



"זאת חוקת התורה"—This Is the Decree Related to the Torah The Passing Away of Moshe Aharon and Miriam Are Determined in Parshas Chukas It is a Decree of the Torah that Is beyond Scrutiny

In this week's parsha, parshas Chukas, it states (Bamidbar 19, 1): "וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר. זאת חוקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדומה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול." **Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: This is the statute ("chukah") of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take to you a perfectly red cow, which has no blemish, upon which a yoke has not come.** Here is the rendering in Targum Onkelos: "דא גזירת אורייתא די בקיד ה' למימר"—**this is the decree pertaining to the Torah that Hashem commanded, saying.** The Rishonim write that it was divinely revealed to Torah scholars that this passuk alludes to the tragic decree that was carried out in France during the week of parshas Chukas.

In a courtroom in Paris, France, Yisrael's enemies presented their case before a panel of Christian judges. They claimed that the Talmud commands Jews to hate goyim and Christians—the follower of the Jewish apostate, who defected from the teachings of the Torah. Two of the Tosafists—Rabeinu Yechiel of Paris and Rabeinu Moshe of Kotzi—were designated to oppose them.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, the Christian judges decreed that all copies of the Talmud be incinerated. In the year 5004, on the Friday of parshas Chukas, that evil regime burned two dozen wagons filled with hand-written manuscripts of the Talmud.

The Torah scholars of that generation consulted the heavens through a dream regarding this tragic decree. It was revealed to them from above that the day to be designated for fasting and teshuvah should not be the ninth of Tamuz—the actual date of the burning of the manuscripts—but rather the Friday of parshas Chukas. That was the day designated in the heavens for this terrible decree, as brought down by the Magen Avraham (O.C. 580).

Thus, it behooves us to examine the three elements intertwined here: **(1)** Why is the Friday of parshas Chukas specifically associated with the decree to burn the Torah manuscripts? **(2)** Why did HKB"H choose to allude to this tragic decree specifically in the Targum—"דא גזירת אורייתא"—rather than in the Torah itself? After all, from the actual words of the passuk: "זאת חוקת התורה"—we would have no clue that this terrible decree to burn Torah manuscripts was ordained from above, and **(3)** Why did HKB"H allude to this decree specifically in association with the mitzvah of "parah adumah"?

The Passing Away of Moshe Aharon and Miriam Is Determined in This Parsha

We will begin to shed some light on the subject based on what we discussed several weeks ago in parshas Beha'aloscha. Although Moshe Rabeinu was the primary leader of Yisrael in the midbar; in truth, HKB"H appointed all three of Amram's children to lead Yisrael during the exodus from Mitzrayim and their subsequent journeys in the midbar, as HKB"H explains to Yisrael via the navi (Michah 6, 4): "כי העליתיך מארץ מצרים ומבית עבדים: **for I have taken you out of the land of Mitzrayim, and redeemed you from the house of slaves; and I sent Moshe, Aharon and Miriam before you.** This agrees perfectly with a teaching in the Gemara (Ta'anis 9a):

"שלשה פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל, אלו הן, משה ואהרן ומרים, ושלוש מתנות טובות ניתנו על ידם, ואלו הן, באר ועגן ומן, באר בזכות מרים, עמוד עגן בזכות אהרן, מן בזכות משה. מתה מרים נסתלק הבאר ... וחזרה בזכות שניהן. מת אהרן נסתלקו עגני כבוד ... חזרו שניהם בזכות משה. מת משה נסתלקו כולן, שנאמר ואכחד את שלשת הרועים בירח אחד, וכי בירח אחד מתו, והלא מרים מתה בניסן, ואהרן באב, ומשה באדר, אלא מלמד שנתבטלו שלש מתנות טובות שנתנו על ידן ונסתלקו כולן בירח אחד."

Three preeminent leaders arose for Yisrael. They are Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. And three outstanding gifts were bestowed on their account. They are the well, the cloud and the “mahn.” The well was provided in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud in the merit of Aharon; the “mahn” in the merit of Moshe. When Miriam died, the well disappeared . . . it returned in the merit of the other two. When Aharon died, the “ananei hakavod” disappeared . . . both gifts returned in the merit of Moshe. When Moshe died, they all disappeared, as it states (Zechariah 11, 8): “I removed the three shepherds in one month.” Did they all die in the same month? After all, Miriam died in Nissan, Aharon in Av and Moshe in Adar. Rather, the passuk is teaching us that the three special gifts that were bestowed on their account were cancelled, and they all disappeared in the same month.

It is apparent that HKB”H decreed the passing of these three magnificent leaders in this week’s parsha, parshas Chukas. All three passed away during the twelve-month period of the fortieth year of Yisrael’s sojourn in the midbar, before they entered Eretz Yisrael. Miriam the prophetess, the older sister, was the first to pass away. She passed away in the month of Nissan, as it is written (Bamidbar 20, 1): “ויבואו בני ישראל כל העדה” מדבר צין בחודש הראשון, וישב העם בקדש ותמת שם מרים ותקבר שם, ולא היה . . . מים לעדה ויקהל על משה ועל אהרן.” **The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael arrived at the Wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and she was buried there. There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon.** Rashi comments: **We see from here that throughout the forty years (in the midbar), they had the well in the merit of Miriam.** The Targum Yonatan (ibid.) teaches us that Miriam passed away on the tenth of Nissan. Similarly, with regards to the days that we fast in the month of Nissan, the Shulchan Aruch writes (O.C. 580, 2): **“On the tenth, Miriam died on this date and the well disappeared.”**

The passing away of Aharon and Moshe ensued from there. For, the cessation of the waters of Miriam’s well prompted the assembly to gather together against Moshe and Aharon, to complain that they lacked drinking water. The tragic episode with the rock—from which Miriam’s well flowed—followed; the episode is known as “mei merivah”—“waters of contention.” As we know from this week’s parsha, HKB”H instructed them (ibid. 8): “ודברתם אל הסלע לעיניהם ונתן מימיו” —**and you shall speak to the rock in front of them, and it shall give its waters.** But they did not speak to the rock; instead, Moshe struck the rock

twice with his staff. As a consequence, it was decreed that they perish in the midbar, as it is written (ibid. 12): “ויואמר ה' אל משה: ואל אהרן יען לא האמנתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל לכן לא תביאו את הקהל” —Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, **“Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them.”**

Aharon HaKohen passed away that same year on Rosh Chodesh Av, as it is written (ibid. 33, 38): “ויעל אהרן הכהן אל הר ההר על פי ה' וימת שם בשנת הארבעים לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים בחודש החמישי באחד לחודש” —**Aharon HaKohen went up to Hor HaHar at Hashem’s command; he died there in the fortieth year after the exodus of Bnei Yisrael from the land of Mitzrayim, in the fifth month, on the first day.** Subsequently, on the seventh of Adar, Moshe Rabeinu also passed away. Thus, in a twelve-month period, all three of Yisrael’s illustrious leaders passed away—Miriam the prophetess on the tenth of Nissan, Aharon HaKohen on Rosh Chodesh Av and Moshe Rabeinu on the seventh of Adar.

The Deaths of the Three Leaders Coincides with the Deaths of the Generation of the Midbar

I would like to propose my own explanation as to why HKB”H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, arranged for all three of these illustrious leaders to pass away in the midbar without entering the promised land. Let us refer to the Gemara cited above: **“Three preeminent leaders arose for Yisrael. They are Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. And three outstanding gifts were bestowed on their account. They are the well, the cloud and the ‘mahn.’ The well was provided in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud in the merit of Aharon; the “mahn” in the merit of Moshe.”** We learn from this Gemara that HKB”H chose Moshe, Aharon and Miriam to lead Yisrael in the midbar, and that Yisrael were sustained by their three unique gifts—the well, the cloud and the “mahn.”

After the botched mission of the meraglim, resulting in Yisrael’s fateful sin, it was decreed that they perish in the midbar, as per HKB”H’s pronouncement (ibid. 14, 35): “אני ה' דברתי אם לא” —**I Hashem have spoken; if I shall not do this to this entire evil assembly that gathers against Me! In this wilderness shall they cease to be, and there shall they die!** Their historic sin also sealed the fate of the three leaders appointed by HKB”H to guide them through the wilderness; they moved on to life in Olam HaBa.

Substantiation for this fact can be found in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19, 13). There, our blessed sages expound on the passuk in this week's parsha that appears after the striking of the rock (20, 12): "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Bnei Yisrael, therefore, you will not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them."

"אמר לו הקב"ה למשה, באיזה פנים אתה מבקש ליכנס לארץ. משל לרועה שיצא לרעות צאנו של מלך ונשבת הצאן, ביקש הרועה ליכנס לפלטרין של מלך, אמר לו המלך, אם את נכנס עכשיו מזה יאמרו הבריות, שאתה השבית הצאן. אף כאן אמר לו הקב"ה למשה, שבחך הוא שהוצאת שישים ריבוא וקברתם במדבר ואת מכניס דור אחר, עכשיו יאמרו אין לדור המדבר חלק לעולם הבא, אלא תהא בצדן ותבוא עמהן, שנאמר ויתא ראשי עם צדקת ה' עשה, לכך כתיב לא תביא את הקהל הזה אלא שיצא עמך."

HKB"H said to Moshe: On what grounds do you wish to enter the land? It is analogous to a shepherd, who went out to watch the king's sheep, and the sheep was stolen. The shepherd requested entry to the king's palace. The king said to him, "If you enter now, what will people say? That you stole the sheep." Here, too, HKB"H said to Moshe, "Your praise is that you took 600,000 out, you buried them in the midbar and you brought another generation in. Now, they will say that the generation of the midbar does not have a portion in Olam HaBa. Instead, stay near them and come in with them," as it says (Devarim 33, 21): "And he came at the heads of the people; he carried out the righteousness of Hashem." Therefore, it is written: "You will not bring this congregation"; rather, it will go out (leave) with you.

Here we have explicit proof that the entire incident of **"mei merivah"** was orchestrated from above, so that Moshe would ultimately bring the generation of the midbar into Eretz Yisrael le'asid la'vo. This is evident from Moshe's remark to Yisrael (ibid. 3, 26): **"Hashem became angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me.** Thus, we can conclude that the other two illustrious leaders of Yisrael in the midbar—namely, Aharon and Miriam—also died only to help atone for the transgressions of the generation of the midbar.

Miriam's Death Was Juxtaposed to the Passage of the Parah Adumah

It appears that we can provide explicit proof for this conclusion from the following Gemara (M.K. 28a): **"אמר רבי אמי, למה נסמכה מיתת מרים לפרשת פרה אדומה, לומר לך מה פרה אדומה מכפרת אף**

מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת. אמר רבי אלעזר, למה נסמכה מיתת אהרן לבגדי כהונה, מה בגדי כהונה מכפרין, אף מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת." **Why was the death of Miriam juxtaposed to the passage of the "parah adumah"? To inform you that just as the "parah adumah" affords atonement, so do the deaths of tzaddikim afford atonement. Rabbi Elazar said: Why was the death of Aharon juxtaposed to the subject of the priestly garments (see Tosafos for clarification)? To inform you that just as the priestly garments afford atonement, so do the deaths of tzaddikim afford atonement.**

In keeping with our current discussion, we can suggest that HKB"H wanted to teach us the following: Moshe Rabeinu passed away in the midbar and did not enter the promised land, so that he would bring the generation of the midbar into the land with him le'asid la'vo. Similarly, Miriam and Aharon, whose deaths are described in this week's parsha, died solely to provide atonement for Yisrael.

Amazingly, we can now comprehend why HKB"H chose to teach us that Miriam's death provided atonement from its juxtaposition with the mitzvah of "parah adumah." We are familiar with Rashi's well-known comment in the name of Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan (Bamidbar 19, 22): **It is comparable to the son of a maidservant, who soiled a king's palace. They said, "Let his mother come and wipe away the excrement." Similarly, let the cow ("parah") come and atone for the calf ("eigel").**

Now, the "parah" is depicted here as the mother of the "eigel." Hence, it is her responsibility to come and clean up after her child. Similarly, Miriam the prophetess can be considered the mother of the generation of the midbar. As explained several weeks ago, Moshe Rabeinu was born as a result of her persuasive influence over Amram. As the Gemara (Sotah 12a) explains, she persuaded Amram, her father, to reunite with Yocheved, her mother; the other husbands followed his example. After Moshe was born, she put herself in harm's way in order to save him from drowning in the river; she even arranged for Yocheved, his mother, to be his nursemaid. Furthermore, throughout their sojourn in the midbar, Yisrael drank from the well that travelled along with them in her merit. Therefore, her death is truly analogous to the mother of Yisrael coming to clean up the mess of her children, since her death provided atonement for the sins of the generation of the midbar.

HKB"H teaches us a similar lesson in this week's parsha with regards to Aharon HaKohen. His death is juxtaposed to the

subject of the priestly garments. Just as the kohen's garments afford atonement, so, too, did Aharon's death provide atonement for the generation of the midbar. Thus, all three of Yisrael's great leaders—Moshe, Aharon and Miriam—passed away in the fortieth year of Yisrael's sojourn in the midbar, before entering Eretz Yisrael. In this manner, they provided atonement for the transgressions of the generation of the midbar, enabling them to enter Eretz Yisrael le'asid la'vo with Moshe Rabeinu.

We can now better appreciate the allusion inherent in the opening pesukim of this week's parsha: **וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר. זאת חוקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדומה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה עול.** The Targum renders this as: **This is the decree of the Torah.** The Targum is teaching us that the deaths of Yisrael's three illustrious leaders, which were determined by the events described in this parsha, were decreed by HKB"H to afford Yisrael atonement like a korban. Rashi alludes to this fact with his comment: **It is a decree of Mine; you do not have the right to question it.**

Let us add one more point. All three of these leaders are associated with the mitzvah of "parah adumah." Moshe Rabeinu is alluded to in the passuk: **"They shall take to you a perfectly red cow."** As Rashi explains in the name of the Midrash: **"They shall take to you"—it shall eternally be called by your name—the cow that Moshe prepared in the midbar.** Aharon's association is due to the fact that the Torah requires that the entire process of preparing the "parah" must be performed by a kohen, a descendant of Aharon. Miriam is alluded to by the "parah adumah," as described above; she represents the mother coming to clean up after her child.

Moshe and Aharon Taught Yisrael Torah She'b'al Peh

Based on this introduction, we can now focus on the burning of the Talmud on the Friday of parshas Chukas, as orchestrated and decreed by HKB"H. We have learned in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 1): **"משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע"**—**Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua.** According to the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 137b), this refers to Torah she'b'al peh. For, he transmitted the Torah she'b'chsav to the leviim, as it states (Devarim 31, 25): **ויצו משה את הלויים נושאי ארון ברית ה' לאמר לקוח את ספר התורה**—**Moshe commanded the leviim, the bearers of the Aron of the covenant of Hashem, saying, "Take this book of the Torah."**

This is why Moshe Rabeinu is considered the first recipient of Torah she'b'al peh. As the Rambam explains in his introduction to the Yad HaChazakah: **אף על פי שלא נכתבה תורה שבעל פה, לימדה משה, ואלעזר ופנחס ויהושע שלשתן קיבלו ממשה. וליהושע שהוא תלמידו של משה רבינו, מסר תורה שבעל פה וצוהו עליה.** **Even though Torah she'b'al peh was not written down, Moshe Rabeinu taught it in its entirety to his court of seventy elders. Elazar, Pinchas and Yehoshua, all three of them received it from Moshe. To Yehoshua, Moshe Rabeinu's pupil, he transmitted Torah she'b'al peh and commanded him regarding it.**

Now, Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, zy"a, explains in Pri Tzaddik (Chanukah 3) that Moshe did indeed also receive Torah she'b'al peh at Har Sinai; however, since he received it directly from HKB"H it resembles Torah she'b'chsav. Aharon, on the other hand, did not hear it directly from HKB"H but rather from Moshe. Hence, Aharon was the first to receive Torah she'b'al peh from him, as described in the Gemara (Eiruvin 54b): **כיצד סדר משנה, משה למד מפי הגבורה, נכנס אהרן ושנה לו משה פירקו... נכנסו כל העם ושנה להן משה פירקו... נסתלק משה [לאהלן] ושנה להן אהרן פירקו.** **What procedure was followed in the teaching of Torah she'b'al peh? Moshe learned from the mouth of the Almighty; Aharon entered and Moshe taught him his portion . . . all the people entered and Moshe taught them their portion . . . Then Moshe left and Aharon taught his portion to them** (everyone present). Thus, we see that Aharon also taught Yisrael the Torah she'b'al peh. This is the implication of HKB"H's remark to Moshe concerning Aharon (Shemos 4, 16): **"והיה הוא יהיה לך לפה"—and it will be that he will be a mouth ("peh") for you.** In other words, Aharon will be the representative of Torah she'b'al peh.

Miriam's Well Facilitates the Acquisition of Torah She'b'al Peh

This provides us with a wonderful explanation for a phenomenon described in our sacred sefarim. They assert that the waters from Miriam's well—"be'erah shel Miriam"—facilitate attaining Torah knowledge. In the sefer Pri Eitz Chaim, it describes how Rabbi Chaim Vital could not comprehend the esoteric aspects of the Torah. He only succeeded after his master, the Arizal, gave him to drink from the water of Miriam's well.

I had a fascinating thought. In his commentary on this week's parsha, the Alshich hakadosh explains at length that the water Yisrael drank from Miriam's well are an allusion to Torah she'b'al peh. He substantiates this claim with a teaching in the Midrash

(Yalkut Shimoni Chukas 763): **“ודברתם אל הסלע, שנה עליו פרק אחד והוא: —מוציא מים מן הסלע—”** **“and you shall speak to the rock”: He taught one portion over it, and he extracted water from the rock.** According to the Midrash, Moshe and Aharon were instructed to teach one portion of Torah she’b’al peh while standing over the rock, so that it would release its water. This alludes to the fact that these waters facilitate the attainment of Torah she’b’al peh. This is why the Arizal gave Rabbi Chaim Vital to drink from the well of Miriam.

Let us add an intriguing explanation concerning why Miriam was privileged to provide Yisrael with water that facilitated the learning of Torah she’b’al peh. In his commentary on this week’s parsha, Rabeinu Bachayei writes (Bamidbar 20, 2): **“ולא היה מים לעדה. כשמתה מרים נסתלק הבאר, כי היה הבאר בזכות מרים, שהיה לה זכות.”** **“There was no water for the assembly”: When Miriam died, the well disappeared, because the well was provided in the merit of Miriam. The water was in her merit, because of what she did for Moshe, as it states (Shemos 2, 4): “His sister stood watch from afar.”** Thus, we learn that because Miriam placed herself in danger in order to save her brother, Moshe, from the water, she merited providing Yisrael with drinking water from her “be’er.” Accordingly, it turns out that Moshe and Aharon were privileged to teach Yisrael Torah she’b’al peh in the merit of Miriam, who saved Moshe from a watery death. Hence, “midah k’neged midah”—measure for measure—the water from “be’erah shel Miriam” possesses the power to sanctify a person, enabling him to acquire the knowledge of Torah she’b’al peh.

We can now begin to comprehend to some minor degree the terrible decree ordained from above concerning the burning of manuscripts of the Talmud in association with parshas Chukas. For, we have learned in the Talmud Yerushalmi (M.K. 17b): **“הרואה תלמיד חכם שמת כרואה ספר תורה שנשרף”**—**one who sees a dead Torah scholar, it is like seeing a sefer Torah that was burned.** Therefore, in association with parshas Chukas—which determined the passing away of Yisrael’s three distinguished leaders, the representatives of Torah she’b’al peh—the burning of the manuscripts of the Talmud—Torah she’b’al peh—was ordained from the heavens.

Targum Onkelos Is a Form of Torah She’b’al Peh

Let us continue onward on this sacred, glorious journey. We will now endeavor to explain why it was orchestrated from above

that the burning of the Torah would transpire specifically on the Friday of parshas Chukas. As mentioned above, HKB”H chose to allude to this terrible decree in the Targum--**“דא גזירת אורייתא”**—rather than with the actual words of the passuk--**“זאת חוקת התורה”**. It appears that we can explain this divine choice based on an insight from the Chazon Ish (Taharos Yadayim 8, 19). He writes that although Targum Onkelos is a commentary on the Torah, it does not have the status of a sefer Torah written in Aramaic. Rather, it is categorized as Torah she’b’al peh; for, it interprets the pesukim of Torah she’b’chsav.

In truth, this is stated explicitly by the Ramban (Shabbas 115a): **Our Targum—that is Onkelos and Yonatan ben Uziel—are like other Torah she’b’al peh.** Additionally, the Gemara states (Megillah 3a): **“תרגום של תורה אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע”**—**the Targum of the Torah was composed by Onkelos the “ger,” who learned it from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.** Note that that the Gemara specifically uses the term **“מפי”**, insinuating that the Targum is considered to be Torah she’b’al peh. In other words, Onkelos received it from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, who received the tradition orally from their teachers all the way back to Moshe Rabeinu at Sinai.

We can now appreciate why HKB”H chose to allude to the decree to burn the Talmud in the commentary of the Targum, with the words **“דא גזירת אורייתא”**, rather than in Torah she’b’chsav with the words of the passuk **“זאת חוקת התורה”**. Seeing as the Targum is categorized as Torah she’b’al peh—because it was transmitted to Onkelos orally by Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua—it is fitting that this awful decree pertaining to the Talmud—the foundation of Torah she’b’al peh—be alluded to in the Targum. For the very same reason, the decree concerning the passing away of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam—the scholars of Torah she’b’al peh—was also alluded to in the Targum.

“On the sixth day when they prepare” Alludes to Mikra Twice and Targum Once

Proceeding along this majestic path, we will now explain why HKB”H chose to associate this horrific decree with the Friday of parshas Chukas. The Magen Avraham (O.C. 285 5) brings down in the name of the Shela hakadosh (Maseches Shabbas) that it is proper to review the text of the weekly Torah portion twice and its associated Targum once specifically on Friday. The source for this practice comes from Sha’ar HaKavanot. There, Rabeinu

Chaim Vital informs us that his teacher, the Arizal, customarily reviewed the weekly Torah reading twice with its Targum once every Friday morning, immediately after tefilas Shacharis. He would say: **This is the secret meaning inherent in the passuk** (Shemos 16, 5): "וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַשִּׁישִׁי וְהִכִּינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִבְיֵאוּ"—**and it shall be that on the sixth day (Friday), they shall prepare what they have brought.**

In keeping with this tradition, the Beis Yosef reports in Maggid Meisharim (Emor) that the malach that would appear to him admonished him: **"Do not neglect reviewing the parsha of the week—twice with the text and once with the Targum—on every, single Friday."** In Korban Shabbas (Chapter 5), he provides the reason for this practice. He explains that the twofold review of the weekly parsha corresponds to the double portion of the "mahn" that fell for Yisrael on Friday, as it is written (ibid. 22): "וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַשִּׁישִׁי לֶקְטוֹ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנָה"—**it happened on the sixth day that they gathered a double portion of bread.**

This illuminates for us the amazing association of the Friday of parshas Chukas with the decree to burn the Torah manuscripts. As discussed, it is appropriate to review the parsha on every Friday—twice with the text and once with the Targum. This is alluded to by the passuk: "וְהָיָה בַיּוֹם הַשִּׁישִׁי וְהִכִּינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִבְיֵאוּ". It turns out, therefore, that on the Friday of parshas Chukas, when we review the Targum Onkelos on the parsha, we read the words "דָּא גְזִירַת אֹרִייתָא" that allude to the burning of the manuscripts of the Talmud—the basis of Torah she'b'al peh. As explained, Targum Onkelos is considered part of Torah she'b'al peh.

Therefore, on this Friday, the Friday of parshas Chukas, we should all recall the great tragedy that transpired on this day. Two dozen wagons loaded with manuscripts of the Talmud were burned within the city. We should strive to emulate and learn from our Jewish brethren in that generation and other generations. Despite this terrible "chilul Hashem" and blatant display of antisemitism, it did not diminish their enthusiasm or dissuade them from studying the Torah. On the contrary, it strengthened their resolve to study Torah with fervor at all costs. This exemplifies the notion of (ibid. 1, 12): "וּכְאֲשֶׁר יֵעֲנוּ אוֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה"—**but as much as they afflict you, so it would increase and so it would burst forth**—the more they were tormented and oppressed, the more they thrived and prospered.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that we all heed the message of the following pesukim (Devarim 4, 32): "כִּי שָׁאֵל נָא לַיָּמִים רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ... הִנְהִיָּה כְדַבֵּר הַגְּדוֹל הַזֶּה אוֹ הַנְּשַׁמֵּעַ כְּמוֹהוּ. הַשְּׁמַע עִם קוֹל אֱלֹקִים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר שִׁמְעַת אֶתָּה וַיְחִי." **For inquire now regarding the early days that preceded you . . . Has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?!** The congregation of Yisrael are G-d's people; they hear His voice emanating from the brilliant, burning flames of the pages of the Talmud. Stay strong and committed; fan the fires of the Torah; it will ultimately consume the reshaim. In this merit, HKB"H will gather together our brothers from all four corners of the earth, with the coming of the righteous redeemer, swiftly, in our times! Amen.

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