



Parshas Chukas 2022, a united people

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna, Leah Mintche Bas Gittel, and Shaul Ben Berta.

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with Moshe teaching the intricate laws of the Parah Adumah – the Red Heifer. The Parah Adumah is a red cow that was never used and is slaughtered as an offering. Then, it is burnt, and its ashes were used to rectify the most severe of ritual impurities, Tum'as Mes, an impurity contracted through interacting with a human corpse.

When a person touches a human corpse, they must use the Parah Adumah ritual to become pure again. This process takes seven days; they must be sprinkled with its ashes on the 3rd and 7th days and then become pure.

Following the Parah Adumah, we learn about the death of Miryam Hanevia, Moshe's sister and the wife of one of the spies who spoke virtuously about Israel, Calev Ben Yefuneh. The rock that would miraculously provide water to the nation in her merit dried up with her passing. She passed away and was buried in the city of Kadesh.

However, a question comes to mind: As the Torah announces Miryam's passing, it seemingly adds extra words. The Pasuk writes (20:1) "ויבאו בני־ישראל כל־העדה" *And the whole congregation of the Jewish people came to the desert of Tzin.*

But why does the Torah includes the words "**כל-העדה - the whole congregation**" if it already said "**בני-ישראל - the Jewish people**"? What is the Torah implying with the extra words?!

The Rabbeinu Bachya (*Rav Bachya ben Asher, a 14th-century Spanish commentary*) writes that our Parsha jumps many years. We are discussing events at the end of the 38th year of the 40-year exile in the desert. Just two weeks ago in Parshas Shelach, we read about the exile of the Jewish people to 40 years of wandering in the desert.

The Rabbienu Bachya explains that our Parsha picks up at the end of the 38th year, which has specific implications as the generation that left Egypt would not enter Israel. This unfortunately required thousands of people to pass away and a new generation to take its place. Hence, the Torah adds "**כל-העדה - the whole congregation**" to tell us that the punishment ended and these people would enter Israel.

The Rabbienu Bachya continues that not only would this generation enter the land, but they themselves were whole. With time and their faith in G-d, they weren't broken by the death of the previous generation. In fact, they were emotionally whole, mentally stable, and ready to settle in the promised land.

However, the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ibn Attar, a Moroccan commentary and kabbalist from the 18th century*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that Torah emphasizes the whole congregation to teach us that there was **unity**. Although they were not perfect, there was a feeling of harmony and solidarity.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains that this unity may have been in honor of Miryam's passing and true understanding of their situation. The Jewish people collectively knew that **those alive today would enter Israel**, hence, a spirit of solidarity and understanding grew larger each day.

Despite being different in many ways, they were the ones who would enter Israel. They realized that they are the generation who would finally fulfill **G-d's promise** to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov.

They are the people who have the opportunity to **achieve G-d's deepest desire** and build Beis Hamikdash. They are the only ones who will merit to settle in the holiest of lands to bring G-d into the world.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh clarifies that this unity was so uncommon that it demonstrated they were ready to fulfill their destiny. They had grown tremendously over the past 38 years and now understood what it means to be a nation. To see the uniqueness of each soul and recognize its value to G-d.

In our daily life, we must open our eyes to the many forces trying to divide and break up our nation. They try to tell us to look at our **externalities** and forget what truly connects us. They emphasize our **differences** and ignore what ties us together.

G-d requires from us the same peace, compassion, and understanding as He did from the Jewish nation in the desert. He needed them to realize that they are truly one and responsible for each other. The exact requirement is necessary now for us to experience our ultimate redemption!

**"Jewish Unity exists as an idea.
Why then should it not exist as a fact?"**

-Rabbi Lord Sacks of blessed memory

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*