

This newsletter is generously sponsored by Caroline & Henry Zeimer
in honour of the Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat of their son Yaakov,
יעקב בן צבי



I sometime wonder what the history books will record about our times. In the immediate sense, it is clear that our current pandemic will be viewed as a significant historical event. However, in a Jewish sense, I ponder what might appear in a future chronicle of exile and redemption.

In recent weeks I have wondered what might be said about those Jews who lived outside Israel (through circumstances justified or otherwise), did not send their children or grandchildren to serve in the army, did not live lives punctuated by wars, terror and sirens, and did not have the right to vote in Israeli elections, yet had the extreme Chutzpah of trying to influence their local governments to oppose Israel's plans to exercise sovereignty within her own borders.

I believe every Jew should be able to influence such decisions. And the way to do so is to make Aliyah and move to the frontline of Jewish history. Until then it is important for people to be educated, engaged and even opinionated, but with a respect for the State of Israel and its citizens to make their own decisions.

A couple of weeks ago, Debbie Nossbaum reported back to us from the Land on Parshat Shelach Lecha. As we know, there were two good scouts in Parshat Shelach Lecha (and the Kli Yakar wrote that things would have ended better had Moshe sent women instead of men). This week, we have a report from our second scout, Sue Korbl. We look forward to her return, if we do not all join her in Yerushalayim first.



Rabbi Mirvis

"And Israel settled in Shittim and began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moav. And they invited the people to the feasts of their gods and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. And Israel became attached to Ba'al Peor and the anger of Hashem burned against Israel" (Bemidbar, 25:1-3).

Most of this week's second Parsha deals with the story of Balak and Bilam and their failed attempts to curse the Israelites in the wilderness. The Israelites were totally unaware of these surrounding events and their only contribution to this week's Parsha appears at the very end, with the sins of harlotry with the daughters of Moav and idolatrous service of their gods.

Twenty-four thousand Israelites died in a resultant plague and our Parsha is brought to an ironically tragic end, for after the bulk of the Parsha has dealt with Divine providence in ensuring that no harm is caused to the Israelites by the King of Moav, the unaware Israelites brought a plague upon themselves by sinning with the daughters of Moav and serving their gods. According to the Gemara, however, this ironic downfall was far from coincidental.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 106a) states that after Bilam failed in his attempts to curse the Israelites, he came up with "Plan B". He advised Balak to situate tents near the Israelite camp and place harlots in these tents to sell linen garments at good prices to the passing Israelites. After building up a rapport with the customers, the harlots would entice the Israelites to serve their idols and engage in immoral acts.

Bilam's "Plan A" and "Plan B" represent two threats we have faced throughout the ages. On the one hand there is the enemy that openly hates us and unashamedly declares their intention to curse us, cause us harm and bring about our physical destruction. This enemy poses a serious threat, but at least makes itself known. Parallel to that danger is the threat of assimilation and our spiritual destruction. Bilam's plan to harm us with love was far more successful than his plan to harm us with hatred.

Hashem provides us incredible protection from our enemies, often without us even knowing when, where or how. The least we can do in response is to ensure we do not behave in a way that contributes to our own downfall.



Reb Leor Broh

Riddle for Chukas

I appear three times in Chukas. Two of those times in connection with other nations. What am I?

Riddle for Balak

How many weapons appear in Balak? What are they?

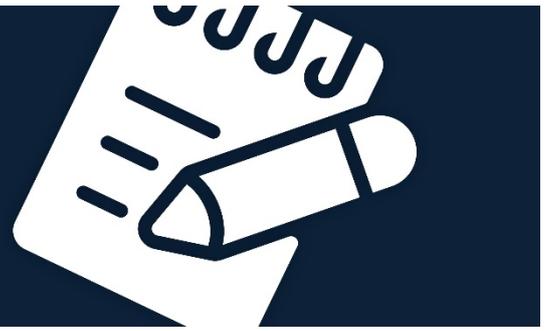
Answer to Last Week's Riddle (Korach)

A string of nine consecutive words appears twice in the Parsha. What are the nine words, and where do they appear?

מתוך העדה הזאת ואכלה אתם כרגע ויפלו על-פניהם

These 9 words appear in 16:21-22 & 17:10.

DERASHA NOTES



Excerpt from Rabbi Mirvis' Derasha at Eli Segman's Bar Mitzva in Beit Yehuda, Parshat Chukat 2016

Your Parsha commenced with the laws of Para Aduma – how the ashes of a red heifer would be mixed with water and sprinkled on those who had become defiled in order to purify them. And in the purification process, you read:

במדבר פרק יט
(יט) וְהִזָּה הַטְּהוֹר עַל־הַטְּמֵא

And the pure would sprinkle on the impure

I would like to share a fascinating comment in the Yerushalmi about this phrase:

תלמוד ירושלמי (וילנא) מסכת דמאי פרק ג
אמר רבי יהושע בן קבסוי כל ימי הייתי קורא הפסוק הזה [במדבר יט יט] והזה הטהור על הטמא טהור א מזה על
טמא א עד שלמדתיה מאוצרה של יבנה... שטהור א מזה על כמה טמאים:

R' Yehoshua ben Kavsa said, all my days I would read this passuk – “And the pure would sprinkle on the impure” (to mean that) one pure person would sprinkle on one impure person, until I learnt it from the treasure house of Yavneh... that one pure person can sprinkle on multiple impure people.

Seems like a straightforward passage - On a simple level, we can understand that R' Yehoshua ben Kavsa learnt something new in Yavneh, but I learnt a fantastic explanation by Rav Yissocher Frand this week which shows that if we understand the role Yavneh played at the time, we can understand this passage on a much deeper level.

And the story of Yavneh is directly related to this time of year, as we approach 3 weeks and period of mourning for destruction of Temples. As we learn in Gittin 56a-b - Prior to the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash, the citizens of Yerushalayim were suffering from a terrible siege imposed from the Romans on the outside and terrible divisions and infighting on the inside.

Greatest sage of time – R' Yochanan ben Zakkai – aware of the upcoming destruction devised a plan to relocate the centre of Torah learning from Yerushalayim, as it was doomed for destruction. Plan went as follows - climbed into a coffin, pretended to be dead and secretly escorted out of city walls to be buried. Carried by R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua. Then went straight to tent of Vespasian, the Roman General. Entered the tent and addressed him as “Your Majesty”.

שלמא עלך מלכא, שלמא עלך מלכא!

Greetings O King! Greetings O King!

Vespasian responded – You are deserving of death on two accounts.

- 1) I am not the Emperor, just the General
- 2) If I am the Emperor, why did you not come until now?

As R' Yochanan responded to these questions and they discussed his responses, a messenger arrived and told Vespasian that the Emperor was dead and that he had been appointed the new Emperor. Impressed by R' Yochanan, Vespasian asked R' Yochanan what he can offer him as a reward, to which he requested:

- 1) תן לי יבנה וחכמיה – Grant me Yavneh and its Sages
- 2) Spare the descendants of R' Gamliel
- 3) Physician to treat R' Tzaddok who had fasted for 40 years to protect Jerusalem from destruction.

And so it was, Jerusalem was destroyed and in Yavneh, ר' יוחנן בן זכאי succeeded in ensuring that Torah lived on. He re-established the Sanhedrin and helped the Jewish Nation adapt to life without a Temple.

Yavneh was a small Yeshiva, but the few teachers and students that there were succeeded in ensuring Jewish continuity and reviving the Torah world.

Now we can explain the Yerushalmi - R' Yehoshua ben Kavsai initially thought that greatest impact an individual could have is on one other person. והזה הטמא על הטהור – One person having a positive impact on one other person.

Yet when he visited Yavneh and saw the huge impact of a small Yeshiva – the tremendous positive impact each teacher in Yavneh had on many people, restoring, reviving and bringing glory to the whole Torah world – Yavneh taught him that one person can truly impact many others.



Rabbi James Kennard

In the parshiot of Shemini, Tazria and Metzora, every type of tumah (poorly translates as “impurity”) is listed; tumah of animal carcasses, of childbirth, of tzarat, zavah and nidah. Except one. The most severe form of tumah, acquired by contact with a human corpse, is deferred until the opening section of Parashat Chukat (Bemidbar Chapter 19). There we learn about how this tumah affects those who touch a dead body, or are under the same roof as one, and how this tumah can be removed with the ashes of the Parah Adumah (red heifer) - a ritual so mysterious and impossible to understand that the Torah itself describes it as a “hukah” - a decree from Hashem.

The placing of all types of tumah but the most serious in one section of the Torah, and the remaining one not just in a different chapter but in another Chumash is curious enough. Adding to the mystery is the fact that knowledge of the existence of tumah from a dead body is required in order to understand earlier passages.

For instance, in Bemidbar Chapter 9, men who were in a state of tumah through contact with the dead complained to Moshe that they were not able to offer the korban pesach (and were rewarded the

opportunity to do so on pesach sheni). In Bemidbar 5:2 those in this state of tumah must stay outside of the Mishcan. And, according to Rashi, Hashem gave the laws of the Parah Adumah at Marah, before the Jewish people even reached Sinai (Shemit 15:25). Why allude to the existence of this type of tuma, without offering its details until much later in the Torah?

The **Ibn Ezra** (12th century Spain) explains tersely that

ונסמכה זאת הפרשה בעבור שהיא לכהן

This parasha is joined (to the previous one, which listed the items given to Cohanim) because it relates to the Cohen.

Since the deputy Cohen Gadol is the one who slaughters the Parah Adumah, the laws of which are taught together with the laws of tumah, the Ibn Ezra believes that the Torah delayed giving these details until this point, since it is already dealing with the unique privileges of the Cohanim. A similar explanation is given by the **Ramban** (13th century Spain and Israel).

The **Hizkuni** (13th century France) believes that this section is juxtaposed not to the immediately previous chapter, but to the one before that, which described the rebellion of Korach and the 14,700 who died in a plague when they complained that Moshe had been responsible for the deaths of the rebels (Bemidbar 17:14). That number of dead would have led to widespread tumah and hence the laws pertaining to such a situation, and the required remedy in the form of the Parah Adumah, were written at this point.

The **Abarbanel** (15th century Portugal) connects the laws of tumah not to what just happened, but to what is about to occur. Chapter 19, the laws of the Parah Adumah and of tumah, serves as a transition from the events of the first year in the desert (the arrangement of the Israelite camp, sending the spies, Korach) to the episodes of the final year (Miriam and Aharon dying, Moshe hitting the rock, victory against Sichon and Og). At this time the people are preparing for war against the Canaanites, the battles that will be needed to conquer the land, and the losses that will inevitably occur. For this reason now is the time to present the laws of tumah from contact with the dead.

The **Netziv**, writing in the Emek Dvar (19th century Russia), links the Parah Adumah to the death of Miriam, which is recounted immediately after this section. He quotes an apparent contradiction in the Talmud regarding whether the Parah brings atonement like other sacrifices, or whether it serves solely to remove tumah. The Netziv's conclusion is that every subsequent Parah was for purification, but the first one, slaughtered and burnt under the supervision of Moshe, was to atone for the sin of the golden calf (see Rashi's second explanation on Bemidbar 19:22 in which he shows the precise parallels between the Parah and the calf).

Moshe's efforts to bring atonement via the Parah Adumah are compared to those of Miriam, who led the women in refusing to participate in the worship of the calf. Therefore the Parah Adumah, and the laws of tumah in chapter 19 are juxtaposed with the death of Miriam at the start of chapter 20. (See also the Netziv on Devarim 9:27 for a further aspect of the connection between Miriam and the atonement for the sin of the calf).

Rav Y D Soloveitchik (20th century America) addresses the placement of Chapter 19 as the bridge between the first and last years in the desert. No narrative is recorded of these years. Since the Torah (from Shemot chapter 12 onwards) is essentially the book of the prophecies of Moshe, when there was no communication between Hashem and Moshe during these years (see Rashi on Devarim 2:17) there is nothing to report.

In fact what was happening during those silent years was a tragedy. As punishment for believing the words of the spies and rejecting the gift of the land of Israel, those who had left Egypt were condemned to die in the desert. For thirty-eight years, nothing happened except the death of an entire generation. So how does the Torah respond to this catastrophe? Not by recording any details of tragedy itself, but by inserting in precisely that space, the laws of tumah and the Parah Adumah - i.e. the halachot relating to death.

“My father related to me that when the fear of death would seize hold of R. Hayyim, he would throw himself, with his entire heart and mind, into the study of the laws of tents and corpse defilement. And these laws, which revolve about such difficult and complex problems as defilement of a grave, defilement of a tent, blocked-up defilement, interposition before defilement, a vessel with a tight fitting cover upon it in a tent in which a corpse lies, etc., etc., would calm the turbulence of his soul and would imbue it with a spirit of joy and gladness. When halakhic man fears death, his sole weapon wherewith to fight this terrible dread is the eternal law of the Halakhah. The act of objectification triumphs over the subjective terror of death.” (Halachic Man, p.73)

But the connection between the Parah Adumah and the loss of the generation goes deeper.

“The painful period when an entire generation died is, like the Parah Adumah ritual itself, a hukah, a Divine decree beyond human comprehension. The symbol of this mournful period is the Parah Adumah, which removes defilements derived from human death. It represents a triumph over death, an affirmation of life, and qualifies one to resume participation in matters of kedusha.

As explained earlier, Hashem is the ultimate purifier, who helps us overcome the depression of morbidity. Parah Adumah is an appropriate transition between the period of rejection and death, and the resumption of Divine communication when they arrived in Midbar Zin, in the fortieth year of their wanderings.” (Reflections of the Rav II, p.112)

The laws of the most extreme form of tumah, resulting from death, are separated from the other types of impurity because of its relevance to the death of the Jews in the time of Korach, or in preparation for the battles yet to come. But also, as Rav Soloveitchik’s brilliant insight shows, because in time of tragedy, when it is as if the Torah itself cannot express its sorrow, the laws of tumah and taharah, of impurity and of purification, shine light upon the darkness.



Sue Korbl

When Paul and I left Melbourne a few weeks before Purim, our plan was to meet up with our son and daughter in law, Adam and Shoshi and their 4 children in Italy for Pesach, stay in Israel until mid-May and then be back in Australia for the Bat Mitzvah of our granddaughter, Shayna at the end of May.

None of that happened.

We had a week of normal living in Israel before the situation dramatically changed. People started to take precautions against the novel corona virus and by Purim, there were no public celebrations and the streets were very subdued. Megillah was still in shule although people had started social distancing. Going to Yael (a small shule in Baka) for a women's Megillah leining was incredibly special.

When the numbers of people infected starting spiking around the World and, to a far lesser extent in Israel, our TV stayed on during the day. We just had to keep up with the latest news, to keep track of the increasing number of people being diagnosed, people being hospitalized and of the unfortunate deaths. It was surreal and simply horrible to believe that things had changed so drastically for everyone.

The Prime Minister broadcast at night, it seemed like every night, reporting the numbers and announcing new restrictions. At first, it all sounded like an overreaction but by the time Pesach arrived, it became obvious that things were profoundly serious.

Who would have thought that borders would close, public gatherings and events would be banned and that the celebration of Pesach would be so seriously affected. But it happened and we all complied.

The ban on travel and the subsequent restrictions changed everything. And we accepted the fact that Adam and family would have to stay in London and that we would be alone in Jerusalem.

I was grateful, at least, that I had been to Osher Ad the day after Purim. It is a very large supermarket in Talpiot, with a large area set aside for products pertinent to the upcoming chag or just specials. In readiness for the then fast approaching Pesach, the store had overnight converted this floorspace from Purim foods and nush to what seemed like mountains of pots and pans and everything associated with

Pesach. The quick change was amazing to see and the atmosphere of Pesach was instantly in the air. It was fortunate that I had bought everything we needed at that time, because soon after that, things tightened up considerably and we started to avoid contact with crowds. Israel also had its share of panic buying. Even though toilet paper was plentiful, there was a shortage of eggs in the last few days before Pesach and planeloads were brought in from Europe. Fortunately, I had stocked up the week before, so I didn't have to leave making my kneidlach to the last minute.



The number of people diagnosed and needing hospitalization was on the rise. Corona wards were opened at all the major hospital. Tel Hashomer Hospital had even opened a special corona maternity ward for women having a positive Covid diagnosis to give birth. The death rate continued to climb. Patients were kept isolated from their families and were not even

allowed to be at the bedside of their loved ones as they died. Tel Hashomer had even made a sort of glass coffin between the underground car park and the hospital allowing families the ability to at least view the body of their loved ones without exposing themselves to risk.

The roads became empty and police patrolled the streets to make sure that people stayed at home. We were not permitted to walk more than 100 metres from our homes. Luckily, within the 100 metres, at the end of our apartment block there is a park where we started gathering with our neighbours on erev Shabbat for a pre Shabbat drink and nush and to see how everyone was coping with the situation. This period was especially difficult for those living on their own and this small gathering was really appreciated by them as they sometimes didn't see people for days. Of course we all wore masks and practiced the requisite social distancing. Three months have passed and our "Erev Shabbat Drinks in the

Park" is still something we all look forward to and has proven to be a wonderful way to make new friends.



Like many others who were not seeing their children and grandchildren we had seder on our own.

It was actually really special, the grandchildren had sent us divrei torah to read out and a play to enact. However, I do hope it will be the only seder we have without our children and grandchildren. We had thought that our seder would be over by 10pm, but we enjoyed it so much it didn't finish till midnight!

One of the highlights was the Ma Nishtana. The Chief Rabbi of Israel had requested that at 8 pm on Seder night, everyone throughout the country should go onto their balconies to say the Ma Nishtana together. It was very moving to be in Israel at that time, sharing together, with people we knew and those we didn't know and hearing voices near and far, all singing the same and all feeling part of Am Yisrael.

During Pesach we were not permitted to daven with anyone else in an enclosed space, so people joined minyanim from their balconies. The baal tefilah on one balcony, the Kriat ha Torah on another and even a dvar Torah from another. If only photos could have been taken. It was an amazing sight and a very creative way to come together in prayer in compliance with the regulations banning public gatherings.

Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut were certainly not memorialised or celebrated like any other year. Families were not even allowed to visit their loved ones' graves on Yom HaZikaron. This was especially difficult for the nation and the pain could be felt in the air. Our TV was on all day on those 3 days as there was special programming all day for each event and that certainly helped us to feel the preciousness of each of those days.

Zoom seemed to take over our lives. There was an endless number of shiurim to attend, both in Israel and even in Australia if the timing worked out. The variety of topics was incredible, even shiurim on the permissibility of being counted for a minyan in a Zoom, or whether balcony minyanim were permissible.

When we were allowed to have 20 in an open area for davening, the car park behind our garden became the new 'shule'. Waking up to the sounds of hallel, kedushah, or duchenen became the new normal. Davening outside makes you much more appreciative of the changing of the seasons. It was an unseasonably cold Spring, so people often wore parkas. However there was also an unseasonal heatwave with 10 days of 38 degrees!

Some very large trees behind our apartment got so confused with the weather changes, they actually lost their leaves during the cold weather. This was most peculiar because the new season leaves had only recently come out. However soon after that, new leaves formed again. But for all that, it was and is so special to daven while watching the sky changing colors and seeing the trees and shrubs coming into leaf and flower.

These were very special days, so much so that the regulars kept saying they didn't really want to go back to shule! However even though Nitzanim and other shules have reopened, there is still not enough room for all the social distancing required and so to everyone's relief, the car park minyan continues. Plans are now being made to continue our car park minyan during the coming Yamim Noraim.



A few weeks ago we had a special event at our open air minyan. A chayal boded (lone soldier) had an aliyah l'torah on Shabbat morning. He had requested to have it at the car park minyan as he knew one of the regulars. His family from USA could not come for the wedding and only his sister and a few friends came on Shabbat. After davening the car park community made him a beautiful kiddush in his honour. It was so moving to see how everyone joined in so happily to make it a special for him even though only one person there knew him!

Paul and I recently went to the Kotel for mincha. What a sight to behold with the area divided into large numbered squares with white cloth fences in order to keep social distancing. A designated person assigns people a particular area. Everyone wears masks. I found it very spiritual as I soaked up the changed but well run atmosphere. There was a cacophony of davening sounds as it was erev Rosh Chodesh. Paul was asked what sort of minyan he wanted. A normal minyan or an erev Rosh Chodesh minyan, (Yom Kippur Katan) which has vidui and some Yom Kippur davening in it.

Paul and I feel like we are in a bubble here. Thank G-d, we don't know anyone who has died or even been very sick with corona virus and nor do we know anyone who has lost their job and is having trouble putting food on the table. But we are certainly aware that many people are hurting and that there is no end in sight for them as the economy struggles to recharge, especially now that a second wave has started.

Despite the fact that we have hardly left Baka, it has been a huge privilege to be in Israel at this time and eventually when we return to Australia, G-d willing, we will look back at this time and be grateful and thankful that we were able to be here during these difficult but amazing times.