

parashas
Chukas

P E R C E P T I O N S

Dedicated in LOVING memory of my father, Yisroel Ya'akov ben Tzvi, z"l. May his Neshamah have aliyah after aliyah, and may he be a meilitz yoshar for Klal Yisroel.

This is the statute of the Torah which God commanded... (Bamidbar 19:2)

PARASHAS CHUKAS IS not considered to be one of the most dynamic parshios. It has drama, to be sure, especially the incident of hitting the rock and the subsequent punishment of both Moshe and Aharon. And that was after the nation had already lost their sister, Miriam. Three of the greatest people the world has ever known, either taken or sentenced to be taken, in one parsha.

Yet, for all that drama, Chukas does not stand out. Perhaps because so many negative events occur, perhaps because it only briefly discusses them, as if in passing: Moshe and Aharon were told to do THIS, Moshe and Aharon did THAT instead, and Moshe and Aharon were PUNISHED. Next section."

But if you look at the events through the “glasses” of Kabbalah, everything looks different. It’s like innocently opening a door to what you think is just a closet, and instead finding yourself looking in on a huge and important meeting. It can be shocking and overwhelming. All of sudden, Parashas Chukas is one of the most historically “important” of all.

Do you know what it is like? It is like speaking to your manager, who starts off telling you about the various different changes the company will be making in the upcoming year, which you listen to with interest. Then he just happens to mention, quite matter-of-factly, before leaving “Oh, and by the way, we’re letting you go.”

Wait. What?

How could such an important piece of personal information be mentioned so casually?! The manager should have called the person into his office, and sat them down. Then he should have COMPASSIONATELY explained the circumstances that led to their firing, intermittently apologizing before complimenting them on their past service and wishing them the best with their future. Even if the manager didn’t really care, he should at least act as if he does.

In our parsha, God is the Manager, the Jewish people are the employee, and Moshe Rabbeinu is what is being lost. Just as a loss of salary can result in tremendous hardship, the loss of Moshe Rabbeinu resulted in even GREATER hardship. We didn’t just lose a livelihood. We lost access to the Messianic Era, and given all the terrible history that has happened since then, it was a CATASTROPHIC loss.

Because as the Leshem explains, Moshe Rabbeinu

was the last individual to have the capability to single-handedly bring Moshiach. In fact, HE would have BEEN Moshiach. But after he could no longer lead the nation into Eretz Yisroel, it fell upon at least the majority of the nation to bring history to an end “early.” Given “two Jews, three opinions,” the likelihood of THAT happening is, well, not good.

If so, then why doesn't the Torah make a bigger deal about the national and historical loss? Maybe it has to do with something Rashi mentions at the end of the Chumash, when the people mourn the death of Moshe. He says that, unlike with respect to the death of Aharon HaKohen, only the men mourned the death of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Why not the women as well? Shouldn't the loss of Moshe Rabbeinu have at least equaled the loss of Aharon HaKohen? Rashi says that it didn't because Aharon helped resolve shalom bayis issues, and apparently that had a greater impact on them than everything Moshe Rabbeinu did for them.

Really? Patching up their marriages mattered more to them patching up the nation? How many times had Moshe Rabbeinu interceded on behalf of the nation, saving them from destruction? Did Aharon threaten God to remove himself from the Torah, as Moshe Rabbeinu did at incredible personal risk, just to save the nation?

This is the reason why we lost Moshe Rabbeinu. If ever there was a case of you don't know what you have until you lose it, this was it. Of course they knew that Moshe Rabbeinu was a great man and leader. They knew that he would be the greatest prophet that ever lived. They understood that all Torah, which is their ticket to the

World-to-Come, came into the world through him.

They KNEW it, but didn't APPRECIATE it. Just because a person knows something doesn't mean that they appreciate it. On the contrary, hypocrisy and spiritual inconsistency is the result of this very problem. That's why when people get that appreciation after the fact, they have such regret, often saying, "If I knew that...then I would have done X or wouldn't have done Y!"

Shalom bayis is something easily appreciated. If a couple is fighting, it hurts NOW. If they are having problems with neighbors, it bothers them NOW. If they have a difficult time keep their children in line, it drives them crazy NOW. The problems are tangible and immediate, and therefore, so was Aharon's contribution to fixing them.

Moshe's contribution was next level. It was in an area of life a person had to work to reach. If you did, then knew what it meant to lose Moshe Rabbeinu, and you cried about the loss. If you didn't, then you didn't have such a deep and emotional reaction to the loss.

This is why, perhaps, the decree of his death is in Parashas Chukas, which begins with the red heifer. It is the quintessential statute, but that doesn't mean, as Rashi shows as well, that a person can't understand aspects of it. If you delve into, insights arise.

Likewise, if the Jewish people had taken the time and made the effort to appreciate who Moshe Rabbeinu REAL-
LY was, they might have justified overturning the decree. As we see later in Parashas VaEschanan, there was a chance to do so, but the people didn't justify it. And we're still suffering in exile thousands of years later as a result.