspection among the Rishonim. They didn't shrug it off as just another incident of persecution and anti-semitism of the golus. It spurred Rabbeinu Yonah to write Sha'arei Teshuvoh. He interpreted the tragedy as a sign that the Baalei HaTosafos did not give enough respect to the Rambam and because of that, France could not be a center of Torah. It is a serious punishment for not having sufficient respect for a gadol baTorah.

If you have respect for the Torah, you must have respect for those who learn Torah. If you lack sufficient respect for those who learn Torah, in the end you will lack sufficient respect for the Torah itself. Limud haTorah is not a competitive realm to play out your own ego needs and gratifications. Torah is above any individual and any group, no matter how brilliant, no matter how pious, no matter how devoted. Each of us are trying to understand the wisdom of Hashem. So when we encounter someone who has thoroughly mastered an enormous portion of Torah, we need to acknowledge his superior position closer to Hashem—and honor his Torah knowledge regardless if we agree or disagree with it. Anyone who has seen the Rambam's Mishnah Torah, or even his Pirush Hamishnayos, can surmise that the Rambam had a tremendous understanding of Torah. It demanded a certain level of derech erez that the Chachmei Tzorfos did not extend and deserved a destruction of their own mokom Torah. So thought Rabbeinu Yonah.

The Maharam went back to Germany and he did his own cheshbon hanefesh.

The parshas starts with the famous posuk of 'Odom ki yomus baohel'. But the posuk doesn't start with that phrase. It actually starts with the words, "Zos chukas haTorah, odom...". Chazal explain that the Torah doesn't remain with someone unless he kills himself over it. Towards the beginning of Moreh Nevuchim

the Rambam fielded a question sent to him about the sin of Odom HoRishon. But before he answered the question, the Rambam accused the questioner of taking the Torah too casually, of treating the Chumash like any other book of human literature. This results in a superficial understanding of Chumash. Chumash is very unique because it is deceptive in its simplicity. It contains stories that a preschooler can understand and relate to while hiding the deepest insights that only well trained talmidei chachomim will pick up on.

When you write a science textbook for 3rd graders, the content will be tailored to the target audience and the concepts and language of the textbook will be simple. It won't be masking any greater depth for older readers to pick up on. You don't use the same textbook for older readers. You write a new one geared for a more advanced level. And so on for every subject you teach to different ages. But the Torah is unique. The exact same text is learned by everyone and it challenges everyone on their level.

My grandchildren learn the same Chumash I learn. Two days a week, I have a grandson who learns Bava Metzia with me. It is a challenge for me to teach it to him on a 9 year old level while I have said shiurim for advanced talmidim on the same material. The Torah is vast with an infinite depth. You never get to the bottom—but only if you are meimis yourself.

The Torah that is written to be published on a website is typically extremely superficial. Why? Because it is written for people who learn their Torah while browsing around surfing the internet. Of course it will be superficial because it has to cater to the demand for instant understanding and gratification.

Torah gives itself over to those who struggle and toil over it. Every time you struggle with it, you get deeper and deeper. You realize it is the greatest chochmoh and you allow yourself to connect yourself to Hashem on a much more inner level.

Klal Yisroel in the midbor had a problem. The man was there whenever they woke up. It tasted like whatever you want. It is there to cater to all their needs. They had the opportunity to learn with Moshe Rabbeinu—the mekabbel haTorah himself—on the highest level. And one day they run out of water, they flew into a panic. They had taken for granted all the miracles and brochos they had been living with all these years—not knowing and never experiencing one day missing what they lacked—without being provided with everything they need. They got spoiled.

This is the story of Klal Yisroel in the midbor and throughout the generations. Hashem gives us unbelievable gifts and

we take them for granted. When we spoke about Parshas Behaalos'choh and Klal Yisroel complaining about the man, we discussed the sin of the old Sanhedrin. Rashi explained that they did not treat the gilui Shechinoh at Har Sinai with the requisite awe and yiras hakovod. They were still feasting as if it was no big deal. Hashem was revealing Himself to them directly.

Hashem has given a gift to our generation. It is an incredible gift of unparalleled comfort and the opportunity to learn Torah on a mass scale that hasn't been experienced for about a thousand years or more. We have an ability to connect to Hashem in the deepest way possible, but we take it for granted and think it will always be available when we want it. No urgency, no sense of how unique and special our period of history is.

In the week of Parshas Chukas, Klal Yisroel experienced a terrible tragedy of gezeiras oraisoh. All the Rishonim responded with the realization that they didn't take the Torah seriously enough and this is why France is deleted from the map of limud haTorah.

Hashem gave us a tremendous opportunity to go away from the materialism of the world and come to Eretz Yisroel to immerse ourselves in limud haTorah for a number of years, and we just treat it like we're tourists looking to have an exotic experience. Parents ask me if we offer a lot of tiyulim. We take our limud haTorah seriously. We are living in unique and wondrous times. Torah is available to you and it can go deep, but it depends on your investment. It pays back dividends. We have to believe in Torah and its power to transform us and expand our abilities.

A talmid of mine once came to Rav Shach to ask for advice about the fact that he is trying to understand the Torah and he isn't succeeding. Perhaps he should give up and go to work? Rav Shach said he simply can't believe him. Chazal tell us that if someone says he is trying and not succeeding in Torah, don't believe him! What we put into our limud Torah, we get paid back.

If Klal Yisroel had understood and appreciated what they had all those years, and had they been so soaked through with Torah, they wouldn't have complained. Moshe wouldn't have had to hit the rock, and everything would have been different.

It was true for them and it is true for us for now and the future. Appreciate the opportunity you have been given. We only succeed in Torah when we make some sacrifices. Those small sacrifices will pay us back dividends for the rest of our lives.