

# HAFTORAH COMMENTARY PARSHAS CHUKAS

*by Rabbi Dovid Siegel*

## *Shoftim 11*

This week's haftorah sheds a ray of light on our dark and troublesome exile. The Book of Shoftim, is replete with experiences during which the Jewish people followed the foreign influences of their Canaanite neighbors. In response to this, Hashem's policy was to incite foreign nations into war with the Jewish people. The Jews would immediately recognize their wrongdoing and plead with Hashem for salvation. Subsequently, Hashem would send them a leader who would successfully defeat the enemy. One such experience was with the nation of Amon whom Hashem sent to awaken the Jewish people of the severity of their actions. Amon forced his way into the land and the Jewish people became petrified. They immediately turned to Hashem for assistance but He responded with severe words of reprimand. After absorbing this strong message the Jewish people began sincerely repenting and a new Jewish leader, Yiftach was inaugurated.

The haftorah portrays Yiftach as one far from perfection. Yiftach was not from accredited descent and was rejected by his family members for this. He left home and developed a following of undesirable individuals. But, now in their time of great distress The Jewish people summoned the family to approach Yiftach and appoint him their leader. After a most appropriate response Yiftach rose to the occasion and, acting as Israel's protector, delivered a powerful message to Amon. He stated unequivocally that it is Hashem Who defeats the major powers of the world and, with this he called upon Hashem to assist in this war. Hashem responded and Yiftach, armed with bold courage and strength, defeated the entire nation of Amon.

Many have questioned the peculiarity of this victory. In fact, this is the first time in Jewish history that the Jews were led by an individual so inferior in spiritual and moral quality. If Hashem deemed it appropriate to perform a miracle on behalf of His people, couldn't He have chosen a more qualified person? In addition, why were the Jewish people so desperate that their only choice was a man of Yiftach's low stature?

An answer to this may be suggested through properly reflecting upon the general status of the Jewish nation at the time. As mentioned above, the Jews of those times were seriously lax in their devotion to Hashem. Although by now they had begun a sincere return to Hashem much remained to be done in order to complete the process. Hashem's response to them is best depicted in the passage preceding our haftorah. "And Hashem's soul was disgusted over the plight of Israel." (10:16) Radak quotes Rambam who explains that Hashem's decision to save His people was based solely

on their suffering. Hashem simply couldn't tolerate watching His people suffer any more. After all, how many more times could they be subjected to such suffering? Hashem therefore responded to their inklings of repentance and sent Yiftach to deliver them from the hands of Amon.

In light of the above we gain clear insight into the strange appointment of Yiftach. In reality, the Jewish people didn't deserve miracles or leaders of stature. Their total merit was nothing more than Hashem's unwillingness to watch their suffering. Hashem therefore chose Yiftach, the man who best reflected the timely status of the Jews, to be their leader. Open miracles and direct contact with Hashem were not in order at this point. Therefore a leader of Yiftach's stature was chosen for the task. A victory was experienced but the Divine dimensions of it were totally concealed. Yiftach, like the Jewish people, did not deserve miracles, yet a heavenly response was appropriate. Once Yiftach and the Jews turned to Hashem with sincerity Amon was defeated and peace was restored to the Jewish people.

This experience is paralleled in this week's parsha. After the passing of The High Priest, Aaron, the Jewish people became fearful of the inhabitants of Canaan and began heading back towards Egypt. After the tribe of Levi forced the issue the Jewish people regained their courage and returned to their path towards Eretz Yisroel. However, their diversion gave rise to disgust and exhaustion and concern over their extended stay in the desert. They subsequently staged a serious complaint against Hashem and Moshe Rabbeinu with the claim that they would never reach the land of Israel. Hashem immediately responded and released poisonous snakes which killed large numbers of the nation. After realizing their wrongdoings they pleaded with Moshe Rabbeinu who interceded on their behalf and successfully calmed Hashem's wrath.

Reflecting upon this, Chazal (see Bamidbar Rabba 19:24) explain that Hashem remained angry at the Jews long after they were healed his blow. Apparently, this complaint left a serious stain on the Jewish character and diminished their contact with Hashem. Yet, as we continue reading the parsha we discover that Hashem continued to assist His people and miraculously defeated the Emorites. In fact, mountains were even levelled to crush all the Emorites who were waiting inside their caves to ambush the Jews.

We learn from both of these incidents the extent of Hashem's concern and feeling for His people. Although there was much room for improvement, Hashem did not forsake His people. True, they did not deserve His assistance, however, when they sincerely turned to Him a favorable response was forthcoming. In a similar manner we realize how much improvement our generation needs. Yet, as in all times, we may rightfully look to Hashem for our salvation. Hashem's total concern for His people will forever exist irrespective of how truly deserving we are of it.