



Jewish Community Center of Paramus

A Home, A Family, A Spiritual Community



Chukat

Bamidbar (Numbers) 19:1 - 22:1

Parshat Chukat begins with the ritual of the *Parah Adumah*, the red heifer. This describes a special sacrifice in which the ashes of the red heifer were mixed with water and offered to make pure (*tahor*) those who had become ritually impure through contact with the dead (*tamei*). What made this particular ritual unique is that although it purified the impure, those who were already pure, and now came into contact with the ashes, became impure in the process.

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died and was buried in Kadesh. Following her death the people once again cried out for water. The juxtaposition of these sections led our Rabbis to teach that it was Miriam's special merit that provided water for Israel throughout the years. As the people continued to complain, G-d told Moses and Aaron to command the rock to provide water. Instead, Moses struck the rock with his rod. Water did indeed flow, but G-d was angry because Moses did not follow his explicit instructions and as a result decreed that neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the land of Israel.

What exactly was the sin that Moses committed? The actual sin is unclear. Nachmanides (13th century Spain) declares: "the matter is a great secret...of the Torah." Here are the views of several of the greatest commentators:

Rashi: They sinned by striking the rock rather than speaking to it, as they had been commanded. (20:11)

Ramban (Nachmanides): They sinned by reacting to the peoples' complaints with anger by referring to them as rebels, thereby leading the people to assume that G-d was angry with them as well. (20:10)

Rabbenu Chananel: The sin was making it seem as if Moses and Aaron, instead of G-d, actually caused the water to come forth. (20:10)

The *Parshah* concludes with the death of Aaron, as well as the difficult encounters with other nations on the journey to *Eretz Yisrael*.



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