

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Faigy bas Rav Nachum by Channah Finkel. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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10 TAMMUZ

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS CHUKAS

Forgiven but not Forgotten

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: Speak to Bnei Yisroel and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow... (19:1-2)

This week's *parsha* describes the *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah*; the extremely rare occurrence of a perfectly red cow whose ashes would be used in the process of purifying those who had come into contact with the dead.

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by the term "to you" which is in the singular even though Hashem was addressing both Moshe and Aharon. He goes on to explain that the *Parah Adumah* was a *mitzvah* that would always be referred to as the cow that Moshe prepared in the desert. In other words, this *mitzvah* is permanently associated with Moshe Rabbeinu.

What exactly does this mean? While it is true that Moshe organized the procedure in the desert, why would a *Parah Adumah* a thousand years later still be referred to as Moshe's? How did Moshe come to acquire the naming rights to the *Parah Adumah*, and why this *mitzvah* as opposed to any other?

Rashi, in his addendum to the end of the section describing the *Parah Adumah*, describes ten similarities between the processing of the *Parah Adumah* and the sin of the golden calf. In other words, the *Parah Adumah* is meant as an atonement for the sin of the golden calf. How does this dovetail with the main purpose of the *Parah*

Adumah, that of purifying those who have come into contact with a dead person?

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 146a) informs us that death left the world when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai to Bnei Yisroel. Death came into the world when Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In other words, Bnei Yisroel accepting the Torah was a

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rectification of Adam's sin and therefore death left the world. The Gemara continues; when Bnei Yisroel sinned by the golden calf death returned. In fact, Hashem had proclaimed a death sentence on the entire Jewish people.

Moshe was the only one not included in the death sentence of the golden calf. Actually, Hashem offered to rebuild the Jewish people solely from Moshe, but Moshe refused. Instead, Moshe pleaded on behalf of Bnei Yisroel that Hashem should spare them. Hashem relented and, in fact, taught Moshe the process



of achieving forgiveness by reciting the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that we have incorporated into the Yom Kippur *davening*.

The *Parah Adumah*, whose actual purpose is to remove the defilement that comes from being in contact with a dead person, is therefore an atonement on the sin of the golden calf which was the cause of death returning to the world. This explains why Moshe is forevermore credited with the *mitzvah* of *Parah Adumah*; it was he who pleaded with Hashem not to destroy Bnei Yisroel after the sin of the golden calf. The *Parah Adumah*, in effect, serves the exact function that Moshe accomplished when he prevailed upon Hashem to spare Bnei Yisroel. Having Moshe's name attached to the *mitzvah* is the very definition of the purpose of the *Parah Adumah*.

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Kiss of Death

...Miriam died there and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon (20:1-2).

Chazal (*Tashbatz Hakatan* 447) use this as a source of the Jewish custom of pouring out all the water in the immediate vicinity of someone who has died. This is also mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch (Yorah Deah 339.5)* and the *Shach* (ad loc) explains that this story in the Torah is the source. The reason given is that when the Angel of Death uses his sword to take a person's life he dips his sword in the nearest available water to clean his blade and the blood of the deceased, where one's *nefesh* resides as it were, enters the water. We therefore pour out all the water in the immediate vicinity.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Miriam died through a kiss. This is referring to a death directly through Hashem without the intercession of the Angel of Death. Rashi explains that although by the deaths of Moshe and Aharon the Torah says "by the mouth of Hashem," by Miriam's death there is no such statement because it is not respectful to Hashem to speak in such a manner. Therefore it was, in effect, hidden.

Chazal, based on the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 28a), explain that we know that Miriam died through a kiss by the extra word "there" that appears in the *possuk*. In other words, the Torah could have simply written "Miriam died and was buried there." From the extra word "there" we make an exegetical analysis as an analogy to the deaths of both Moshe and Aharon where the word "there" also appears by their death. Just as their deaths were through a kiss, so too was Miriam's.

On the face of it this is perplexing; why does it matter how we know that Miriam died through a kiss? An exegetical analysis

is a perfectly valid way of teaching us a concept. As an example; nowhere in the Torah does it say that one must fast on Yom Kippur. The Talmud (*Yoma* 77b) proves the obligation from the same type of exegetical analysis. Yet everyone knows that we must fast on Yom Kippur. So too here, once we have an exegetical analogy, everyone knows that Miriam died through a kiss. So why is it considered "hidden"?

Finally, if there was no Angel of Death involved in Miriam's death, then how can that be the source for the custom of pouring out water in the area around one who has died?

The essential difference between the death by the hand of the Angel of Death and of a kiss by Hashem is that by the Angel of Death a murder is essentially taking place. But by Hashem the soul recognizes its source with which it yearns to be reconnected and the soul leaves the body willingly, and as a body without a soul cannot survive, it dies. In this case the body isn't violated in the same way that the Angel of Death performs his function.

This is the explanation of Miriam dying in a hidden manner. This doesn't mean that we do not know how she died; it's only that her manner of death wasn't made apparent to the Jewish people **at that time** because it isn't a respectful way to conceive of Hashem. How do we know that it was hidden from them? Because they poured out all the water ("there was no water for the assembly"), indicating that they thought she died through the Angel of Death.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, after Sicho, King of Emorites, attacks and is defeated by Bnei Yisroel, Og, the King of Bashan, does the same exact thing – and, of course, he is soundly defeated as well. But what's interesting to note is the manner in which he died: The Gemara (*Berachos* 54b) says that Moshe was ten *amos* tall, his staff (or axe, as Artscroll defines it) was ten *amos* tall, he jumped ten *amos* high, and only hit his ankle. If this is to be understood literally, (and Rashi there confirms that Moshe was 10 *amos*) this would make his ankle 60 feet high (according to the Chazon Ish that an *amah* is two feet).

But exactly how tall was Og? All we need to do is compare him to a regular sized person, with bigger numbers. A normal six foot person is 72 inches with about three inch ankle space. So a person's height is 24 times 3 inches, or 72 inches. Therefore Og's (minimum) height is 24 times 60, or 1,440 feet tall!

To put this in perspective; this is taller than the Empire State Building and 240 times the size of a person. Even at his height, he had plenty of space to breathe, as humans can live at an altitude of almost 20,000 feet. At 240 times the size of a normal person he would "only" have to eat about an entire cow a day, as it contains a little over 500,000 calories. In addition, if a six foot person were standing next to Og he would be almost exactly this big: [↔]. His body, being that huge (and we imagine, pretty impossible to move), should be found somewhere around the Golan Heights, because Josephus (*Antiquities* 4:5:3) identifies Bashan as being somewhere near the Golan Heights.



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