

Candlelight time 8:46, Sabbath ends 9:39
Scriptural Reading for Saturday
morning, July 3

CHUKAS: Numbers 19:1-22:1
HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: What is the legality of military conquest? Torah's view is that might does not establish right, nor does occupation grant possession. But results of a morally just war, fought against an enemy who threatens one's very existence, are legally valid. Any territory thus obtained is consecrated to the victor. The advancing Israelites respected the territorial integrity of Edom, Moab and Ammon, already settled in the South of Transjordan. Although explicitly hostile and hindering Israel's progression, they did not present a real threat. They were bypassed. However, the northern kingdoms of Sihon and Og, who attacked, were conquered and became part of Israel's territory. Included in this conquest was land previously ruled by Ammon and Moab. Was Israel obliged to return it to its former rulers? So demanded Ammon 300 years later. Israel's argument, presented by Jephthah the judge, was that the land was acquired not from Ammon but through a just war against Sihon. Hymns celebrating Sihon's previous seizure of the land are preserved in Scripture to document forever Israel's claim. It is Torah's concern that war, which is inherently evil, be no license for injustice and inhumanity, and that even in war righteousness be upheld.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WATER FROM THE ROCK (Nu. 20:7-11): God told Moses to take his rod and "talk" to the rock; Moses "hit" the rock with his rod twice, and an abundance of water streamed from it. In its vivid imagery, this story reflects nomadic life. The scanty rainfalls in the desert are quickly absorbed in the sands. In the rocky terrains, however, large amounts of water may be stored in a hollow rock. In his search for water the nomad would use his rod to discover such a rock, by knocking on it -- first, to listen to its resounds; and then, after hearing sounds of water, to break it open. Thus nomads "communicate" with a rock, "talk" to it or "hit" it.

So did Moses who followed precisely God's (metaphoric) command: He did "talk" to the rock with his rod, by "hitting" it twice, first to explore it, and then to release its water. However, by publicly voicing doubt in the divine promise, he failed to sanctify God.

HUKKAT: Numbers 19:1-22:1

HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WAR AND JUSTICE: What is the legality of military conquest? Might does not establish right, nor does occupation grant possession. But results of a morally just war, fought against an enemy who threatens one's very existence, are legally valid: any territory thus obtained is consecrated to the victor: The Israelites advancing from the desert to the Promised Land respected the territorial integrity of the peoples already settled in the southern part of Transjordan: Edom, Moab and Ammon. Hostile and hindering Israel's progression, they presented no real threat: They were bypassed. However, the northern kingdoms of Og and Sihon, who had previously conquered some land from Ammon and Moab, initiated an attack on the Israelites. The aggressors were defeated and all the conquered territory became Israel's lot. It is Torah's concern that war be no license for injustice and inhumanity; even in war, righteousness and courtesy must be upheld.

Friday, June 28, 1985

CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

UNBLEMISHED AND UNBURDENED: These are the two essential qualities of the Red Cow ("para aduma;" Nu. 19:2), "in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid." These two qualities are suitable for a cow, not for a human being. A Hassidic word: If a person thinks he is spotless, he is surely also irresponsible, thus embracing both "qualities" of the Red Cow -- no blemish and no burden of morality or duty.

To be truly human means to assume responsibility -- to accept the burden of duty on earth as well as the yoke of Heaven. Only then a person realizes that he is far from perfect.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

UNBLEMISHED AND UNBURDENED — “in which there is no defect, and on which no yoke has been laid” (Nu. 19:2) — there are two qualities of the “Red Cow” (*para aduma*). They are appropriate for a cow, but not for a human being. Who is without any blame? Who is without any yoke? Hassidic saying: If a person considers himself flawless, he may be lawless — thus embracing both “qualities” of the Red Cow, no sense of guilt and remorse (unblemished) and no sense of duty and morality (unburdened).

To be truly human means to assume responsibility — to accept the yoke of civil duty, “of earth,” as well as the yoke of religious devotion, “of Heaven.” Then one will surely realize that he is far from perfect.

For June 24, 1993 / HUKAT

VICTIM OF IGNORANCE AND ARROGANCE

Rabbi Zvi A. Yehuda

Jephtah of Gilead, a rigorous and crafty warrior, is the hero of this Shabbat's *Haftara* which concludes with his awkward vow to God and smashing victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11:30-33). Before waging war he pledged that if victorious he will offer as sacrifice to God "whatever" (or, "whomever") exits his home to greet him upon his safe return from the battlefield (even if it be a dog or a human being?). Splendidly he won the war. How will he resolve his reckless vow?

The unfolding drama (11:34-40), unread in the Synagogue, introduces a pathetic figure, **Jephtah's daughter**. This anonymous heroine appears on the stage unexpectedly greeting her victorious father and celebrating his safe return. Consequently she becomes the victim of his barbarity. What did he do to her? In skillful evasiveness the biblical narrative enshrouds the awesome denouement, while it depicts in detail the dramatic encounter: The crude reaction of the shocked father seeing his one and only daughter coming forth to greet him with song and dance, "*Ha, my daughter! you forcibly devastate me! you are my trouble! I have loosened my mouth before God, I cannot retract!*"; and the bitter surrender of the helpless daughter. "*My father! You have loosened your mouth before God! do to me whatever your mouth ejaculated...*"

This uncouth confrontation between father and daughter reflects bitter irony. **Jephtah**, a dejected recluse, was normally living alone. He dwelled in the company of his livestock, with no human companion. He probably expected no human being to greet him on his triumphant return. Ironically, this time, however, successfully returning home as victor, his daughter surprisingly waits for him to joyfully welcome him. Will he now execute his brutish vow? Will he really offer his daughter as a human sacrifice to God?

A veil of eloquent silence conceals the fateful outcome. The story intimates, however, that **Jephtah's daughter** "*never knew a man*" and that "*she mourned her virginity.*" Hence, some Medieval commentators suggested that rather than put to death, she was put in a monastery for life, condemned to a lonely, love-less existence. Even so, she was still a victim of her father's gruesome abuse, of his impulsive vow and its repulsive execution. Dead or alive, she was a victim of his stupidity and savagery. A living victim is not much better off than a dead one.

Rabbinic tradition insists that **Jephtah** did indeed execute his vow to the letter. He did sacrifice his daughter's life. He brutally murdered her. Thus he committed unjustifiable homicide. Torah never permits human sacrifice. **Jephtah's** vow was initially worthless and void. It should have been annulled at the time by the sages of Israel. But **Jephtah** was ignorant and the sages indifferent, and both arrogant. While the mighty leaders were playing politics of rank and power -- each claiming, "I am the highest leader; let the other party come to me!" -- an innocent girl was victimized.

"TALKING" TO A ROCK OR "HITTING" IT?

An interpretation of Num. 20:7-13

by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WATER FROM THE ROCK (Nu. 27:14): The scanty rainfall in the desert is absorbed by the sands; in the rocky terrain, however, water may be found stored in some hollow rocks. Searching for water, the desert nomads "talk" to the rocks with a rod; namely, knock on them and listen to their echoing resound. If a rock sounds promising, it is "hit" again, opened to release its water. This realism is reflected in the Meribah story (Nu. 20). The Divine word to Moses was: "Take the rod and 'talk' to the rock, and it will give forth its water." (v. 8) The idiom "talk" was well understood and followed: Moses, although he failed in his leadership (20:10), for which he was punished (v. 12), did not fail at all in his adherence to the Divine command. Moses "struck the rock with his rod twice"--first to check it and then to open it--"and out came ample water."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

NOT BY AN ANGEL NOR BY A MESSENGER were we delivered from Egypt, but by God Himself; this theme is dominant in the Passover Haggadah. Judaism worships none but God, acknowledges no other Redeemer or Savior—human or divine—besides God. Moses, the great prophet and messenger who carried the heavy burden of leadership throughout the Exodus, is scarcely mentioned in the Passover Haggadah. The Exodus in its totality is perceived in Judaism as an immediate act of God, in His glory and His might. However, in his message to the king of Edom, Moses describes the Exodus as if carried out by a mediator (Nu. 20:16): "We cried to the Lord, and He heard our plea, and He sent a Mal'ach (angel or messenger), and he (the Mal'ach; or, and He, the Lord) delivered us from Egypt." This account seems to deviate from the pure monotheistic outlook which denies the role of any angel or messenger in the process of the Exodus. But this account, with its circumventive style and simplistic content, reflects Moses' diplomatic considerations in his dealing with a pagan ruler

Candlelight time 8:45 Sabbath ends 9:39

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, June 21:

**HUKKAT: Numbers 19:1-22:1 **

HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

HUKKAT: Numbers 19:1-22:1

HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE COPPER SNAKE EPISODE (Nu. 21:4-9) demonstrates a delicate struggle against paganism. On their way from Mount Hor, skirting the land of Edom, the wandering Israelites, restive and worn-out, were hit by a plague of "fiery" snakes which killed many of the people. "Fiery" (serafim) probably describes both the snakes' fierce appearance and the deadly consuming effect of their venom. Divinely ordained, "Moses fashioned a snake of copper and mounted it on a banner; whoever was bitten could look at the copper snake and recover." Why copper? Maybe it resembled the coloring of this snake. In Hebrew, there is a linguistic relation between snake ('nahash'), copper ("neho'shet") and magic ("na'hash"). What was the purpose of gazing at the copper snake? Does it not seem like indulgence in magic? Moses, by using means which border on paganism, actually comes to defy it – bringing man closer to God. Gazing at the snake is a way of seeing the snake for what it is, a dangerous creature, no less no more, to be watchful – but not fearful – of it; to tame it, not worship it. Biologically it may be harmful or beneficial, but it has no magical power. Commenting on Moses "remedy," the Mishna (RH 3:8) insists that the copper snake neither kills nor heals. It is the inner disposition of man, subjecting himself to his Creator – not to any of His creatures – that advances his recovery.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE COPPER SERPENT – that Moses made in the desert and mounted on a pole to cure those gazing at it from the venomous bites of the real “burning” serpents (Nu. 21:8-9) – has an intriguing etymology. In Hebrew the same root-word “nahosh” connotes three meanings: copper (“Nehoshet”), serpent (“nahash”), and magic (“nahash”). The brazen color and appearance of the serpent yielded the name “nehoshet” for brass and copper; hence, “mezah nehusha” for an impudent, shameless person, who is “brazen-faced.” Also the use of serpents for sorcery and divination led to the term “nahash” for magical enchanting and foretelling; hence, the verb “nahesh” in the modern sense of guessing. Although linguistically “copper serpent” is related to “magic,” the one of Moses in the desert, insist the rabbis, was no magic. It was displayed on a high standard, so the people looking at it in their need would standard, so the people looking at it in their need would raise themselves high, turn to their Father in Heaven, and to Him alone direct their hearts – their attentions and intentions. Judaism outgrew magic both by elimination and sublimation. The Copper Serpent episode illustrates the latter: how ancient symbols of primitive magic were utilized in the Torah as steppingstones for higher and more refined ideas of monotheistic worship.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, July 15:

HUKKAT: Numbers 19:1-22:1

HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER was a victim of her father's stupidity and her society's indifference. Jephthah pledged to offer a sacrifice to God, after returning victorious from battle with the Amonites. The nature of this sacrifice was strangely specified (Judges 11:31): "The one that will come out from the doors of my home to welcome me on my safe return from the Amonites." Jephthah certainly had in mind the first animal coming toward him. He was a recluse and a loner; he thought no human being would greet him upon his return home. Ironically, however, his daughter was there. Hearing about her father's heroism and victory she came to welcome him. Not an animal, but a human being, his own daughter, fulfilled the conditions of his reckless vow. Did Jephthah follow through and sacrifice his daughter? The biblical narrative veils the end with sensitive silence, leaving us wondering.

Candlelight time 8:46 Sabbath ends 9:38

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, July 4:

HUKKAT: Numbers 19:1-22:1

HAFTARAH: Judges 11:1-33

Independence Day, Saturday, July 4

Friday, June 29, 1990

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JEPHTAH'S DAUGHTER (Judges 11:29-40): The narrative tells of the father's crude vow to "offer to God whatever exits" his home's door to meet him upon his triumphant return from battle (beast or human?); his shocking agony seeing his one and only daughter coming forth in celebration to greet him (would she usually visit him?); the daughter's helpless surrender ("You opened your mouth to God, now do with me as you have vowed ..."); but not of the fateful outcome. This is concealed behind a veil of eloquent silence, leaving the reader wondering. The account mentions that she "mourned her virginity" and "never knew a man"; is this a hint that she was placed in a monastery for life, rather than executed? Less horrible than literal death, such a fate of a secluded, loveless existence, is still inexcusable: An innocent victim of a father's savagery and society's apathy!

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JEPHTAH'S DAUGHTER. Was she really sacrificed alive by her father? The biblical story describes the terrible vow of the father, to offer as sacrifice to God whatever (or, whoever) comes out of the door of his house to meet him when he returns from war in triumph; the horrible agony of the shocked father seeing his one and only daughter coming forth to greet him with song and dance; the bitter surrender of the helpless daughter: "My father, you opened your mouth to God, now do with me as you have vowed" But how was this vow fulfilled? The fateful outcome is covered behind a veil of eloquent silence. The reader is left wondering. The story, however, intimates that the daughter "mourned her virginity" (Judges 11:37), and that she "never knew a man" (39). It was therefore suggested that she was not literally killed, but put in a monastery all her life (Radak, Ralbag, Abrabanel).

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HUKAT

July 10, 1992

JEPHTAH'S DAUGHTER: Was she really sacrificed alive by her father? The biblical story (Judges 11:29-40) describes the terrible vow of the father to offer as sacrifice whatever (or, whoever?) comes out of the door of his house to meet him when he returns from war in triumph; the horrible agony of the shocked father seeing his one and only daughter coming forth to greet him with song and dance; the bitter surrender of the helpless doubter: "You opened your mouth to God, now do with me as you have vowed..." But how was this awesome vow actually fulfilled? The fateful outcome is concealed behind a veil of eloquent silence; the reader is left wondering. The story, however, intimates that the daughter "mourned her virginity," and that "she never knew a man." It was therefore suggested that Jephtah's daughter was not literally put to death, but rather put in a monastery for life -- condemned to a gloomy, love-less, existence. Less horrible, though, than actual death, her fate was still an inexcusable cruelty. Even if she was not literally sacrificed alive by her father, she was still an innocent victim of his stupidity and savagery, his impulsive vow and its repulsive execution. Is a living victim much better off than a dead one?

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

JEPHETHAH'S DAUGHTER was a tragic victim of her elders' ignorance and arrogance. Her father, a son of a whore, an outcast and outlaw, a former gang-leader, emerged after a grave national crisis as a valiant war hero and one of the judges of Israel. He remained, nonetheless, uneducated and unrefined. In war, he pledged that if the enemy be defeated, he shall sacrifice to God the first living being to welcome him at home (Judges 19:31). Oddly, he did not expect it to be a human being. This betrays his ingrained loneliness and unsociability. He is used to animals, not humans, running out of his home to meet him on his regular returns. This time, alas, his own daughter, probably excited by his glory, came out to greet him. What an irony! Meeting her father, she meets her doom. The father's pledge, however, was not immutable. The priest could annul it. But, the rabbis figure, the father was ignorant, the priest far off, and both arrogant. Each considered himself superior and for it to be beneath his dignity to visit the other. Meanwhile, an innocent girl was sacrificed on the altar of barbarity and inhumanity.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

OCCUPIED TERRITORY, in a just war against a threatening enemy, belongs to the victor. Might is not right; occupation does not legalize possession; but territorial gains in a just war, paid for with precious lives, are non-returnable. Advancing east of Jordan, the Israelites – respecting the territorial integrity of their kindred neighbors, Edom, Moab and Ammon – bypassed them; hostile, they presented no real threat. Not so the northern kingdoms of Sihon and Og; they attacked, and lost. Their territory, conquered by Moses, belongs to Israel. Included in this territory was land formerly part of Ammon and Moab.

To document Israel's right to this contested land (Judges 11:12-28), Torah preserved war-hymns, telling of the previous conquest of this land by Sihon (Nu. 21:14-15; 27-30), establishing Israel's right as the final victor.

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

HUKAT

June 21, 1991

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, won in a just war against a threatening enemy, rightfully belong to the victor. Might is not right; occupation does not legalize possession. But territorial gains of a just war, paid for with precious lives, are nonreturnable. This law is demonstrated in Torah: Advancing east of Jordan, the Israelites meticulously respected the territorial integrity of Edom, Moab and Ammon, and by-passed them. These people were hostile, but presented no real threat. Not so the Northern kingdoms of Sihon and Og; they attacked Israel and lost. Conquered by Moses, their territories became part of the land of Israel.

Included in this conquest, was land formerly belonging to Ammon and Moab. To repudiate the earlier claim of Ammon and Moab to the same land (as in Jephthah's days; Judges 11: 12-28), Torah preserved war-hymns (Nu. 21:14-15; 27-30) which tell the previous defeat of Ammon and Moab to Sihon; thus documenting Israel's title to this land, as the final and rightful victor.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

OCCUPIED TERRITORY—won in a just war against a threatening enemy—duly belongs to the victor. Might is not right; occupation does not legalize possession. But the territorial gains of a just war, paid for with precious lives, are non-returnable.

Advancing east of Jordan, the Israelites respected the territorial integrity of Edom, Moab and Ammon and by-passed them; they were hostile, but no real threat. Not so the northern kingdoms of Sihon and Og; these kingdoms did attack and lost. Conquered by Moses, their territory became part of the land of Israel. Included in this conquest, however, was land formerly belonging to Ammon and Moab. To repudiate the earlier claims of Ammon and Moab to the same land (as in Jephthah's days; Judges 11): 12-28), Torah preserved war-hymns (Nu. 21:14-15; 27-30) which tell their previous defeat to Sihon; thus documenting Israel's right on this land, as the rightful and final victor.