
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT CHUKAT

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

WHERE DOES PARSHAT PARA ADUMA BELONG?

1. Even though the laws of Para Aduma are recorded in Parshat Chukat, there is ample reason to assume that these laws of 'tum'at met' [i.e. laws pertaining to 'spiritual uncleanness' caused by touching a dead body] may have been given at an earlier time.

To prove this point, review Bamidbar 9:1-8, noting how that event ('pesach sheni') took place before the 14 of Nissan and after the laws of tum'at met had been given! Is it logical to assume that these laws were given before the mishkan was first erected? Explain why yes (or no). [See Ramban on 19:1.]

Is it logical to assume that these laws were given before **Matan Torah**? If so, explain why.

2. See Rashi on Shmot 15:25. According to this Rashi, when were these laws (re: para aduma) first given? What, do you think, leads Rashi to this conclusion?

What is problematic with this conclusion, based on Bamidbar 19:4. [See also Ramban.]

3. Finally, see Rashi at the conclusion of Bamidbar chapter 19 (i.e. after he completes his commentary on 19:22) - where he quotes Rebbe Moshe ha'darshan, providing an alternate commentary for the entire chapter which emphasizes the thematic connection between the laws of "para aduma" the events at "chet ha'egel"

After reading this commentary [which is simply a masterpiece], explain how it would affect our understanding of when and why these laws were first given, and why they are recorded at this specific point in Sefer Bamidbar!

4. In our introductory shiur to Sefer Bamidbar, we discussed the unique style of Sefer Bamidbar (where its ongoing narrative is periodically 'interrupted' by parshiot of mitzvot). Would you consider these laws of para aduma (i.e. chapter 19) typical of this style?

If so, what is the narrative that precedes these laws and what is the narrative that follows them?

Do any of these two narratives involve death? Do any of these parshiot relate to the responsibilities of the kohanim?

Based on your answer to question #1, how could this explain why the Torah chose to record this parsha here, even though these laws were actually given at a much earlier time?

[See Rashi on 20:1 ['va-tamot sham Miriam'...]. What leads Rashi to this conclusion?]

5. In what year do the events recorded in Bamidbar chapters 16 thru 18 [i.e. the story of Korach's rebellion] take place?

Would it make more sense if they took place soon after the sin of the 'meraglim'? [See Ibn Ezra & Ramban on 16:1.]

Assuming that Korach's rebellion took place soon after the sin of the meraglim, and the Mei Meriva incident took place in the fortieth year, approximately how many years elapse in between these two events?

What is recorded in Chumash between these two events? Are there any narratives?

In your opinion, could parshat para aduma (and its laws) relate to this time-period? If so, how?

6. Re: other commentators on this topic:

See Ibn Ezra on 19:1 (and Ramban on 19:1 / about 15 lines down) where they discuss **why** this parsha is recorded here.

See also Chizkuni on 19:1. In what manner is his peirush similar and in what manner is it very different from Ibn Ezra and

Ramban's? Then, see Rashi on 20:1 [d.h. 'va-tamot sham Miriam']. How is Rashi's peirush different from all of the others?

BETWEEN SEFER BAMIDBAR & DEVARIM

1. Review the story of how Bnei Yisrael doesn't enter the territory of Edom (and why) in 20:14-21 and their journey and ensuing war with Sichon & Og in 21:10-35. Then, review the parallel account of these events in Devarim 2:1 thru 3:22.

Attempt to explain why each account emphasizes different aspects of these events, based on the primary theme of [this section of] Sefer Bamidbar in contrast to the purpose of Moshe Rabeinu's speech to the nation in Sefer Devarim [i.e. the 'pep talk' to the nation before they embark on their battle to conquer the land/ see TSC shiur on Parshat Devarim].

THE LAST STOP

1. Review the final pasuk of Parshat Chukat (i.e. 22:1). Notice how it forms the final pasuk of entire 'parshia', yet on the other hand, it's considered the first verse of chapter 22! In your opinion, which division makes more sense, i.e. the chapter division - considering 22:1 as the beginning of the Balak story; or Chazal's division, considering this the conclusion of Bnei Yisrael journey that began after Aharon's death in (see 21:4)?

2. Note how Bnei Yisrael arrive at Arvot Moav in 22:1. To the best of your recollection, when is the next time the Bnei Yisrael travel, and where do they travel to, and where is that story recorded?

Did you ever notice before, that this is the last 'camp site' that Bnei Yisrael set up during their forty year journey? To appreciate the importance of this site, make a list of all of the events that take place in Arvot Moav, from the stories in Parshat Balak until the end of Sefer Devarim.

**PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)
THREE SHIURIM!!**

SHIUR #1 - Moshe's 'sin' at Mei Meriva

1. How many different opinions can you recall, which explain what Moshe did wrong at the Mei Meriva incident?

Which opinion do you consider the most logical?

What ever it may have been what he did wrong; in your opinion - was his 'sin' intentional, or 'unintentional'?

2. What was Moshe Rabbeinu's punishment for this sin? [Keep note of your answer for later reference.]

Do you think that the punishment that Moshe received was 'fair'? If not, explain why not.

[Did you ever hear an explanation for why he was punished so severely for such a small transgression?]

3. To begin our study, let's go to the 'crime scene' - i.e. begin your study with a quick review of 20:7-11 - the psukim that describe this 'sin', noting how they first describe God's commandment to Moshe & Aharon, followed by how they fulfilled [or didn't fulfill] that commandment.

Review God's commandment to Moshe in 20:8, noting how it includes a long list of instructions. List each command that Moshe is instructed to perform. [Be sure that you can identify each of these five commands. /If it's not Shabbat, it would be helpful if you write down each command, leaving a space between each one, for later reference.]

4. Based on these five commands, is it perfectly clear (from these commands) precisely what Moshe is supposed to do?

For example, what is supposed to say to the rock?

Why is he commanded to take the staff?

Is he supposed to take water out of the rock, or is the water supposed to flow out by itself?

Did you notice any apparent contradiction between the third and fourth commands (in 20:8)?

5. Next, carefully read 20:9-11, noting how Moshe fulfills (or doesn't fulfill) each of these five commands. [If you are writing them down, then insert them into the list you began above.]

Is it easy to pinpoint precisely what he did wrong?

How do you know for sure that he did do something wrong? In your own opinion, did he do anything wrong? If so, which command (or commands) did he not fulfill properly?

In your opinion (if he did something wrong), was it because he didn't understand what God's command was; or did he understand - yet disobeyed intentionally?

[If you have time, see Ramban on 20:7 where he summarizes all of the various opinions. Note how your answers to these questions should help you understand all of the various points raised by Ramban. Which opinions does Ramban refute, and which opinion does he prefer?

6. Return now to 20:9. To the best of your recollection, which (or whose) 'mateh' did Moshe take? Based on this pasuk, how do we know for sure that he indeed took the proper mateh?

Where does he take this mateh from and why? Is this what God instructed him to do in 20:8?

Now, review Bamidbar 17:16-26, noting especially 17:25! How would this explain which mateh Moshe was instructed to take in 20:8? What other textual and thematic connections can you find between the events at Mei Meriva and the story of Korach's rebellion? Note 16:14, 16:19, & 17:27-28; compare with 20:4, 20:6, & 20:3! [See Chizkuni on 20:8-9, noting how he deals with many of the questions raised above!]

7. Next, review the story that sets the background for Moshe's 'sin' by studying 20:1-6, carefully comparing these psukim with a similar event that took place in Shmot 17:1-8.

Based on this parallel, what do you think should have been Moshe & Aharon's initial reaction to Bnei Yisrael's complaint for water (as described in 20:2-5)?

How did Moshe & Aharon react to the people's complaint at Mei Meriva? In your opinion, was their reaction proper? What was their reaction to the similar complaint raised by the nation as recorded in Shmot 17:1-5?

How are Moshe and Aharon's reaction to Bnei Yisrael's complaint in 20:2-5 similar to their overall reaction to the various other complaints raised by Bnei Yisrael in Sefer Bamidbar? Could this explain the reason for Moshe & Aharon's 'punishment'?

8. Review 20:12-13. What was Moshe & Aharon's punishment? Be precise! Does this punishment relate in any manner to their 'leadership', or was it a personal punishment?

Does this punishment relate in any manner to their 'sin'?

In other words, are Moshe & Aharon punished as individuals or as national leaders? Explain your answer.

9. In addition to the Ramban on 20:7-10 (where he discusses just about all of the opinions of the various Rishonim on the topic of Mei Meriva), see also Abrabanel at the end of chapter one of Sefer Devarim where he explains that Moshe does not actually sin at Mei Meriva, rather is punished due to chet ha-meraglim [and Aharon because of chet ha-egel].

Note in his peirush that he brings down about TEN different explanations of Moshe's sin at Mei Meriva and disproves each one! As you study this Abrabanel, relate it to the above questions.

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SHIUR #2 - WHEN DID MEI MERIVA TAKE PLACE?

1. To the best of your recollection, in what year do the events of Mei Meriva (see Bamidbar 20:1-13) take place? Similarly, when do the events in Bamidbar 20:14-29 take place?

[Base your answer on Bamidbar 33:37-39 in relation to 20:22-26. See also Ibn Ezra on 20:1]

Based on the psukim alone, is it possible to reach a definite answer to this question? [Explain why yes or why not.]

From a thematic perspective, is there any reason to prefer an explanation that puts (or doesn't put) these events in the fortieth year?

Can you explain why the Torah (in 20:1) only informs us in regard to the month, yet prefers not to tell us the year! How does the fact that this event takes place in the first month affect our understanding of what transpires in the ensuing story (i.e. in 20:2-6) in regard to the lack of water, and why they fear death?

2. According to Bamidbar 20:1, the incident of Mei Meriva takes place at Kadesh in Midbar Tzin.

Where is Midbar Tzin located?

[For those of you familiar with the map of Israel today, take a look on the map where the road to Eilat from Beer Sheva meets the road to Eilat from the Dead Sea (below the 'machtesh ha-katan' - the small crater). You should be able to find there 'nachal tzin'.]

In your opinion, is this the same location as Kadesh Barnea in Midbar Paraan, the site from where the meraglim were sent? (Be sure you understand where Midbar Paraan is located in relation to Midbar Tzin.) Note Yehoshua 10:41 & 15:3, and Bamidbar 34:4 in their context.

[To find that Kadesh [Barnea], look on the map on Egyptian side of the Israeli-Egyptian border in the Negev, left of the Rimon Crater area.]

3. Do you think that Kadesh was the original name of this site at Midbar Tzin (mentioned in 20:1), or was it named Kadesh because of the incident of Mei Meriva? Relate to Bamidbar 20:13 and 33:36!

Relate this to the nature of Moshe's punishment (20:12-13)!

Are there any other cities in Israel (or nearby) that are called Kadesh, or have the word Kadesh as part of their name? [See Shoftim 4:6! Note as well Breishit 14:7 & 16:14; Yehoshua 12:22, 15:23, 19:37, 20:7 & 21:32.]

Based on these sources, would it be logical to assume that Kadesh Barnea and Kadesh Midbar Tzin could be (and should be) two different places?

4. Carefully read Devarim 1:40 - 2:14, paying careful attention to the chronology of the events. Pay special attention from 1:45 thru 2:3. Be sure that you can identify (within these psukim) when the 38 year 'gap' transpires. [Note again 2:14.]

Attempt to correlate those psukim with the events described in Bamidbar chapters 20 and 21, as well as in Bamidbar chapter 33. [Btw, this is a very difficult question - but necessary preparation to follow the shiur.]

Relate your answer as well to Shoftim 11:15-17 (note by chance, it is quoted in this week's Haftara)!

5. In Devarim 1:46, the Torah informs us that Bnei Yisrael encamped in Kadesh - 'yamim rabim' - for many days (most likely this implies many years / see Rashi 1:46).

In your opinion, which Kadesh is this pasuk referring to: Kadesh Barnea or Kadesh Midbar Tzin? What do you base your answer on? Can you bring support for both opinions?

6. After the sin of the meraglim, were Bnei Yisrael supposed to stay in Kadesh Barnea, or were they instructed to leave? If so, why? [Relate to Devarim 1:40 and Bamidbar 14:25.]

See Ibn Ezra on Devarim 1:46 & Bamidbar 20:14.

Do you agree with his interpretation? Explain!

7. If Kadesh mentioned in 1:46 is indeed Kadesh Midbar Tzin, and not Kadesh Barnea, what possibility arises in regard to when (i.e. in what year) Bnei Yisrael may have first arrived at that site?

If so, what possibility would arise in regard to **when** the events at Mei Meriva may have taken place?

8. See the Netziv [Emek Davar] in his lengthy commentary to Devarim 1:46. Note how his commentary relates to many of the points raised by the above questions. Be sure you understand what leads him to conclude [nevertheless] that Mei Meriva took place in the fortieth year!

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SHIUR #3 - PARSHAT PARAH

1. Review Bamdibar chapter 19, i.e. Parshat Parah.

How did you translate the phrase 'chukat ha-torah', and in your opinion, what does this phrase mean?

In general, what does the word "torah" usually refer to in Sefer Vayikra & Bamidbar? [Relate to Vayikra chapters 6 & 7, and Bamidbar 5:29-30 & 6:21.]

What does the word 'chok' usually refer to? [Relate to Shmot 12:14, Vayikra 18:1-5 & 23:14,21,31 & 41.]

2. Based on Bamidbar 5:30, clearly the word "torah" can infer a certain type of 'procedure'. As you review Bamidbar chapter 19, see if you can identify a 'procedure', i.e. a set of instructions for how to make 'something'. How many 'procedures' did you find, and what would you title each one. [In other words, what is the end result of each procedure?]

If you found more than one procedure, how does each procedure relate to the next one?

3. Review this parshia once again, this time looking for special laws or 'consequences' when performing these procedures. Do these laws share anything in common? If so, can you explain why? Relate your answers to questions #2 & #3 to question #1.

4. Based on chapter 19, attempt to summarize the various laws of "tum'at met" [spiritual uncleanness contracted by contact with a dead body]. Clarify the various manners how one can contract tum'at met, and the procedure that one must follow to 'get rid' of it. Relate your answer to the above questions.

5. Based on your answers, how would you define a 'chuka' (or chok) and how would you define a 'torah' in this parshia? [Relate to the definition of a torah in Parshat Tzav. Relate as well to the word chok in Shmot 12:14 and Shoftim 11:38-40!]

How could this help explain what chukat ha-torah means?

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PART IV - PARSHANUT

EVERYONE or EVERYBODY?

1. Read 20:1, note the use of the phrase 'kol ha-eida' = the entire 'eida'. In your opinion, what does the word 'kol' add to this pasuk?

In other words, how would the pasuk have a different meaning if the word kol was not included? Can you recall any other times in Chumash when this phrase kol ha-eida has been used? If not, try Shmot 16:1 & 17:1 and Bamidbar 14:1 & 17:6, and 20:27-29. Attempt to explain in each of these instances what the word kol adds to the pasuk?

2. Now see Rashi on 20:1. What detail does Rashi learn for the word kol? Why? [Note Ibn Ezra as well. How does this relate?]

Finally, see Ramban. How and why does he disagree with Rashi? How does he explain kol here and in all of the other instances noted above? How does he relate to Rashi's peirush concerning **when** the last members of the first generation died?

In your opinion, which peirush is 'pshat', Rashi or Ramban's?

A 'SARAF' OR A 'SERPENT'

3. Review the story in 21:1-10. Note that God tells Moshe to make a 'saraf' (see 21:8), but in 21:9 - Moshe makes a 'nachash nechoshet'. Can you explain why?

Based on the story, is there any logical reason that this 'symbol' should be a nachash? Is there any reason that it should be made out of copper?

First, see Rashi on 21:8-9. Which of the problems (discussed above) does Rashi deal with?

Next, see Seforno on 21:8-9. Which of the problems (discussed above) does he deal with?

Finally, see Ibn Ezra on 21:8. Note that he makes a very bold, but important statement in regard to understanding miracles of this nature. In your opinion, does this Ibn Ezra contradict anything in the commentaries of Rashi or Seforno?

WHO'S THE "BAM"?

1. Review 20:13 (the final pasuk of the Mei Meriva incident), noting its final phrase "va'ykadesh BAM". In your opinion, who (or what) does the word "bam" refer to? What did you base your answer on?

[In other words, does "bam" refer back to "heyma mei meriva", or to "bnei Yisrael" that were mentioned earlier in 20:13, or to "Moshe & Aharon" mentioned in 20:12?]

2. See Rashi on 20:13. [Read it carefully!]

How did Rashi answer our above question, and how does he reach his conclusion?

Then see Ibn Ezra, noting how he offers a different interpretation [even though he and Rashi both bring a proof from the pasuk "b'krovei akadesh" from Vayikra 10:3, but for different reasons.]

3. Next, see Rashbam & Chizkuni, noting how they disagree with Ibn Ezra, yet seem to agree with Rashi - even though they provide a different reason.

Then see Seforno, noting how he offers a similar interpretation, yet once again, based on a very different reason!

4. Finally see Ramban, noting how he quotes Rashi, yet disagrees. Study this Ramban carefully, noting the logic behind each stage of his commentary. Note he bases his interpretation on the context of the word "bam" in this pasuk; but also takes into account what transpired in Refidim in Shmot chapter 17.

be-hatzlacha,
menachem