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Once again the Jews rebel against G-d and Moshe. In consequence, G-d sent poisonous snakes as a punishment (to bite the people). The people begged Moshe to pray on their behalf "we sinned...pray to G-d that He remove the snake from us" (21/7), which Moshe promptly did. Rashi explains from this that when someone is asked to forgive, he or she should not be cruel, and (should) forgive. How can we apply this to our own lives? The Rebbe explains that there are three levels of forgiveness: 1. Forgiveness that protects the offender from punishment: a person may pray for the person who harmed him or her, but only in order to prevent any punishment being meted out. 2. Forgiveness not only for the offending act, but for the person who caused the harm. In other words, no grudge is held. 3. The forgiveness is so heartfelt that the sin is totally uprooted leaving no taint, as if it never happened. In this case, the relationship is totally restored to its former positive state.

In the matter of the snakes, Moshe prayed "for the sake of the people." Not only did Moshe pray for their lives-that the punishment of the snakes cease, he prayed for their sake, for the people. This is a demonstration of Moshe's complete love of the Jewish people. Their malevolence had no effect on Moshe. He continued to love his people in the same measure as before. He achieved the third and highest level of forgiveness. Even more, Moshe's manner of forgiving was not 'cruel', as Rashi writes, 'don't be cruel, and forgive'-don't forgive in a cruel way. He was not satisfied with just preventing fatalities, he also completely loved and wished well for those same people who rose up against him.

The Midrash says that G-d, in His own way, performs all the deeds He commands of us. Just as we see every day that G-d forgives us with His unbounded mercy, He also expects us to completely forgive one another. Additionally, when we consider how great and kind G-d is in constantly restoring our relationship with Him-no matter how insensitively we act-we are inspired to reciprocate with a feeling of wanting to improve our relationship with Him, to do tshuva. This tremendously powerful tshuva goes against the natural trend of life, bend the limits of creation. This in turn will be an impetus for G-d to also defy the world's trend and bring Moshiach-may it be NOW! (By Rabbi Shaul Yosef Leiter, www.ascent.org.il)

"Every open vessel that does not have a tight seal is impure."
[19:15] This refers [also] to the mouth! If as person can't shut it at appropriate times, 'he is impure.' Silence is preferable to speech. Rebbe Elimlech of Lisensk (www.ascent.org.il)

The clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean person... and he shall be clean at evening... [But] he that sprinkles the water of sprinkling... shall be unclean (19:19-21) All who are involved in the preparation of the Heifer from beginning to the end, become impure, but the Heifer itself purifies the impure! But G-d says: I have made a chok, decreed a decree, and you may not transgress My decrees. (Midrash Tanchuma)

The fact that the ashes of the Heifer "purify the contaminated and contaminate the pure" carries an important lesson to us in our daily lives: If your fellow has been infected by impurity and corruption, do not hesitate to get involved and do everything within your power to rehabilitate him. If you are concerned that you may become tainted by your contact with him, remember that the Torah commands the Kohen to purify his fellow Jew, even though his own level of purity will be diminished in the process.(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And Miriam died there... And there was no water for the congregation (20:1-2) A person may ingest the ingredients of life, but these will not vitalize him without the fluids that course through his body. The food swallowed by the stomach, the oxygen drawn in by the lungs, must now be transported through the body's canals and made to saturate its every cell.

Therein lies the spiritual significance of Miriam's role as Israel's provider of "water". Miriam first appears in the Torah (see Midrashim and commentaries on Exodus 1:15) as a children's nurse: one who distills adult food for the consumption of a child; one who trains and educates a growing human being, filtering the stimuli of an adult world for his maturing mind: who processes the raw materials of life to meet the specific needs of her charges' age and phase of development.

Miriam's well is the vital fluid of Israel's spiritual life, the water that inculcates them with the knowledge and identity her brothers provide. The waters of Miriam transport and apply the nutrients of Torah and the abstractions of faith to each individual, on his or her particular level. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe) - chabadonline.com

YUD GIMMEL TAMMUZ

Adapted from a Letter of the Rebbe

... At this time, in proximity to the anniversary of the geulah--deliverance--of my father-in-law, the Rebbe, of saintly memory, from the tyranny of the Soviet regime on the 12th-13th of Tamuz, it behooves us to reflect again on those history-making events and how they relate to every one of us here and now. For, as he indicated in his first letter on the occasion of the first anniversary of his geulah, and as we see it clearly now, his deliverance was more than a personal one; it was a turning point in the survival of Russian Jewry, and is of lasting significance for every Jew everywhere.

This timely reflection should make every one of us all the more deeply appreciative of the blessing of freedom [which enables us] to live a full life of Torah and mitzvot. In addition, it should heighten our awareness of the sacred obligation to do one's utmost to spread and strengthen Yiddishkeit, with enthusiasm and love--love of G-d, love of the Torah, and love of our Jewish brethren, which are inseparable.

By his total mesiras nefesh [self-sacrifice], even in the face of overwhelming odds, and by his ultimate triumph, with G-d's help, the Previous Rebbe has shown the way, and, in fact, trodden the path, so that every Jew can follow in his footsteps, with complete assurance that when he is firmly resolved to work for Torah and Yiddishkeit, he will overcome whatever difficulties there may be, and be successful, with G-d's help.

I hope and pray that the inspiration of the Previous Rebbe and the holiday of his Redemption will stimulate you and yours to redouble your efforts in the said direction in the days ahead, which will also widen the channels to receive G-d's blessings for you and yours, in all your needs, both material and spiritual. (From: Living with Moshiach-Chukat 5758, www.moshiach.net)

THE GREATEST GUARANTEED ASSURANCE (OF DIVINE ASSISTANCE) FOR ALL JEWISH PARENTS IN NEED OF SPECIAL HELP AND DELIVERANCE (1) FOR THEIR CHILDREN IS THROUGH THEIR SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO STUDY TORAH.

FOOTNOTE: 1. FROM ON HIGH. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, TAMMUZ 9)

"It was not myself alone that the Holy One, blessed be He, redeemed on the 12th of Tamuz, but also those who love the Torah and observe its commandments, and so, too, all those who bear the name Jew--for the heart of every person of Israel, irrespective of his particular level in the observance of the mitzvot, is perfectly bound with G-d and His Torah. . .

- The Previous Rebbe - Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson