

# A GENERATION REPENTS

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

The generation who witnessed the exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the sea, and the giving of the Torah was no more. The generation that had crafted the Golden Calf, believed in the Spies, and gave birth to Korach's rebellion, was no more. A new generation stood poised to enter the Promised Land. A new generation stood on the threshold of their foretold destiny.

In this week and last week's Parshios the Torah recorded three new rebellions. The first rebellion took place after Miriam's death. The second rebellion followed Aharon's death when Moshe led them in a circuitous route to avoid the land of Edom. The third rebellion followed the unsuccessful plot of Balak and Bilam to curse and destroy the Jewish people.

The first rebellion was about water. The second rebellion was about bread. The third rebellion was because of basic carnal desire.

In the first rebellion no one died. In fact, it does not seem as if G-d was angry at all. In the second rebellion many died, but the "Torah did not record how many." In the third rebellion the Torah recorded that 24,000 died.

In what way was the generation of the Exodus different from the new generation of the desert? Why did the new generation deserve to inherit the land while their predecessors had not?

Why were the consequences for the first rebellion seemingly non-existent while the second and third rebellions ended in great losses of life? What is the significance of the first rebellion following the death of Miriam and because of water? What is the significance of the second rebellion following the death of Aharon and because of bread? Why is it significant that the third rebellion was motivated by carnal sin?

The year was 2484. The Jews had wandered the desert for almost forty years. The new generation was reaching middle age and had begun to assume the leadership of the nation. The generation that had left Egypt as adults were almost all gone, only a handful remained. For the new generation, water from rocks and manna from heaven were not novelties. For them, these were commonplace. These miracles had become nature.

Miriam, the matriarch of the nation, suddenly passed away. As with so many great personalities it is only after their passing that their greatness is recognized. All of a sudden, the "well" dried up. For forty years the Jews had enjoyed water from a spring that appeared for them whenever they

camped. All of a sudden the nation knew that the spring, the well, had been in Miriam's merit. (See Rashi 19:2).

Rashi (19:3) points out that death by thirst is a horrible way to die. Therefore, panic set in among the people. Any change can cause stress and concern but an entire nation in a desert without water is good reason for concern. Remember, for most of the nation there had not been a single day without running water. The original confrontation with Moshe over water had been in the first two years of the desert. It was now 38 years later, and no water! Miriam had died, and their sense of security in the presence of their leadership had weakened. If Miriam could die, so could Aharon and so could Moshe! The nation had begun to feel their own mortality. Therefore there was panic; therefore, G-d did not get angry. (See not 3-5 pg. 843 Stone Edition ArtScroll).

Aharon was the next to go. His death shook the nation to the core. Rashi (21:29) points out that he was loved by all. The "peacemaker" had been a constant. A legend in his own time, the new generation had grown close with the First Kohain Gadol. He who had "stopped the Angel of Death" in last week's Parsha (following the rebellion of Korach) was seemingly invincible, immortal. Miriam was gone. Aharon was gone. Even worse was the fact that he had died without warning. (See Rashi 20:29) Who might be next?

They wanted to enter the land. They did not want to wander anymore. Moshe had led them around the land of Edom rather than fight for the more direct route. Once again it seemed they were wandering. Then Aharon died. The double punch of their disappointment and their insecurity turned to anger at their situation. They took it out on the manna. They attacked their primary source of sustenance. They displayed their anger and fear. However, this time G-d was less forgiving. This time he punished the people for their lack of gratitude, their immaturity. Therefore He sent the poisonous snakes. (See Rashi 21:6).

However, in this instance, the new generation revealed its uniqueness and greatness. As the snakes attacked and people began to die, the people came to Moshe and exclaimed, "We have sinned for we have spoken against Hashem and against you." They were no longer the "stiff necked" people who had fashioned the Golden Calf, listened to the Spies, and supported Korach's rebellion. This was a nation that admitted their shortcomings and said they were sorry. In all the 38 preceding years there is not a single record of the Jews admitting their guilt. This was a truly new, and in this way, improved generation. Such a generation was worthy of occupying the land. Such a generation was capable of living in the land. (Remember, life would be an ongoing series of sinning and repentance. Note: The period of the Shoftim).

The last recorded rebellion in the Torah is found in the last verses of this week's Parsha. The new generation had learned their lesson well. They trusted G-d and they trusted Moshe. However, they also trusted themselves, and therefore, they failed. Living in the desert, isolated, insulated, and being frum in one thing. Living among the other nations exposed and unprotected is entirely something

else. Yes, the tents and dwelling places of Jacob were good, but they could not withstand the test of assimilation. They could not stand up against themselves.

The new generation had to learn a terrible, but important lesson. "Learn to trust G-d. Learn to trust Moshe. Learn to never trust yourself". To be human is to err. To be G-dly is to forgive. So long as we know how to evoke His forgiveness, we will continue to ask His forgiveness. So long as we ask forgiveness we will be deserving of the Land.

### **The 3 Weeks & The 17th of Tamuz**

The fasts of Gedalia, the 10th of Teves, the 17th of Tamuz, and Tisha B'Av, were ordained to commemorate the destruction of the 1st and 2nd Batei Mikdash (Temples). Beginning with the 17th of Tamuz - July 8 and culminating on Tisha B'Av - July 29 is a period of mourning. As legislated by the Talmud and amplified by our customs, the degree of mourning becomes more intense as we approach Tisha B'Av.

The laws of the 3 Weeks extend from July 8 - the 17th of Tamuz, until after Tisha B'Av - July 29. Our custom is not to shave or take haircuts during this three-week period, and it applies to men and women. Marriages aren't performed and it is forbidden to rejoice with music and dance. The custom is to refrain from listening to any music, or to attend any public entertainment.

Occasions necessitating the Bracha of Shehechianu, such as buying or wearing new clothes or eating a new fruit should be avoided during the Three Weeks.

On the 17th of Tamuz, five tragedies befell the Jewish People. In commemoration of these events Chazal - the Rabbis ordained a fast day.

- 1.** Moshe returned from Mt. Sinai and witnessed the Golden Calf. Moshe broke the first Luchos.
- 2.** From the day that the Mizbeach was inaugurated in the desert (2449), offerings were sacrificed every single day for 890 years. During the fall of the first Bais Hamikdash, there were no more sheep to sacrifice due to the hunger, and the daily offerings stopped.
- 3.** During the fall of the second Bais Hamikdash, the Romans breached the walls of Yerushalayim. At the destruction of the 1st Bais Hamikdash, the walls were breached on the 9th of Tamuz. The fast of the 17th commemorates both occasions.
- 4.** The Talmud in Taanis recounts that in 2610, right before the story of Channukah, Apustomus, a Syrian governor, publicly burned a Sefer Torah.
- 5.** In 3228, during the 1st Bais Hamikdash, King Menashe placed an idol in the Bais Hamikdash. During the era of the 2nd Bais Hamikdash, Apustomus did the same.

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