

**Parashat Chukat (ordinance of)
June 23, 2007 - 7 Tammuz 5767**

Torah: Numbers 19:1-22:1

Haftarah: Judges 11:1-33

Brit Chadasha: John 3:10-21

(The readings above are based upon Jeff Feinberg's reading list, located at www.flamefoundation.org)

Parashat Chukat discusses ritual purification, as well as some of the final stages along the journey of Israel through the desert. In Chapter 19, the sacrifice of the Red Heifer is described, which had a special purification function, as the ashes were used in the purification of someone who had come into contact with a dead body. The cow itself had to be pure: in perfect health, no hairs of any other colour, and never used in a work situation. The portion then goes on to describe two major battles that Israel fights, and wins. At the same time, the people being led through the desert are growing increasingly frustrated with their circumstances, and again, start to doubt the Divine plan for their journey.

Numbers 20:4 Why did you bring the L-RD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? **5** Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

20:6 Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the L-RD appeared to them. **7** The L-RD said to Moses, **8** "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

Once again, the L-rd provides for His people, even in the face of their doubt. G-d gave them water – not pomegranates or figs, the nice stuff the people began their complaint with. He gave them water. Water is life and survival.

In the Prophetic portion, the central figure is Jephthah the Gileadite, who fights the Ammonites after trying to resolve their issues peacefully – he sent a message to them, which was ignored. In the end, Jephthah is triumphant, and gives the glory to G-d – as well as a physical sacrifice of a burnt offering.

Judges 11:31 whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the L-RD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

11:32 Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the L-RD gave them into his hands.

In the New Testament portion, Yeshua is conversing with the Pharisee Nicodemus, explaining how to be born again, and that He is the Son of G-d.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of G-d unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

In each component of this week's portion, there is some kind of a process that is described that is part of a journey, either physical or spiritual. The very beginning of the portion deals with purity. As Believers living in the present day, achieving purity is a process that can involve any number of things, from giving up habits that are blocking us spiritually, to the very basic ritual of Baptism. It's no coincidence that water is a recurring theme in this portion – in literature, water can symbolize life and purity, and in faith, water is cleansing, both literally and figuratively.

Purity is an ongoing process on our journey as Believers. We need the water of this world and we need the water of Life given to us in the Torah, which is fulfilled by our Messiah.