

Parshas Chukas-Balak

This week's Parsha opens with the concept of purification through the red heifer. This law is a "Chok," meaning there is no reason, other than Hashem telling us to do it, and we do it. In theory, every Mitzvah is solely for the purpose of serving Hashem; any rational explanation is a secondary benefit of the primary purpose, i.e. to serve Hashem. The Torah and all its laws are the means by which humans, specifically Jews, can overcome their animal nature and attain something higher and better. To truly reveal this light, we must completely orient ourselves to seeing the world as Hashem's world, and to do everything we try to do for Hashem. As the Alter Rebbe spells out in chapters 6 and 7 of Tanya, the Kelipa, and the shield of true light of Hashem, is deep, especially on the plane of Gashmiyus, and it takes work to turn that to the opposite. At every moment, we have the ability to do that, and when we do, we are drawing a righteous, holy light, which is why it is important, as often as we can, to do Mitzvos, or think about our actions as being in the service of Hashem (even if it involves a physical pleasure).

The next section of the Parsha in chapter 20, the Jews entered the desert of Tzin, where Miriam passed away, and the Jews complained about not having water. The important part of this narrative is that the Jews ganged up, quarrelled amongst one another, and then, when they passed

through Edom, were not allowed through the land. In 20:14, Moshe sent messengers to Edom, telling them of their brotherly obligation (Edom coming from Esav) to come to the aid of the Jews, by allowing them to travel through the land (for which Moshe promised they would not use any local resources), and Edom answered that the Jews could not pass through this land. Even after following up with guarantees to use the repayment for any resource use, Edom replied that they couldn't pass it through. The critical elements outlined here are as follows: Rashi says on 20:14, "Your brother Yisrael," explaining that Edom-Esav and Yisrael have a bond that predates this moment, when Yakov conquered the angel of Esav (in Bereishis), thereby solidifying his place as the forefather of the Jews. (The Posuk uses their "king names," that is Edom- red, as he was seen in Bereishis 25:25, is Esav, and Yisrael- Yakov granted a holy name, that came after conquering the angel), And Rashi says further that this is about the fact that Avraham was told his offspring (through Yitzchak and Yakov) would be foreigners in a foreign land and end up leaving – the time that the Jews are in now, i.e. right after their exodus, receiving the Torah, and on route to the Land that was promised to them. The point is that the world knew of what was promised to the Jews, arguably since creation (as follows on from the first Rashi- that the Torah begins with creation, so there is no argument on why the world is here, and

what the lineage is for). This Posuk references ancient (at that time) history, which was imbued in the psyche of all the nations, as evidenced by Moshe using specific messaging to Edom, which Edom disregarded. The Torah is explicit in showing the quarrelling of the Jews prior, as a lesson to us that the nations of the world around us, who know the truth, and disdain us for it, and are antisemitic, will act like Edom (which is what it feels like in this moment in history). We know our enemies use this tactic because, when certain intelligence was uncovered, the enemy's tactic was to follow Israeli politics and play the sides, and the weakness within the nation. Therefore, this rejection of Edom directly follows the "Mey Meriva" (the waters of contention), because this outcome will arise when the Jews are disparate and disconnected from one another.

Circling back to the beginning, the Parsha begins with laws of no reason other than Hashem's commandment, because, to alleviate ourselves from quarrels, we ought to be united on the front that everything is here because of and for Hashem, as the Parsha begins. When things are absolute (not subject to the Halachic interpretation, prior to this, because it is all in the name of Hashem—even if we disagree on a specific fact), then we will have a situation like Balak. He called the most powerful person to curse us, but he couldn't succeed at first. Rather, he tried, and the compliment he

offered was about the tents of Yakov. Why would this be the area of focus, even though there are so many other things or ways to show the Jews' greatness? Because the morality of how they placed their tents went beyond quarrelling, it imbued Hashem, meaning they acted properly and were therefore protected from the curses of Bilaam, which turned into blessings.

In conclusion, by uniting as one, and realizing even if we have differences are in Gods world, and we ought to live in Gods dimension we will be successful, and get through the hardest and darkest of times, and get to our own land, when we will be delivered redemption with Mashiach, Good Shabbos.