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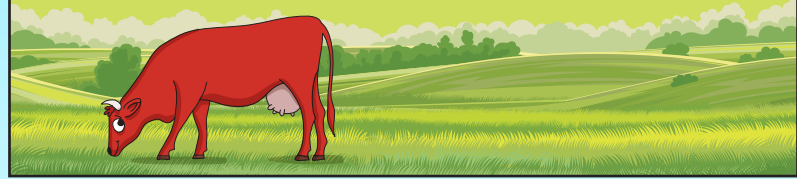


June 29 - July 5, 2025 ג' - ט' תמוז תשפ"ה



מה בפַּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

The ashes of a פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red cow) can purify anyone who becomes טָמֵא (tamei, impure) through contact with a dead body.



Miriam dies.



Benei Yisrael complain about not having water. God tells Moshe and Aharon to take a staff and speak to a rock to get water for the people. Moshe hits the rock twice with the staff, and it gushes water.



God tells Moshe and Aharon, "Because you failed to sanctify Me, you will not enter the Land of Israel."



God says it's time for Aharon to die. Moshe takes Aharon and his son Elazar to the top of a mountain. The special כִּהֹנֵן גָּדוֹל (Kohen Gadol, High Priest) garments are taken off Aharon and placed on Elazar, and Aharon dies. Benei Yisrael mourn for 30 days.



Benei Yisrael complain again about not having enough food and water. God sends deadly snakes. God tells Moshe to create a copper snake and put it up on a pole. Whoever looks at this is healed. The armies of Sihon and Og fight against Benei Yisrael, and Benei Yisrael win.



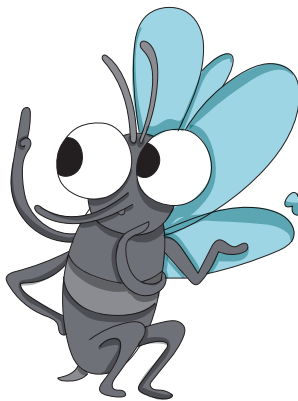


Bemidbar 21:9

Moshe made a copper serpent and put it up on a pole; and when a person was bit by a snake, they could look up at the copper snake and recover.

במדבר כא:ט

וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה נָחָשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וַיִּשְׁמְהוּ עַל-הַנָּחָשׁ
וְהָיָה אִם-נִשָּׁךְ הַנָּחָשׁ אֶת-אִישׁ וְהָבִיט אֶל-
נָחָשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת וְחָיָה:



This is a really unusual approach to healing snake bites. How did it actually work?!

Bzzzzz
A lot of midrashim are **bugged** by something unusual in the Torah text

To answer this, here's a midrash from inside a mishnah. (In the Mishnah or Gemara, a midrash is often called "aggadah" in Hebrew or "aggadeta" in Aramaic.)

The mishnah is talking about the mitzvah of hearing the shofar (we promise, we will come back to snakes!). The mishnah imagines two people walking by a synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, and hearing a shofar sound coming from the building. Both people heard the same sound, but only one had כַּוְּנָה (kavvanah, inner intention) to be fulfilling the mitzvah. Kavvanah is so important here that only the person who had kavvanah fulfilled the mitzvah of hearing the shofar. The other person heard the exact same sound, but it didn't count for them.

And now, the snake connection:



Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8

Could a copper snake have the power to make a person die or live?!

What really happened is that when Benei Yisrael would look upwards, and turn their hearts in service to their Father in Heaven, then they would be healed. But if they didn't, they would rot from their snake bites.

משנה ראש השנה ג:ח

וכי נחש ימית, או נחש מחיה?!

אלא, בזמן שישראל מסתכלין
כלפי מעלה ומשעבדיו את לבם
לאביהו שבשמים, היו מתרפאים.
ואם לאו, היו נמוקים.

According to this midrash-in-a-mishnah, the copper snake wasn't magic. It was there to inspire people to pray (to God, not the snake) with proper kavvanah. If they did that, then God would heal them!

- ◆ Why is it so important to have kavvanah in prayer or when hearing the shofar? When else is it important to have kavvanah?
- ◆ How can you tell when you are praying or acting with kavvanah? Is kavvanah something you can see with your eyes, or is it something else?





פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

When Benei Yisrael complain about being thirsty, God tells Moshe and Aharon to speak to a rock, and it will bring forth water. Moshe hits the rock, water rushes out, and Benei Yisrael drink. But God is not pleased. Moshe and Aharon receive a painful punishment: They will not live to lead Benei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael.

What went wrong? What exactly was the sin here, and why did it deserve such a severe punishment?

Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash!
Write to us at devash@hadar.org

- ♦ Read the story carefully (Bemidbar 20:1-13). What clues can you find? Try to build an argument based on evidence from the text.



Many פְּרָשְׁנִים (parshanim, commentators) offer different answers to these questions. Here are two.

Ramban (Spain, 800 years ago)

The sin was saying, "Shall **we** get water for you?" (Bemidbar 20:10). They should have said, "Shall **God** get water for you?"

רמב"ן

הַחֲטָא הוּא אָמְרוּ "נֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם" (במדבר כ:י) וְרָאוּ שֶׁלֹּא מָרוּ "יֹצִיא ה' לָכֶם מַיִם."

- ♦ How does Ramban's explanation fit with God's statement at the end of the story (Bemidbar 20:12), לָעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (because you failed to sanctify Me in Benei Yisrael's eyes)?



Rambam (Spain and Egypt, 850 years ago)

Moshe's sin was that his behavior tilted away from the balance of patience he should have had. He tilted toward anger when he said, "listen up, you rebels" (Bemidbar 20:10).

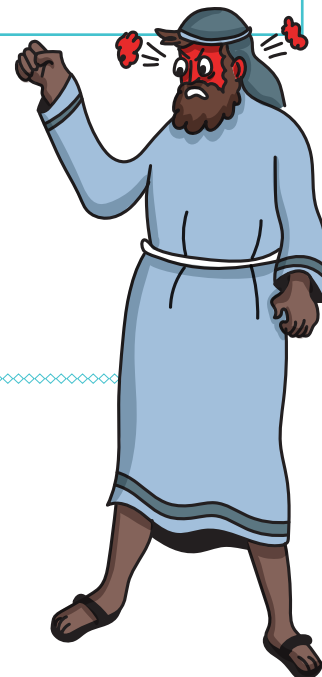
God held him to a high standard because it was not fitting for a person of his greatness to be angry when anger was inappropriate...

שמונה פרקים לרמב"ם

וְחָטְאוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם הוּא שְׁנֵטָה לְצַד
אֶחָד מִן הַקְצוֹת מִמַּעַלָּה מִמַּעַלּוֹת
הַמִּדּוֹת - וְהוּא הַסִּבְלָנוֹת - כְּאִשֶּׁר
נָטָה לְצַד הַרְגָּזָנוֹת בְּאָמְרוֹ "שְׁמָעוּ
נָא הַמּוֹרִים" (בַּמִּדְבָּר כ:).

דִּקְדִּיק עָלָיו הַשֵּׁם שֶׁיִּהְיֶה אָדָם כְּמוֹהוּ
כּוֹעֵס לִפְנֵי עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמָקוֹם
שֶׁאֵין רָאוּי בּוֹ הַכֶּעַס...

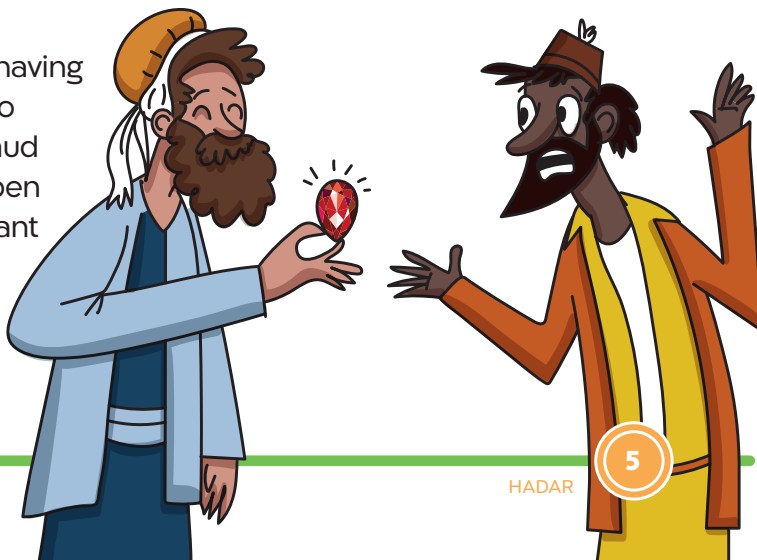
- ◆ How does Rambam's explanation fit into the story? Especially when you read 20:8, do you notice whether God expresses anger at the people?
- ◆ How do Ramban and Rambam help us understand the story better? How do they compare to other explanations you were able to think of?



הלכה • Halakhah

After Moshe hits the rock, God punishes him and Aharon. They will not be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael, because, in God's words, they failed לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי (lehakdisheini, to make Me holy). We saw in our פְּרָשְׁנוֹת/Commentary section (p. 4) that it's not exactly clear what they did wrong. But from the word lehakdisheini we can understand that they missed an opportunity to create a קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם (kiddush Hashem, sanctification of God's name).

Creating a kiddush Hashem often means behaving in a way that causes others to come closer to God. For example, there's a story in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Bava Metzia 2:5) about Shimon ben Shetah, who bought a donkey from a merchant who wasn't Jewish, and then discovered that inside the donkey was a precious gem. Shimon's students told him this was a



blessing from God and he should keep the gem, but Shimon insisted that it should be returned to the seller. He went above what the law required because, he explained, he wanted to cause the person who had sold him the donkey to bless God.

Rambam writes that our everyday behavior can create a kiddush Hashem. When we speak kindly, show respect to others, or behave ethically in business, this brings glory to God and can also cause others to improve their own behavior. But if we speak inappropriately, behave rudely, or show disrespect to others, the opposite happens, and that is called a חילול השם (hillul Hashem, desecration of God's name) (Mishneh Torah, Yesodei Ha-Torah 5:11).



רְגִיעַ שָׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bemidbar 21:22

Let me pass through your country. We will not turn off into fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king's highway until we have crossed your territory."

במדבר כא:כב

אֶעֱבֹרָה בְּאַרְצְךָ לֹא גִטָּה בְּשָׂדֶה
וּבְכֶרֶם לֹא נִשְׁתֶּה מִי בְּאֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ
הַמֶּלֶךְ יָלֵךְ עַד אֲשֶׁר-נִעְבֹּר גְּבֻלְךָ:

לַעְבֹּר (שָׂרַשׁ ע.ב.ר.)

- ◆ To pass (or pass through) or cross (la'avor)

מַעְבָּר =

- ◆ Passage or passageway
- ◆ A move or a transfer (like a move to a new house, school, or job) (ma'avar)





דְּבָרָה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!

For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.

Debate: Adults should never show they're upset.



Agree!

- Adults have to be patient, especially with people who don't yet know better.
- If an adult shows anger, everyone around them gets scared. Look what happened with Moshe at the rock!



Disagree!

- Seeing someone's anger can sometimes help us learn when we've crossed the line.
- Even adults have emotions, and that's ok. We all do.

Find the Word!

עוֹנַת מַעְבָּר =

A season that is a transition, usually referring to spring or fall (onat ma'avar)

Despite the punishment he receives in our parashah, when Moshe nears his death, he will beg God to let him enter Eretz Yisrael. Look ahead to the first few pesukim of Parashat Va'ethanan. Can you find the word he uses that comes from this שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root)?

עֲבֵר =

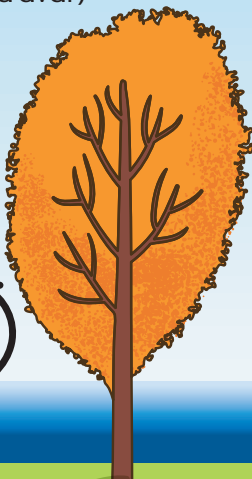
The past, history (avar)

מַעְבְּרָת =

Ferry (ma'aboret)

עֲבֵירָה =

Transgression, crime, foul (in sports) (aveirah)



7



שְׂאִלוֹת הַשְּׁבוּיָה • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Bemidbar 19:1 to 19:17
- 2) 19:18 to 20:6
- 3) 20:7 to 20:13
- 4) 20:14 to 20:21
- 5) 20:22 to 21:9
- 6) 21:10 to 21:20
- 7) 21:21 to 22:1

Good luck!

1 After a person comes into contact with the dead, on which days must they be purified?

2 What seems to disappear as soon as Miriam dies?

3 What detail makes it seem like maybe Moshe was **supposed** to hit the rock?

4 What do Benei Yisrael offer to pay for, if they are allowed to pass through Edom?

5 After Aharon died, how long did the people mourn?

6 What written book gets quoted in our parashah?



7 What was the name of the site of the battle between Benei Yisrael and Og?

8 What insulting term do Benei Yisrael use to describe מַן (mann), the miraculous food that fell for them each day from the sky?

9 After Aharon dies, who takes over as High Priest?

10 What is the capital of the territory of Sihon, and what does it have to do with mathematics?



*
Look for
the answers
on page 12!



Pashta

פֶּשְׁטָא

Pashta is a very simple note and it appears in almost every verse in the Torah. It means “stretching out” and it looks like an arc going up to the left—exactly like a kadma! So how do you tell them apart? Well, a kadma goes on the accented part of the word. But a pashta is always at the very end of the word, and the accent will always be on the last syllable where there’s a pashta, but the pashta won’t necessarily appear on the accented letter. If you see something that looks like this note and it is hanging off the word, you know it is a pashta. Take a look at this example from our parashah:



Bemidbar 19:10

The one who gathers the ashes of the cow

The first note, on the right, is a kadma. It is above the samekh, which is the letter where the accent is in the word ha-o-SEIF. But the last note, on the left, is a pashta. Even though the accent should be on the reish, since the word is ha-pa-RAH, the note hangs off the last letter, because that’s where a pashta always goes. Here is a very clear example from much earlier in the Torah, where you can see the difference between a pashta (at the end) and a kadma (in the middle), both on the same word:



Go kadma and pashta hunting until you can tell them apart!



Before or
after Shabbat,
scan to hear
this pashta!

Quick Facts

1

How many times does it appear in the Torah?
5431—Very common
Almost every pasuk

2

Does it end a musical phrase?
Yes

3

Is it above or below the word?
Above

4

Where is it placed on the word?
At the end



Before or
after Shabbat,
scan to hear
this pashta!





בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

The ashes of a פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red heifer or cow) are a super-powerful ingredient that could get rid of the most serious טְמֵאָה (tum'ah, impurity). This was critical because the mishkan and the Beit Ha-Mikdash were off-limits to anyone who was טָמֵא (tamei, impure).

A parah adumah was a rare thing. Because of this, everyone in Eretz Yisrael would be on the lookout for when a new parah adumah was born.

There's a story about this in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Kiddushin 1:10). There was a non-Jew who lived in Ashkelon, called **Dama ben Netina**. He was so committed to honoring his parents that, according to one rabbi, he never once sat on the stone that his father used to sit on. Once, he refused to wake his father up, even though this cost him loads of money in a sale.

As a reward for being so good, a parah adumah was born in his flock. And the Jews ended up buying it from him—the price was its weight in gold!

- ♦ Why do you think a parah adumah was an appropriate reward for Dama ben Netina?
- ♦ What do you think about the fact that he's a non-Jew? What is the story trying to teach us about Jews and non-Jews?





בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

What happened to the copper serpent that Moshe made (see מִדְרָשׁ / Midrash section on p. 2)? It actually has a very surprising history!

Around 700 years after Moshe, when King Hizkiyah took the throne of Yehudah, he destroyed all the places where people were worshiping outside of Jerusalem and all the idols he could find. One in particular stands out:

Melakhim Bet 18:4

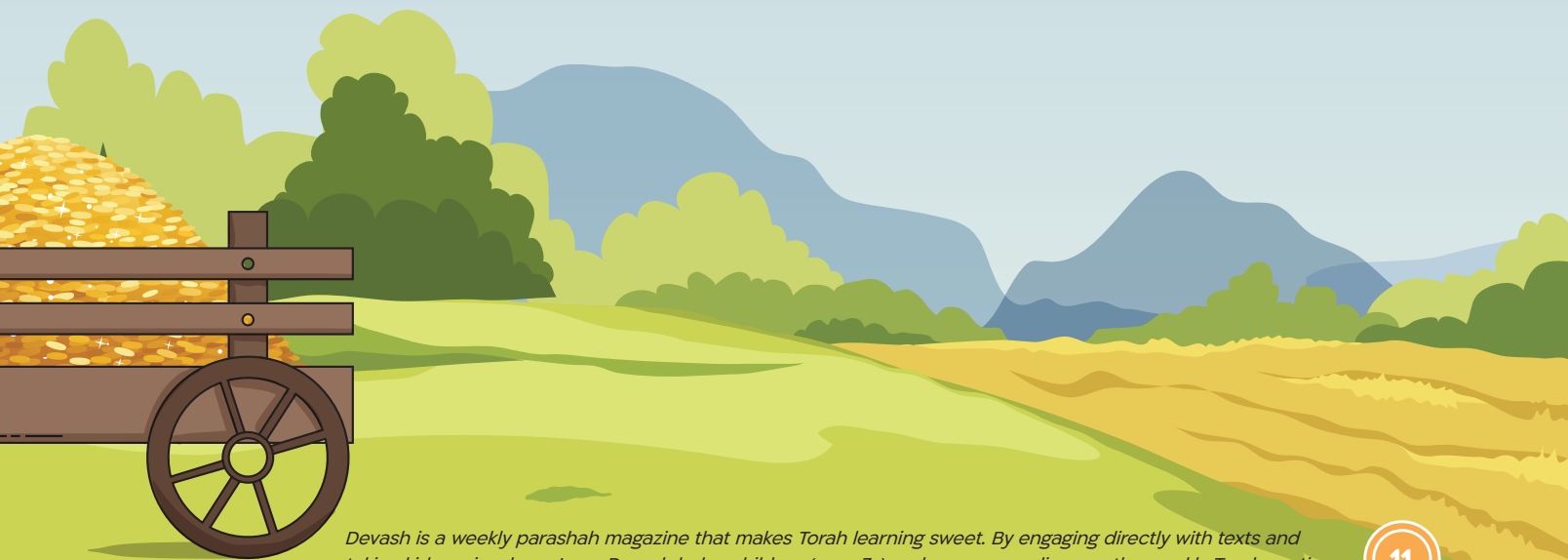
Hizkiyah destroyed the bronze serpent that Moshe made—because until that time, Benei Yisrael used to offer incense to it, and they called it Nehushtan.

מלכים ב יח:ד

וְכָתַתְּ נֶחֱשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה כִּי עָד-
הַיָּמִים הָהֵמָּה הָיוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקַטְרִים לוֹ
וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ נְחֹשֶׁתָן:

This story shows how easily Benei Yisrael fell to idol worship. Moshe had made this special object following God's instruction, to inspire people to pray to God (according to our midrash). And yet they ended up turning it into an idol!

- ◆ This seems like a pretty big mistake. How do you think people could mess up so badly that they use something for the exact opposite of its purpose?





מה קרה • What's Going On Here?

Aharon dies at the top of a הָר (har, mountain). It has an unusual name: הֹר הָהָר (Hor Ha-Har). What was this place?

Hor might just be the name of the mountain. But there's a midrash (from the Tanhuma, quoted by Rashi) that interprets Hor Ha-Har as "mountain on a mountain." In the words of the midrash, it was "like a small apple on top of a larger apple."



Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. The third and the seventh (19:12)
2. Water (20:1-2)
3. God tells him to take his staff! (20:8)
4. Any water they drink (20:19)
5. 30 days (20:29)
6. סֵפֶר מִלְחָמוֹת ה' (Sefer Milhamot Hashem, The Book of the Wars of God) (21:14)
7. Edre'i (21:33)
8. לֶחֶם הַקֶּלֶקֶל (lehem ha-kelokel, the despicable bread) (21:5)
9. His son, Elazar (20:25-28)
10. Heshbon (21:26)—which is also the modern Hebrew word for math!

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