
SHABBAT WORKS

09 Tammuz 5781

Friday night, June 18 - Saturday, June 19, 2021

PARASHAT CHUKAT

NUMBERS 19:1 - 22:1

HAFTARAH

JUDGES 11: 1-33

Candle Lighting: 7:49 pm

Havdalah: 8:52 pm

The Inner Snake

Rabbi Mordecai Finley, Ph. D.

Our Torah portion describes events in the last year of the Israelites' 40-year sojourn in the desert. The old generation that had come out of Egypt had mostly died off, and the new generation was to fight their way back into the ancient homeland in Canaan.

Some old habits from the first generation remained, however. We find in our Torah portion, Chukkat, the following:

“The people spoke against God and Moses: ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no food and no water, and our souls are disgusted with this miserable food.’”

We the readers know what is happening. Miriam and Aaron had just died, leaving the people bereaved. The Israelites just had their first experience of warfare, and more was to come. They were grieving, afraid and anxious. Some people fall into depression when overwhelmed with such feelings; other people find something or someone to be angry at.

I can't imagine they even believed the worn-out complaint of “bringing us to the desert to die.” They had arrived in Canaan. They weren't even in the desert.

The complaint about the miserable food? The manna from heaven? Their parents had also complained about the food when they were anxious. The new generation dredged up that old grievance, modeling after the prior generation of miserable people. The new generation were probably a bit dismayed at hearing the words that were coming out of their mouths. “Jeez, I sound just like my father.”

The Bible, with its usual psychological acumen, is portraying here one of the sad truths about our inner lives: the ritual nature of our complaints against each other - worn out criticism, void of any meaning except the desire to complain. I see this when a couple, frustrated and angry with each other, bring up old complaints as if they were on an archeological dig. Each of the couple knows that this excavation of complaints is a very bad habit and no good will come of it. Why do we do it?

The Inner Snake, Continued

The destructive dimensions of the ego-self need a “toxic object.” The destructive dimensions of the ego-self lack insight, rationality, and sometimes human decency. The constant bitter complaints, rebellions, and accusations of the Israelites against God, Moses and Aaron punctuate the narratives of the desert. They make no sense, except that they accurately portray the inner lives of many people. Don’t be rational, don’t cultivate insight, don’t take responsibility – just accuse and blame. Project your toxicity onto another person. Having a toxic object relieves us of the responsibility to self-regulate, to look inside, to be objective in life, to be morally accountable, to be virtuous, rational and wise. The whole world is food, the Hindu saying goes. Our ego-selves often decide whether something will be “manna from heaven,” or “rotten food.”

God’s response to this projection of inner toxicity has a stunning metaphorical dimension. God unleashes biting snakes on the people who were biting at God and Moses with their complaints. God shows them what they are like.

The people are suddenly brought to consciousness. “We have sinned,” they say, and beg for the biting serpents to be removed. Perhaps they even looked inside and offered another prayer. “Remove the biting serpent from within me, as well.”

Unfortunately, God can’t do that. The snake within is our problem.

How do we bring that inner biting serpent under control? First, know that the snake hides inside complaints for example. The inner snake, biting out at toxic objects, likes to hide in our organizing our consciousness around a “toxic other.” Spouses make each other a “toxic other,” and so do children and parents. Even large groups of people see other groups as toxic objects.

When we find ourselves rehearsing the moral failings of others, we are producing venom inside. Others do morally fail (as do we), but little good comes of venomously rehearsing our litany of complaints, or ritually complaining to each other with our verbal snake bites.

Venom is a kind of energy, and all energy can be transformed. It is not easy to transform negative energy; negative energy comes with its own justification, its own *raison d’etre*, and resists transformation. To transform that energy, as with all other inner transformation, we must start with a clear vision of ourselves to live without venom. Once we have the vision and will to live without venom, we then master skills to flush that bitter energy out of its hiding places – in complaints, for example.

We come eye to eye with the snake within. We no longer care, for the moment, about rotten manna from heaven or the failings of others. We have struggles right ahead of us that will consume most of our energy for quite a while to come.

Shabbat Zoom Sessions

Friday Evening, 7 pm

Candle Lighting and Brief Teaching

Meeting ID: 852 4540 4129

Password: 290167

Shabbat Morning, 9:15am - 12pm

Shabbat Morning Teaching

Meeting ID: 245 967 453

Password: 595703

Parashat Chukat

Synopsis of the

Torah Portion

Numbers 19:1 - 22:1

1. The laws of the parah adumah, the Red Heifer
2. Defilement from a corpse; the purification of such defilement.
3. The death of Miriam; the people have no water.
4. Moshe is asked to talk to a rock to bring forth water; he strikes the rock instead. He is informed: he will not enter the land of Canaan.
5. Israel negotiates with Edom for permission of passage to Canaan -- permission refused.
6. Death of Aharon; the people mourn.
7. The fiery serpents
8. The Valley of Arnon; the song of the well; battles with Sihon and Og, the people encamp on the plains of Mo'av.

Synopsis of Haftarah

Judges 11: 1-33

The Haftarah for today is from the book of Judges, which tells of events that took place sometime between the initial conquests of the land (ca. 1200 BCE) and the beginning of the monarchy, (ca. 1050 BCE). We read today from the first part of the story of Yiftach -- a man born of his father Gilead and a zonah (which can mean either “storekeeper” or “prostitute”; in either case, not Gilead’s wife) and was driven away by his family. He gathered together a band of drifters. When Ammon (Jordan) made war on Israel, the Israelite elders called on Yiftach to lead them in battle. He first entered into negotiations with the Ammonites, which includes a recitation of the history of how certain lands came into Israel’s possession. The details of our Torah portion and the next one, Balak, are referred to at length in Yiftach’s explanations to the Ammonites as to why these lands are in Israel’s hands. Of course, the Ammonites did not listen to his well-reasoned arguments and historical explanations and decided to make war. The Ammonites lost the war, but Yiftach suffered a great tragedy, to be discussed another time.

Happy Birthday...

Shondell Spiegel on June 20

Adi Cohen on June 20

Michael Shader on June 22

Beth Shader on June 22

Ted Ries on June 22

Leslie Kautz on June 22

Katherine Bobrow on June 24

Arlene Nelson on June 24

Melinda Rosenthal on June 25

Happy Anniversary...

Wendy & Dennis McGinty on June 22

Leanna & Richard Borys on June 22

Support  **Ohr HaTorah**
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We Remember...

Henry Manning,
father of Sheri Manning, on June 20.

Paul Guth,
father of David Guth, on June 20.

Ronald Heller,
father of Sarah Megan Heller, on June 24.

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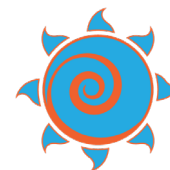
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PLEASE NOTE:

If you have something for the weekly update, material, as well as flyers, must be in the office by 4PM the preceding Monday!