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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON CHUKAS - 5774

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subject: Rabbi Hershel Schachter - Dealing with Contradictions

### **Rabbi Hershel Schachter** **Dealing with Contradictions**

For many years the twenty third Psalm was the most popular among American Christians. It conveys the impression that religion can have a very calming and soothing effect on one's life. Some ministers would "sell religion" to the masses by claiming that one who is devoutly religious will not have any contradictions in his life and will always be at peace. Rav Soloveitchik never liked this approach.

Shlomo Hamelech commented (Koheles 7:23) that he thought he could understand everything but soon enough he realized that there is much that is simply beyond him. According to tradition (Yalkut Shimoni, Melachim, #178) he was referring to the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. The details of this "chok" are simply contradictory. The main purpose of the ashes of the parah is to help one purify himself from tumas hameis, but at the same time it causes one who handles those ashes to become tameh. How can it be that the same thing can be metaher the tehorim and metameh the temeim?

The truth of the matter is that the world is full of contradictions. According to quantum physics a particle can indeed be in two places at once and can travel in an infinite number of directions at once. A cat may be thought of as dead and alive at the same time. It is absolutely impossible to explain quantum phenomena using traditional principles of physics. If someone says he can think about quantum physics without becoming dizzy, that only shows that he has not understood anything whatsoever about it (see "Quantum Physics, Jewish Law, and Kabbalah", by Aaron M. Schreiber, z"l, pp. 14-16.)

Whenever we recite a beracha, we always start off in second person ("Blessed are You...") and conclude in third person (e.g. - "Who has brought out bread from the ground.") We often have the sense that G-d is very close to us, and on other occasions feel as if he is very far away from us. Both impressions are simultaneously correct. We are expected to both love Hashem and fear Him at the same time. These two mitzvos are clearly interconnected. To the extent that we love Him, we come close to Him; and to the extent that we fear Him we withdraw from Him. When we recite Ashrei we continually switch back and forth between second and third person.

In Sefer Tehillim (chapter 8) Dovid Hamelech describes the duality of man's nature. On the one hand (in possukim 4 and 5) when we observe the vastness of the universe man's role seems so insignificant and petty that it leads one to wonder why G-d should think about man at all! And on the other hand in the very next possuk(6) Dovid Hamelech states, "You have created him (man) only slightly lower (in stature) than the angels, and crowned him with honor and glory, and gave him control over the entire creation."

The gemarah (Yoma 19b) derives from a passuk that when one is in the middle of reciting Krias Shema he ought to interrupt in order to show respect for someone else (mipnei kavod barhiyos.) but when one is in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei we consider man as insignificant and ignore him.

According to Professor Schreiber z"l (ibid p. 31) the Avnei Nezer deals with the possibility of tartei d'sasrei in Halacha in over thirty of his responsa. Rabbi Soloveitchik z"l adopted this notion of the Avnei Nezer and this was a recurrent theme in many of his shiurim (see Sefer Mipeninei Horav, Yoreh Deah, the section about Talmud Torah). If in the natural world there seem to be glaring contradictions, we ought not to be surprised if in halacha as well there will be contradictions.

Religion will not resolve any contradictions at all! If anything it will make us aware of more contradictions. Parah Adumah is not the only instance of the contradictory nature of Halacha. The parsha opens with the statement, "This is the chukah of the Torah." All of the Torah is one big chukah; the entire creation is one vastchukah. The midrashim on the opening passuk in Breishis make the comment that Hashem looked into the Torah and used it as a blueprint for creation. All of nature is interconnected with Torah.

Just as the study of physics guides us to maneuver with all the contradictions in the natural realm, so too the halachah guides us in how we should deal with contradictions in the spiritual realm.

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Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
Britain's Former **Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**  
Miriam, Moses' Friend

It is one of the great mysteries of the Torah. Arriving at Kadesh the people find themselves without water. They complain to Moses and Aaron. The two leaders go to the Tent of Meeting and there they are told by God to take the staff and speak to the rock, and water will emerge.

Moses' subsequent behaviour is extraordinary. He takes the staff. He and Aaron gather the people. Then Moses says: "Listen now, you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?" Then "Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff" (Num. 20: 10-11).

This was the behaviour that cost Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land. "Because you did not have enough faith in Me to sanctify me in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them" (ibid., v. 12).

The commentators disagree as to which aspect of Moses' behaviour was wrong: His anger? His act of striking the rock instead of speaking to it? The implication that it was he and Aaron, not God, who were bringing water from the rock? I argued in an earlier Covenant and Conversation that Moses neither sinned nor was punished. He merely acted as he had done almost forty years earlier when God told him to hit the rock (Ex. 17: 6), and thereby showed that though he was the right leader for the people who had been slaves in Egypt, he was not the leader for their children who were born in freedom and would conquer the land.

This time, though, I want to pose a different question. Why then? Why did Moses fail this particular test? After all, he had been in a similar situation twice before. After emerging from the Red Sea the people had travelled for three days without finding water. Then they found some but it was bitter and they complained. God showed Moses how to make the water sweet (Ex. 15: 22-26).

Arriving at Rephidim, again they found no water and complained. Despairing, Moses said to God, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me." God patiently instructs Moses as to what to do, and water flows from the rock. (Ex. 17: 1-7).

So Moses had successfully overcome two similar challenges in the past. Why on this third occasion did he lose emotional control? What was different?

The answer is stated explicitly in the text, but in so understated a way that we may fail to grasp its significance. Here it is:

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. (Num. 20: 1) Immediately after this we read: "Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron." A famous Talmudic passage<sup>[1]</sup> explains that it was in Miriam's merit that the Israelites had a well of water that miraculously accompanied them through their desert journeys. When Miriam died, the water ceased. This interpretation reads the sequence of events simply and supernaturally. Miriam died. Then there was no water. From this, you can infer that until then there was water because Miriam was alive. It was a miracle in her merit.

However there is another way of reading the passage, naturally and psychologically. The connection between Miriam's death and the events that followed had less to do with a miraculous well and more to do with Moses' response to the complaints of the Israelites.

This was the first trial he had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. Let us recall who Miriam was, for Moses. She was his elder sister, his oldest sibling. She had watched over his fate as he floated down the Nile in a pitched basket. She had the presence of mind, and the audacity, to speak to Pharaoh's daughter and arrange for the child to be nursed by an Israelite woman, that is, by Moses' own mother Yocheved. Without Miriam, Moses would have grown up not knowing who he was and to which people he belonged.

Miriam is a background presence throughout much of the narrative. We see her leading the women in song at the Red Sea, so it is clear that she, like Aaron, had a leadership role. We gain a sense of how much she meant to Moses when, in an obscure passage, she and Aaron "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite" (Num. 12: 1). We do not know exactly what the issue was, but we do know that Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron turns helplessly to Moses and asks him to intervene on her behalf, which he does with simple eloquence in the shortest

prayer on record – five Hebrew words – "Please, God, heal her now." Moses still cares deeply for her, despite her negative talk.

It is only in this week's parsha that we begin to get a full sense of her influence, and this only by implication. For the first time Moses faces a challenge without her, and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. This is one of the effects of bereavement, and those who have suffered it often say that the loss of a sibling is harder to bear than the loss of a parent. The loss of a parent is part of the natural order of life. The loss of a sibling can be less expected and more profoundly disorienting. And Miriam was no ordinary sibling. Moses owed her his entire relationship with his natural family, as well as his identity as one of the children of Israel.

It is a cliché to say that leadership is a lonely undertaking. But at the same time no leader can truly survive on his or her own. Yitro told Moses this many years earlier. Seeing him leading the people alone he said, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Ex. 18: 18). A leader needs three kinds of support: (1) allies who will fight alongside him, (2) troops or a team to whom he can delegate, and (3) a soul-mate or soul-mates to whom he can confide his doubts and fears, who will listen without an agenda other than being a supportive presence, and who will give him the courage, confidence and sheer resilience to carry on.

Having known through personal friendship many leaders in many fields, I can say with certainty that it is false to suppose that people in positions of high leadership have thick skins. Most of those I have known have not. They are often intensely vulnerable. They can suffer deeply from doubt and uncertainty. They know that a leader must often make a choice between two evils, and you never know in advance how a decision will work out. Leaders can be hurt by criticism and the betrayal of people they once considered friends. Because they are leaders, they rarely show any signs of vulnerability in public. They have to project a certainty and confidence they do not feel. But Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, the Harvard leadership experts, are right to say, "The hard truth is that it is not possible to experience the rewards and joy of leadership without experiencing the pain as well."<sup>[2]</sup>

Leaders need confidants, people who "will tell you what you do not want to hear and cannot hear from anyone else, people in whom you can confide without having your revelations spill back into the work arena." A confidant cares about you more than about the issues. He or she lifts you when you are low, and gently brings you back to reality when you are in danger of self-congratulation or complacency. Heifetz and Linsky write, "Almost every person we know with difficult experiences of leadership has relied on a confidant to help them get through."<sup>[3]</sup>

Maimonides in his Commentary to the Mishnah<sup>[4]</sup> counts this as one of the four kinds of friendship. He calls it the "friendship of trust" [chaver habitachon] and describes it as having someone in whom "you have absolute trust and with whom you are completely open and unguarded," hiding neither the good news nor the bad, knowing that the other person will neither take advantage of the confidences shared, nor share them with others.

A careful reading of this famous episode in the context of Moses' early life suggests that Miriam was Moses' "trusted friend," his confidante, the source of his emotional stability, and that when she was no longer there, he could no longer cope with crisis as he had done until then.

Those who are a source of strength to others need their own source of strength. The Torah is explicit in telling us how often for Moses that source of strength was God himself. But even Moses needed a human friend, and it seems, by implication, that this was Miriam. A leader in her own right she was also one of her brother's sources of strength.

Even the greatest cannot lead alone.

[1] Taanit 9a.

[2] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, 227.

[3] Ibid., 200.

[4] Maimonides, Commentary to Mishnah Avot 1: 6.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
*Christianity And Israel*

It is well known, though hardly discussed in public, that the creation and existence of the State of Israel has created serious theological problems for sections of the Jewish community. But the creation and existence of the State of Israel has created even greater theological and emotional problems for much of the Christian world and many different branches of the overall Christian religion.

The recent visit by Pope Francis to Israel, at one and the same time soothed relationships with the Jewish world and yet exacerbated the almost irreconcilable issues that separate Judaism from Christianity. The main problem that the State of Israel poses to Christian thought and tradition is that somehow it was never to have happened.

A large part of Christian thought and tradition condemned the Jews to eternal exile and to an always subservient role regarding its relationship with the Church and Christian civilization generally. That the Jews should somehow possess an independent state of their own – not only that but in the Holy Land itself – was an event that Christian doctrine deemed to be enormously improbable if not impossible.

For many decades the Church of Rome did not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel and found it difficult to reconcile itself to Jewish domination and control (no matter how benign and fair) of the Christian holy places in the Land of Israel. This attitude is slowly changing and great strides towards reconciliation and cooperation between the Vatican and the Jewish state have been made over the past two decades. This is certainly to be seen as a positive development after so many centuries of hatred and violence sponsored by the Church against a hapless Jewish people.

The situation with the mainstream Protestant denominations is murkier. The recent vote of the Presbyterian American church encouraging divestment of investments in companies that provide Israel with machinery and building supplies and technologically advanced capabilities is an example of the latent anti-Jewish theology and attitude that has dominated much of the Protestant church over the past centuries.

As the Anglican and Presbyterian churches have become the cutting edge of the new culture and permissiveness of Western society – supporting gay marriage, for instance, and thereby reversing the tenets of its own Bible – they have adopted the mantra of the Left in becoming openly anti-Israel. The existence of the State of Israel and whether it should be supported or damned is a deeply divisive one within the Protestant movements.

The extremely “progressive” leadership of certain Protestant denominations is not necessarily representative of the mass body of church members and believers. Nevertheless, it is deeply disturbing that the Presbyterian Church can take upon itself the responsibility of telling the Jewish people, who are embroiled in a life and death struggle with a Moslem enemy sworn to its destruction, that they are not entitled to build and protect themselves in their

own homeland. Speaking out of both sides of their mouth at once, the Presbyterian Church supports the right of the State of Israel to exist but just does not want it to have the material tools necessary to guarantee that existence.

There is a significant section of Protestant denominations that wholeheartedly support the State of Israel and who have donated very large sums of money to Jewish charitable and educational organizations operating in the State of Israel. Since many of these denominations also sponsor widespread missionary and proselytizing activities, there has been a determined campaign mounted here in Israel to refuse the acceptance of these monies, no matter how worthy the causes they apparently support. There is a great split in the observant Jewish society on this issue. There is rabbinic opinion on both sides of the question and there is no doubt that this flood of Christian money given to Israeli institutions has had beneficial educational and social results. Nevertheless, lurking behind all of it is the increased missionary activity of many Christian denominations here in Israel. These activities are aimed at Jews, mainly very poor new immigrant families. The laws against Christian missionaries and their activities in Israel are not enforced because of diplomatic reasons and international consequences. So the question remains as to the true intent of the Christian supporters of the State of Israel.

In a world filled with enemies and with those who wish us no good, it would be cavalier and almost foolish to cast away the hand of friendship which these Christian denominations have extended to the State of Israel and the Jewish people. How to square this circle and arrive at a wise decision remains a troubling issue for us. Thousands of years of enmity are not easily forgotten but in the world that we inhabit, friends are hard to come by. Wiser and greater minds than mine will decide what is a reasonable policy and solution to these issues.

Shabat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
*Chukat*

Moshe is finally done in by the requests of the Jewish people in the desert – this time again for their water supply. In his exasperation about their constant litany of complaints and grumblings, he transgresses over God’s commandment to speak to the rock and instead he strikes the rock with his staff. His punishment for this act is swift and dramatic. He will not step into the Land of Israel but only be able to glimpse it from afar.

There are many questions and difficulties raised regarding the narrative of this incident in the Torah. Firstly, complaints about the lack of water are certainly legitimate complaints. Human beings cannot survive without water and now that the miraculous well of Miriam disappeared with her passing, the pressing need for a replacement water supply was obvious.

So, why does Moshe become so angry with them and describe them as a rebellious mob? And another perhaps greater and more difficult question is why this sin is the one that seals Moshe’s fate? Does the punishment really seem to be commensurate with the crime? All of the commentators to Torah over the ages have dealt with these two questions and have advanced a wide variety of insights and explanations regarding the issues raised. It is apparent that the Torah somehow wished these issues to be further explored and studied and therefore it left its own description of the matter somewhat vague and mysterious – hiding in the narrative more than it was willing to reveal. Maimonides and other scholars throughout the ages see the events of this week’s parsha as the concluding part of a continuing and cumulative pattern

of behavior, both on the part of the people of Israel in the desert and of Moshe as well. Moshe realizes, as do the people, that they require water to sustain them. But this request and the manner that it is presented to Moshe is part of their long-running, nagging behavior pattern in the desert.

For the Jewish people, there is still a vestige of resentment against God for redeeming them from Egypt. There they had water in abundance, and it was natural not miraculous water. Miraculous water binds them to a commitment to God and His Torah – a commitment that a portion of the people is always attempting to wriggle out from.

With their seemingly reasonable request for water, Moshe senses all of this background music. They really want to opt out of the entire mission of Sinai, which results in Moshe's extreme display of displeasure. And Moshe's anger again undoes him. There is an entire literature of rabbinic study about the moments and causes of Moshe's anger that appear throughout the Torah. For Moshe, the greatest of all human beings, it is agreed that this is his one failing. And, therefore, Moshe unwittingly becomes the model and example of the dangers involved in falling into the pit of emotional anger. The incidents of his anger – past and present - were now cumulatively judged by Heaven and the punishment is not for this one incident alone. Anger is a character trait to be avoided at almost all cost. Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Chukat**  
**For the week ending 28 June 2014 / 30 Sivan 5774**  
**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com**

#### Insights

#### *Hollywood Loves the Bible*

***“And someone will slaughter it (the red heifer) in his presence...” (19:3)***

Few things are less epic than a Biblical Epic.

If you cast a glance over the history of Hollywood, the Bible features high on its list of subject matter. Without fail those movies manage to mangle the facts to suit the increasingly crass tastes of the viewing public. But even if they were scrupulously faithful to the Torah and its authentic rabbinic exposition, there would still be a major problem.

I well remember one of the great teachers in Ohr Somayach confiding to me that because of his upbringing in America (albeit in a religious home) whenever he thought of Moshe Rabbeinu he had to work hard to push a picture of Charlton Heston out of his mind.

Nowadays, the present generation is more likely to have to deal with a picture of Moshe Rabbeinu as a stylized cartoon figure, or Noah as raging environmentalist.

Truth be known, the physical realities of the Chumash are far beyond our imagination.

“And someone will slaughter it (the red heifer) in his presence...”

The Aramaic translation of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel adds to the translation of this verse: “And he will examine it for the eighteen indications that render it a treif (ritually unfit).”

The Talmud (Chullin 19) states that it's impossible to open the carcass and examine the red heifer since it has to be incinerated whole. From this our Sages derive a general principle that since the majority of animals are not treif, we may rely on this and not check them at all. How then can the Targum Yonatan say that the animal should be checked to see if it is a treif by cutting it open?

Rabbi Michael Cohen answers that the Targum Yonatan is speaking in a limited and specific case: the red heifer that was used in the Jewish People's journey across the wilderness.

One of the wonders of that journey was the Pillar of Cloud. The light that radiated from the Pillar of Cloud was like an X-ray (but without its health hazards). By its light it was possible to examine from the outside the darkest places in a house or a tent – or the inside of an animal.

With the disappearance of the Pillar of Cloud it became impossible to check the innards of the animal from the outside, and, indeed, subsequently they relied on the principle of the majority.

The miraculous light of the Pillar of Cloud is just one example of the supernatural world in which the Jewish People lived during their travels in the desert. With their entry into the Land of Israel they left an existence where reality was much stranger than fantasy, a world more unbelievable than even the most sophisticated Hollywood special effects could conjure. Based on Mayana Shel Torah, “Heard by Rabbi Alexander Zushia Friedman from his teacher, Rabbi Michael Cohen;” Tosefot Shabbat: “And when it was for light” in the name of a beraita of the Malechet HaMishkan

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#### **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum** **Parshas Chukas**

#### ***This is the chok, statute/decre... take to you - red heifer. (19:2)***

Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, is from its very beginning, a paradox. It is used to purify one who has become spiritually defiled by coming in contact with a human corpse. This is done by burning the cow and mixing its ashes with pure water, with the mixture then being sprinkled on the defiled person. What is the meaning of tumah, impurity, and how is it purified by means of sprinkling water? The paradox goes deeper. The Kohen who burnt the Parah Adumah and sprinkled the water on the defiled person - himself becomes tamei, impure, while the subject of his sprinkling becomes tahor, pure. Chazal teach: Zos chukas, "This is the chok." This is what is meant by the pasuk (Iyov 14:4), Mi yitein tahor mitamei; lo Echad, "Who can bring purity from impure? Not One. Like Jews from non-Jews, the next world from this world, who did so? Who commanded, also decreed? Was it not the Single One of the Universe?

"Those who are involved in preparing the Parah Adumah become impure, while the Parah itself purifies! (Is this not paradoxical?) The Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'I set My statute; I decreed My decree; there is no permission to transgress it.'"

Having quoted this Midrash, we are in a deeper quandary as to its meaning. Originally, we had no clue as to the workings of tumah and taharah. Now we see that we know even less. Whatever we thought might make sense is now the opposite.

The Sfas Emes explains that, indeed, it is illogical for purity to be derived from an impure substance. Purity should beget purity; impurity should generate impurity. That is the natural order; that is the logical understanding of how things are supposed to work, but tumah and taharah are not part of the natural order of the world. They are spiritual in nature, decreed by G-d. Thus, the purification process of the Parah Adumah cannot be analyzed by applying human logic. The human mind cannot comprehend the Divine. When one realizes this, when he senses this paradox, when he begins to question: Mi yitein tahir mitamei, "Who can bring pure from impure?" - he approaches the answer - Hashem. He begins to acknowledge and becomes acutely aware of the power that brings purity to the world. Chazal continue with a pasuk in Sefer Tehillim 12:7, Imros Hashem amarus tehoros, "The words of Hashem are pure words." The taharah, purification, which is engendered by the Parah Adumah is not due to some purifying

factor, hocus pocus that is done by sprinkling the water/ash on the defiled person. It is by virtue of connecting to the pure words of the Torah and fulfilling Hashem's decree - despite not understanding it - that generates purity. In other words, it is specifically the paradoxical essence of tumah/taharah/Parah Adumah that creates the purity.

When we are overwhelmed with questions, when doubt consumes our mind, when nothing seems to make sense - yet, we continue to believe, accept and do: this is taharah. By accepting and connecting with Hashem's words, we elevate and purify ourselves.

When we confront two conflicting realities, we are able to reconcile one with the other only with the realization that everything originates with Hashem's decree.

The Sfas Emes explains two other wonders of Creation. We are aware that the world was established on Asarah Maamaros, Ten Statements, which emanated from Hashem. These statements were the force behind the Creation of the world, and they continue to uphold and maintain Creation to this very day. In other words, the world continues to exist only by virtue of Hashem's Will. Now, if the world continues to exist only through Hashem's continued desire to create, how can any force that opposes Hashem's Will exist?

Let us face it, from man's early youth he is in a constant battle between good and bad. The yetzer hora does everything to seduce man to sin, to violate and rebel against the very force which upholds creation. This is truly a wonder - a paradox! The yetzer hora persuades us to fight against the powers of good, to sin against Hashem, without Whom there is no world, there is no "us"! This, says Sfaz Emes, is the meaning of the Midrash's question, *Mi gazar kein*, "Who decreed so?"

Another wonder is manifest from the flipside of the yetzer hora/yetzer tov battle of wills. Despite the evil inclination's incredible ability to entice us to sin, we have the power within us to prevail over and conquer it, to draw spirituality into a world of darkness, a world filled with hedonism, a world in which ethics are archaic and morality is as bankrupt as the economy. How do we do it? What gives us the ability to prevail? This is the second question presented by the Midrash. *Mi tzivah kein*, "Who commanded so?"

The answer to these questions is forced on us, because there is no logical answer. Thus, it must be noted as above. We come to the conclusion that only Hashem could command these conflicting realities.

The Parah Adumah is called a *chukah*, which is also related to the word *chakikah*, etching, engraving. Hashem's Will is engraved into the physical matter of Creation that seems to oppose it. When we recognize that everything originates from Hashem, and that everything continues to exist only because this is His Divine Will, we return Creation to its Creator. This is how *tamei* brings about *tahor* - by returning the universe to its pure, spiritual source. The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, wonders why a woman who gives birth becomes *tamei*. Hashem has the "key," the power that opens the womb which releases the child. Hashem's pure hands release the child from an impure place. The mother is *tamei*; the child is *tahor*. It has all been orchestrated by Hashem, Who is the essence of purity. Is this not paradoxical? Horav Gedalyah Schorr, zl, explains that the child's purity is an indication that it comes from Hashem and has no real connection to its impure source. The mere fact that a pure child is derived from an impure place demonstrates the Hashem factor in this creation. Likewise, with the Parah Adumah: the one who touches the ash becomes impure, while the one upon whom it is sprinkled becomes pure. This teaches us that purity really comes from Hashem.

### ***This is the chok/statute/decreed of the Torah. (19:8)***

The term *chok* is used to describe a *mitzvah* which, for all intents and purposes, seems inexplicable. While Hashem certainly has a rationale for this *mitzvah*, our little finite minds have difficulty understanding that which is infinite. We are instructed to serve Hashem out of love and awe - not because it makes sense, it seems the right thing to do, or we understand it. We serve Hashem because He is the Almighty, and, on Har Sinai we

accepted to be His People, with a resounding declaration of *Naase v'Nishma*, "We will do and we will listen," thereby affirming our commitment to Hashem being based on doing - not on listening and understanding. The *chok* then becomes the key to all observances. We serve because He is King. He makes decrees, and we accept them. There is no rhyme or reason - just obedience. This is Judaism.

The concept of *chok* goes beyond the scope of *mitzvos*. There are *chukim* in life, episodes which, at the time, do not make sense: illnesses; financial challenges; and such, which are beyond our ability to understand and accept. These episodes of inexplicability should be treated the same way we perform *mitzvos* which are *chukim*. They are Hashem's decree. He owes us no explanation. We take it as it comes, and smile.

This is the *yesod*, foundation, of Parah Adumah. Hashem seems to be conveying to us the following message: "Rabbosai - you are not going to understand all of My ways. Parah Adumah appears to you as a senseless, contradictory *mitzvah*. This is the way I want it to be, and this is what I want you to follow."

Perusing our national history, our people have suffered many tragic and grievous events. These experiences run counter to our vision and understanding of a loving and kind G-d. How could He allow these terrible things to happen? Sadly, there are some who employ their inability to understand as a vehicle for reneging their commitment, to rebel and deny Hashem. Apparently, their ancestors who experienced the tragedies, who were the victims, did not seem to think so. They maintained their belief in Hashem, and, with pride and dignity, sacrificed their lives to glorify His Name. They are the true survivors. Their descendants, who arrogantly deny Hashem and impugn the integrity of their ancestors, are the actual victims. The parents live on, while the children have chosen to exchange eternal life for temporary gratification.

In his commentary to the Haggadah, Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, explains the verse *Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu*, "Blessed is the Makom (Hashem), blessed is He," which precedes the discussion of the four sons. We understand *Makom* as referring to Hashem, since *makom* means "place"; Hashem is the *Mekom* *Shel Olam*, the "place" of the world. He embodies the entire world. Rav Weinberger notes that this term as reference to Hashem is not found anywhere in Torah *She'B'ksav*, Written Law. The first time Hashem is alluded to by the word *Makom* is in Bereishis 22:4, with regard to the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak, wherein the Torah writes *Va'yaar es haMakom meirachok*, "He (Avraham Avinu) saw the place from afar." While we usually translate the place as *ha'Makom*, the place where Avraham was instructed to slaughter Yitzchak Avinu, the Zohar *HaKadosh* contends that *Makom* refers to Hashem. Thus, the *pasuk* is informing us that Avraham sensed that Hashem was distant from him. Specifically at this moment of ultimate sacrifice, when he needed Hashem's closeness more than ever - He appeared distant and unapproachable.

The *Chidushei HaRim* explains this anomaly. After all, this is when Avraham required and deserved Hashem's support. He was doing exactly what he was instructed to do. Why not grant him support? Apparently, Hashem was enabling Avraham to magnify the challenge of the *Akeidah*, thereby allowing him to qualify for an exponentially greater reward. When Avraham accepted the *nisayon*, challenge, of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, it was his tenth test. Although he had successfully passed the previous nine, taking the tenth test was equivalent to saying - "I am negating the first nine. If I pass this one, I receive the reward for all ten. If I fail, I fail all ten." This was an incredibly difficult step, but our Patriarch was prepared to demonstrate his total conviction.

There were so many questions that coursed through his mind. Everything about this test ran counter to what he had been led to believe. How could Hashem promise him a glorious nation if He was demanding that he sacrifice his only son? The Satan executed his role in attempting to dissuade Avraham from following through. Indeed, everything was working against his success. Nonetheless, our Patriarch moved forward. It was at this time that he needed

Hashem so much; one little bit of encouragement would have gone so far. Instead, Hashem distanced Himself, magnifying the difficult nature of the test. Hashem did this to allow for a potentially greater reward.

Rav Weinberger notes that we employ the term HaMakom twice in our vernacular. When we visit a shivah house, where mourners are grieving the loss of a loved one, we say HaMakom yinacheim eschem, "The Makom/Hashem should comfort you." In light of the Chidushei HaRim's explanation of the Zohar HaKadosh, we now have a poignant new interpretation of these words. Someone who has just lost a close relative is going through a grief process that takes its toll on his ability to think rationally. He feels that G-d has distanced Himself from him. At a moment like this, we say to him: "HaMakom, the Almighty, Whom you feel has distanced Himself from you, will once again be close with you. If you believe that Hashem really cares about you and that what has occurred is part of His Divine Plan, then you will be reunited with Him."

Another instance when this word is used is in the prayer of Acheinu kol Bais Yisrael, "Our brethren, all of the House of Yisrael, who are in strife, trouble, the Makom should take pity on them and remove them from their troubled circumstances." Once again, this is an instance when a person begins to question Hashem's closeness to him. We pray that Hashem will provide him the opportunity to be in His close proximity once again.

There are situations in life when our belief is challenged. It is specifically at these times that we must be resolute in our conviction and make every attempt to transcend the obstacles, so that we come closer to Hashem. Indeed, when He appears far away, it is specifically at this time that we can get much closer - if we only persevere. Patience and conviction are the answers. I came across the following story in Rabbi Hillel Goldberg's *The Unexpected Road*. It is a story of faith and trust which was challenged a number of times, and, only after generations, did the light finally appear. The war had ended, and a father and his young son were reunited in Buchenwald's Barracks 66. It was a miracle that they had both survived. A few days later, they were both taken to France.

It was a miracle that the young boy had survived the murder camps, but he was terribly weak. The torture and starvation had taken their toll on his young body. He was now near death. The doctors said that his only hope for survival was a blood transfusion. Blood was at a premium. The war had just ended, and there were wounded and sick, broken people everywhere. Where would this boy's father find enough blood to allow his son to live? He tried everywhere - to no avail. Finally, he made the ultimate decision: he was going to give his son his own blood. If only one of them would live, let it be his son.

So it was performed. The father lay down next to his son. The blood transfusion began with the father's blood flowing into his son's arm. The son was revived; his life was before him; a new dawn had risen. The father, however, died, lying there next to his son. The young boy grew into a man, nurtured by his father's blood. He had a family - four children. The new father did not live to see his children grow up and marry, however, because, at the young age of forty-three, he returned his neshamah, soul, to his Creator.

Four young orphans. It was not supposed to be this way. When the grandfather gave up his blood so that his son should live - he was supposed to live to a ripe, old age. So many questions. No one had answers, but one does not question Hashem. Eventually, we will be privy to the answers - in due time. The four orphans grew up, married, and had large families, which grew profusely. Today, there are grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren, all leading Torah lives, studying Torah, performing mitzvos, all because a father gave his blood to his son. We now have the answers. This is what HaMakom, Hashem, wants. He may seem distant, but actually, He is much closer than we think.

***Because you did not believe Me, to sanctify Me, in the eyes of Bnei Yisrael, therefore you will not bring the Congregation to the Land that I have given them. (20:12)***

The error of mei merivah, waters of strife, cost Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen the opportunity to enter Eretz Yisrael. The various commentators are troubled with coming to grips with this definitive error. How did Moshe make such a mistake? Hashem instructed him to speak to the rock - not hit it. Rashi explains that had Moshe spoken to the stone, he would have magnified the miracle of water flowing from a stone. While this may be true, it does not explain what Moshe, Hashem's eved neeman, true servant - who would never do anything on his own - did. Second, if Hashem had wanted Moshe to speak to the stone, why did He instruct Moshe to "take the staff" in his hand? Third, in Sefer Devarim 3:25, Moshe actually blames the nation for his inability to enter the Land, saying that "Hashem became angry with me because of you." Is this true? The pasuk in Parashas Chukas clearly lays the blame at Moshe's doorstep.

Let us first analyze Rashi's understanding of the episode. In an attempt to explain Rashi, Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita, asks how the entire debacle transpired in the sequence that is implied by Rashi's explanation of the circumstances. First, why did Moshe hit the rock? Second, why did he hit the rock twice? Third, why is the rock referred to as hasela, "the" rock, as if it were a specific rock? Fourth, why did Moshe refer to the people as morim, rebellious? Were they demanding so much? After all, asking for water is not what one would consider to be overly demanding. Last, why did Moshe ask the people, "Shall I bring forth water from this rock?" Was there another rock in the picture? Hashem commanded him to speak with this rock.

Based upon the above questions, Rav Friedman presents his understanding of Rashi in the following manner: It all started with Hashem instructing Moshe to speak to the rock. The reason hasela, referring to a specific stone, is used is that Hashem wanted Moshe to speak to the original stone which had served as Be'irah shel Miriam, the Well of Miriam. When Miriam died, the Well reverted back to its original function as a stone. Therefore, Moshe and Aharon had difficulty locating that stone.

When Moshe and Aharon attempted to speak to the stone, the people asked, "Why bother with that specific stone? Speak to any stone." Moshe looked at them incredulously and said, "Morim - do you not realize that it is not any stone to which we can speak?" During this dialogue Moshe and Aharon saw a stone which resembled the one for which they had been searching. They spoke to it, but, since it was the wrong stone, it produced no water. Then, Moshe figured that, as he had once hit a stone, he would make a similar attempt now. He hit the stone, and it worked, and out came a few drops of water. Then Moshe hit the stone again. This time, the water came flowing out.

According to Rashi's pshat, explanation, Moshe and Aharon should not be responsible for what happened. It was all an accident, because they had been unaware that they were dealing with the wrong stone. The Mizrachi senses this question and replies, echad shogeg v'echad meizid b'chillul Hashem, "when it involves a desecration of Hashem's Name, there is no difference if one does so on purpose or inadvertently." At the end of the day, a chillul Hashem was committed. This cannot be ignored.

Rav Friedman cites a novel exposition from the Megaleh Amukos that illuminates the mei merivah incident in a new light. Moshe desired to enter Eretz Yisrael so that he could build the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem did not acquiesce to Moshe's request. The reason is based on a statement made by Chazal in the Talmud Sotah 9a, that what was constructed by both Moshe and David Hamelech was never destroyed by our nation's enemies. When the enemies destroyed the first Bais Hamikdash, the original Mishkan was concealed.

Accordingly, had Moshe entered Eretz Yisrael and built the Bais Hamikdash, Hashem, Who had taken out His wrath on the wood and mortar of the Bais Hamikdash structure, would have to chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid, do so to the Jewish People. The Ohr Hachaim HaKadosh asks, indeed, how could

Moshe have been allowed to succeed in speaking to the rock? Had he been successful, it would have meant an end to the Jewish People, because then someone had to feel Hashem's wrath, and it would not have been the physical structure of the Temple. He explains that had Moshe spoken to the stone, he would have engendered such a powerful Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of Hashem's Name, that Klal Yisrael would have achieved spiritual perfection, thus allowing for Moshe to enter the Land and build the Temple edifice. There would no longer ever be a need to punish the people. Thus, because they did not speak to the stone, they did not enter the Land, because it would have been detrimental to the nation.

Moshe and Aharon were worthy of the miracle. Most of the nation was also worthy. There were, however, the morim who insisted on Moshe hitting the stone, that, by their very words, indicated a spiritual deficiency on the highest levels. We now understand why Hashem had Moshe take the stick, when, in fact, He wanted him to speak to the stone. That was the plan: speak to the stone; create an incredible Kiddush Hashem; go into Eretz Yisrael and build the Bais Hamikdash. The people are worthy of maintaining themselves. The morim got involved. They could not wait for Moshe to speak to the rock. As a result, he applied the stick. Hashem wanted Moshe to be prepared for both contingencies: if the people were all worthy, he could speak; if they were not, he would have to hit the stone, so that he could not end up building the Bais Hamikdash. Thus, by hitting the stone, Moshe Rabbeinu actually saved Klal Yisrael.

We now address the reason that Moshe hit the rock twice. Rav Friedman quotes the well-known commentaries of Ramban and Sforno who maintain that Hashem follows through with a miracle after His servant has first set the tone with a physical action. This act is similar to Moshe throwing the staff to the ground before it became a serpent, raising up the stick before hitting the rock. Hashem wants mortal participation. Having established that Moshe's hitting the rock spared the destruction of the Jewish People during the churban Bais Hamikdash, destruction of the Temple, we must also take into consideration that there were two Temples. This required two actions on the part of Moshe. Thus, we now understand why he hit the rock twice.

***V'limadetem osam es b'neichem l'dabeir bam.***

***And you shall teach it to your sons to speak in them.***

By equating limud haTorah, the study of Torah, with the imperative of l'dabeir bam, "to speak in them," Chazal derive that as soon as the child is able to speak, his father should teach him to say Torah tzivah lanu Moshe. Horav Yechezkel Sarne, zl, observes that this is not a component of limud haTorah, for a child who is just beginning to speak has neither the cognitive skill nor the intellectual ability to study Torah. This is a new concept of maschil diburo b'lashon hakodesh b'divrei Torah, a child's first organized words should be in the Holy Tongue by articulating words of Torah. A young child is hardly able to put together words, let alone sentences. It is a process which is developed over time. Should it not be developed through the verbalization of divrei Torah? These should be his first words, his first concepts. This is what Chazal mean when they interpret l'dabeir bam, "to speak in them," v'lo b'davarim biteilim, "and not in speaking meaningless words." This admonition is not due to bitul Torah, wasting time from Torah study. It is a unique enjoinder that a Jewish child develop his speaking abilities by saying words of Torah b'lashon HaKodesh. What better way to teach a child what is important, and what his parent's values are?

*In loving memory of my aunt Yolanda bas Baruch A"H Dr. Jacob Massuda*

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha Parshas Chukas**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

### ***Crime and Punishment***

Crime and Punishment. In a corporeal world, the correlation of a jail sentence to a crime does not symbolize a cogent philosophical message. Of course, it may tell us that crime does not pay. Unfortunately, that comprehensive message does not differentiate between one who steals to sustain his family, and the greedy scam-artist who bilks widows out of their life's savings. The two felons may sit only a few cells apart from each other, with an arsonist or barroom brawler separating them, but the crimes that sent them to their dismal abodes are so very different in intent.

Divine justice does better. Every aveirah generates a punishment specifically designed to send a distinct Heavenly message to the afflicted. Of course, it may take an otherwise perspicacious mind to correlate what life is handing to him and how it relates to his mortal misdeeds. We do not always relate events that occur to the acts we have perpetrated. Sometimes it is too much for us to bear, and sometimes our ideas may lead us to wrongful conclusions, harming both our psyche and morale.

But when the Torah teaches us about crime and punishment we are more fortunate. The lessons of our past are now devoid of the guilt-ridden, depressive response we may have currently; rather they are moral springboard from which to bound to greater heights. And thus, when the Torah tells us of a clear crime and an immediate response, we have to transpose the relationship between the two to attain another moral lesson. The people spoke against G-d and Moshe - "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to die in this wilderness, for there is no food and no water, and our soul is disgusted with the insubstantial food [Manna]?" G-d sent the fiery serpents against the people and they bit the people. A large multitude of Israel died. The people came to Moshe and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against Hashem and against you! Pray to Hashem that He remove from us the serpent" (Numbers,21:5-7). The people complained about their fare, and were punished with snakes. If Divine retribution is corollary to the crime, how do snakes correspond to kvetching?

Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma. "Hashem said as it were - let the serpent which was punished for slanderous statements come and exact punishment from those who utter slander; Let the serpent to which all kinds of food have one taste [that of earth; cf (Gen:3:14) and (Yoma: 75a)] come and exact punishment from these ingrates to whom one thing (the manna) had the taste of many different dainties.

What was the slander of the snake? Didn't he just convince Chava to take a bite of the fruit? What connection is there with the Manna? The old Jewish yarn has a Bubby (grandmother) taking her grandchild, little Irving, to the beach toward the end of spring. There is hardly anyone around as the child, dressed in a spring suit, plays innocently on the shore. Suddenly a wave breaks and sweeps him into the vast ocean. The grandmother, who cannot swim, yells toward the deserted beach, "Someone! Please save my Irving! Please! Anybody!"

Out of nowhere, a man charges forward, dives into the ocean and swims valiantly toward the helpless child. Moments later he is holding the gasping child aloft, while his weeping grandmother dashes toward them. She whisks the child from the man, and looks over the child making sure he is still in one piece.

Then she turns to the man, nods her head slightly and parts her otherwise pursed lips. "He was wearing a hat."

In Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden, life was blissful. Adam and Chava had all they could have wanted, except for one type of fruit -- The Eitz Hada'as, The Fruit of Knowledge. It was the snake that taught his human cohort, the concept of total self-indulgence, rendering them powerless to say, "No!" The desert dwellers did not fare much differently. Their celestial fare adapted to almost any flavor in the world. Water flowed freely from the rock. But they were not content. They wanted more. The unfulfilled flavors that the Manna refused to replicate were on their minds. They felt that Manna was only a mere simulacrum of the luscious cuisine that they desired. Their

craving for everything, manifested itself in punishment through the animal that has his most favored fare, anytime anywhere -- the snake. To a snake, all dust is desirous!

When the Jewish nation were both led and fed, through a hostile environment, yet complained that their miraculous bread is insubstantial, then the only correlation, powerful enough to make them mend their thoughtless ways was the bite of the very being who gains no enjoyment from what he bites, while having all he desires.

Our goal in life is to revel in the blessing, rejoice in all the good that we have, despite the shortcomings of a limited world, and the trivial amenities we may lack. One must learn to appreciate his head, even if he is missing his hat.

*Good Shabbos*

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Chukas**

#### ***Two Insights: Miriam Did Not Get Eulogized and Aaron Did Not Get Complaints***

"...And Miriam died there and she was buried there. And there was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together upon Moshe and upon Aaron. The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up saying..." [Bamidbar 20:1-3] The incident of Mei Meriva follows the death of Miriam. The supply of water from the Well, which had been traveling with the Jews and flowing miraculously all these years, ceased to flow. Rashi, quoting the Gemara in Taanis 9a, cites this as proof that during the entire 40 years the Jews spent in the wilderness, the Well was present and flowing for the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam.

The Kli Yakar writes that the Well stopped flowing following Miriam's passing, as a punishment for the people not properly eulogizing Miriam at the time of her death. Following the death of Aharon and Moshe, the Children of Israel cried. Such a statement does not appear following Miriam's passing. The Torah says that she died and she was buried but there is no mention of any eulogy or mourning. The Kli Yakar states that Miriam died without anyone so much as missing her and it was for this reason that the supply of water was taken away from them. They did not appreciate who Miriam was and the Almighty therefore said "I will show you who Miriam was!" The reason for the departure of the Well was in order that they retroactively recognize that only in her merit did they have water in the wilderness for the past 40 years.

It is strange, perhaps, to hypothesize that the Children of Israel did not know that the Well existed in Miriam's merit. But if they did know, then we are left to deal with the problem -- why did they NOT demonstrate gratitude and pay her the proper respect at the time of her passing?

This is a fundamental lesson of life -- people can become accustomed to even the greatest of miracles! The first time they received water from the rock, they were amazed. But when something continues for forty years, day after day, people begin to take it for granted. That is what happened. They took Miriam for granted and they took the miracle for granted.

Many times, I have walked out of a funeral with the emotion "I did not fully appreciate this person while he was still alive." This is exactly what happened with Miriam. The Well was in her merit. But she died and it was "another day at the office" for the rest of the nation. Her righteousness and merit had been taken for granted. The Torah is telling us this is not right.

When such a person dies, it is incumbent -- at least retroactively -- to try to understand who she was and to give her the tribute she deserved. There is another fascinating lesson to be derived from these pesukim. "There was no water for the assembly, and they gathered together upon Moshe and upon Aaron. The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up..." Is this not noteworthy? They gathered together against both Moshe and Aaron, but they only quarreled with Moshe. What happened to Aaron?

One of the disciples of the Ari z"l, the Baal Bris Avraham, says an interesting insight. He interprets the statement "and they gathered upon Moshe and upon Aharon" to be referring to the fact that the nation came to be 'Menachem Avel' [console the mourners] the two brothers on the loss of their sister (Miriam). Picture this: the two leaders of Israel were sitting Shiva and people came to console them regarding the loss of their sister. What do they say? "We have no water to drink!"

Why then, did they only complain to Moshe? The Baal Bris Avraham says that Aaron was so beloved amongst the nation that people could not have complaints against him. As we also learn in this week's parsha, Aaron was the quintessential lover of peace and pursuer of peace. He patched together people's marriages. He made peace between feuding neighbors and feuding business partners. He was beloved to everyone. That is why we are taught he was mourned by "ALL the House of Israel" [Bamidbar 20:29], which the Torah does not even say by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even though they had complaints, they were not going to start up with Aaron. When you love someone, you do not start up with him. This is not to say that Moshe was not a man of peace, but there are two distinct personality traits -- the attribute of Truth (Emes) and the attribute of Peace (Shalom). In reality, they are contradictory attributes. When a person emphasizes Emes, he lets the chips fall where they may and Shalom sometimes falls by the way side. When a person emphasizes Shalom, he must sometimes bend the truth, and Emes might fall by the way side.

It is very hard for these two character traits to exist in their full glory in the same person. Moshe was the Teacher of Israel. He was the one who gave the Torah. Torah must represent Truth. 'This' is what the law is! Aaron did not have that position. He was the Kohen Gadol. His preeminent attribute was more Shalom [Peace] than it was Emes [Truth]. This is not to say that Aaron did not also represent Emes and it is not to say that Moshe Rabbeinu did not represent Shalom, but in terms of their prime attributes, they were different. Aaron, as the man of Shalom in the Jewish nation, was more beloved and consequently, even though people were upset because they did not have water -- to such an extent that they brought it up in the middle of "Shiva" -- nevertheless, they did not complain to Aaron. They did complain to Moshe. When we love someone, we do not complain to him.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Rabbi-Shmuel-Rabinowitz>

***Parshat Chukat: Who can write the Torah***  
**By Shmuel Rabinowitz**  
**June 26, 2014 Thursday 28 Sivan 5774**

*Behind it are deep and elusive ideas relating to the mitzvot that seem logical to you, and even more so in regard to the ones that do not.*

The Torah's 613 mitzvot include many commandments that the human mind and morality logically require. For example, "Thou shall not kill" and "Thou shall not steal" are necessary for the basic existence of any human society.



However, there are certain mitzvot whose reasons are unclear, and seemingly attainable. The classic example for this sort of mitzva is the one with which this week's parsha – Chukat – opens: Para Aduma (Red Heifer).

The mitzva deals with the purification process of a man who became impure by touching or getting close to a dead body. This person is defined as tameh, impure, but the meaning of this impurity does not relate to day-to-day life, rather impacting things relating to the issue of purity, such as entering the Temple and eating from the korbanot.

By the way, this impurity is the reason why Jewish leaders and the Chief Rabbinate have forbidden entrance to the Temple Mount. This is because the Mount is a sacred site upon which the Temple sat, and we are all defined today as impure – due to being in places where there are dead bodies or touching impurities from dead bodies, with no contemporary ability to purify ourselves using the Red Heifer.

But a man who lived when the Temple stood and became tameh due to a dead body was not forever forbidden from entering the Temple, or from eating from the sacrifices. The Torah suggests a manner of purification through a complex procedure at the center of which stood the Para Aduma, whose ashes were sprinkled on the person, thus purifying him; he was then allowed to enter the Temple and eat from the sacrifices.

This mitzva appears to lack any logical sense. Indeed, our sages noted it as such, as the commentator Rashi stated on the verse, “This is the statute (‘chukka’) of the Torah” at the beginning of our parsha: “Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, ‘What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?’ Therefore, the Torah uses the term ‘statute.’ I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.”

The clear mention of this commandment as a “statute” whose reason is incomprehensible has brought many to use this point of view in reference to all of the Torah’s commandments.

There are those who claimed that all the mitzvot lack logical reasons, and that their entire significance is obedience to the words of God – when His words seem logical, as well as when they seem illogical.

But many great Jewish thinkers throughout the generations, led by the Maimonides, argued strongly against this outlook – and even saw it as an offense to the honor of the Torah. Their claim was that only a few, specific mitzvot are referred to in the Torah as being defined as a “statute.” Meaning, most of the mitzvot in the Torah are comprehensible, and only for a few is the reason hidden so that man does not have the ability to comprehend them.

Understanding the mitzvot of the Torah requires work and effort. One cannot expect that when reading the Torah for the first time, it will be completely understood. On the contrary, it requires learning and study in order to grasp the significance of the different commandments.

But this approach raises a question: If in principle the mitzvot of the Torah have reasons and logic, why then are there several mitzvot like Para Aduma whose reasons are elusive? It is inconceivable that God instructed us to fulfill these mitzvot for no reason whatsoever. And why wouldn't the Torah write the reasons for these commandments as well, and thus save us the debate of, “What is this mitzva, and what is the reason for it?” It seems that the reason for these mitzvot was hidden intentionally, for a specific purpose. A person reading the Torah who finds a mitzva that human logic would reach on its own might respond with a certain amount of disrespect for the Torah. The thought that might cross his mind would be “I could have written this myself,” or “I would have solved this problem in a different manner.” Man might then look at the Torah as a code of laws just like any other that was created by people, which can be disputed and seen from a different perspective, or changed and adjusted for a specific situation or environment.

As a way of dealing with these thoughts, the Torah notes several mitzvot as statutes. Alongside the fact that most of the Torah’s commandments are such that it is not difficult to identify the logic which leads to them, there are specific mitzvot whose reasons are hidden so that the person reading the Torah will be able to comprehend that the totality of the commandments is not just another human creation. Even the mitzvot that contain logic are not a

human code of laws, but something much beyond that – an exalted Divine creation which should be treated as such.

If all of the Torah’s commandments were incomprehensible statutes, this would also be disadvantageous. Indeed, most of the Torah’s commandments are comprehensible after profound examination. But a few are statutes intentionally, so that you may know – you the reader and the learner – that this book you are reading is not just another book like all human creations, but a holy book given by the Creator.

Behind it are deep and elusive ideas relating to the mitzvot that seem logical to you, and even more so in regard to the ones that do not.

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### **Rav Kook List**

#### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### ***Chukat: Beyond Human Logic***

Even King Solomon, renowned for his profound wisdom, failed to grasp its meaning. "I thought I would attain wisdom," he admitted, "but it is distant from me" (Ecc. 7:23).

What was it that eluded Solomon's powerful intellect? The Talmud in Niddah 9a explains that he was referring to the Parah Adumah, the red heifer whose ashes were used for ritual purification. The true meaning of this ritual is uniquely profound, beyond the grasp of the human intellect.

Why is this mitzvah so difficult to understand?

#### **Repairing the Sin of the Golden Calf**

According to the Sages, the Parah Adumah comes to atone for the Sin of the Golden Calf. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:8) explains this by way of a parable: when the maidservant's son sullied the king's palace, it was his mother who needed to come and clean up the mess.

What exactly is the connection between the ritual of the Red Heifer and the Sin of the Golden Calf? After all, the golden calf was formed out of gold jewelry donated by the people; it was not born to a cow.

What was the essence of the Sin of the Golden Calf? Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi (Kuzari 1:97) and other medieval commentators explained that only when taking into account the unique spiritual level of the Jewish people at that time does their action count as a grievous offense. For other peoples, not only would it not have been deemed a sin, it might have even been considered a meritorious deed.

The people's motivations were sincere. They did not wish to abandon God. On the contrary, they sought to remain close to Him. They created an image - the prevalent form of worship at that time, like a house of prayer nowadays - in order to have a tangible focal point toward which they could direct their offerings and prayers. Even those who erred by praying directly to the golden image did not reject God. They announced, 'O Israel! This is your God, Who brought you out of Egypt' (Ex. 32:8).

If so, what was their mistake? They erred in their attempt to gain closeness to God through actions dictated by their own logic and reasoning. God specifically forbade this form of worship. The image they created - despite their good intentions - contradicted God's command, and it became a stumbling block for those who worshipped the Golden Calf as an actual idol.

Understanding God's Rule

Why did God forbid us from using our powers of reason to establish new mitzvot and modify existing ones, using methods that, according to our understanding, would allow us to become closer to God? If we want to know what God wants, we need to examine His actions and the ways through which He governs the world. Theoretically, the percipient individual should be able to discern wonderful aspects of God's rule of the universe, and thereby understand His ways and Divine Will. This would work had God organized creation in such a way that all paths leading to the final goal reflect Divine perfection. Then all aspects of the universe would provide an accurate understanding of God and His Will, allowing us to recognize the proper way to serve Him. God, however, in His lofty wisdom, organized the universe differently. He decreed that purity might be the end result of impure paths. Even those means which contravene God's Will will lead toward the final goal. Thus it is impossible to deduce what God truly wants simply by observing the ways of the world. Our service of God can only be guided by those directives which God explicitly transmitted through His Torah.

#### Acknowledging Our Limitations

How is this connected to the purifying ashes of the Red Heifer? Purity and impurity are a function of closeness or distance from God. True purity is the ability to draw near to God and fulfill His will. Death, on the other hand, is *avi avot ha-tum'ah*, the primary source of impurity. Death is an example of a phenomenon in the world that is diametrically opposed to the genuine intention of God, Who desires life. A person noting the phenomenon of death could deduce the exact opposite of God's true intention in the world, concluding that God does not wish that His creations live. How do we purify ourselves from the impurity of death? To correct the misleading impression of death, we need to recognize the limits of the human intellect in understanding God's rule in the world. By performing the ritual of Parah Adumah, a mitzvah that by definition transcends logic, we acknowledge the limitations of our intellect, and avoid the pitfall of inferring God's will from the phenomenon of death. We can also understand why those who prepare the purifying ashes of the Red Heifer become defiled in the process. God's Will cannot be deduced from the ways of the world, only from the final goal; so too, the process of the Parah Adumah generates impurity, and only the end result provides purification. (Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 317-320) Comments and inquiries may be sent to: [mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com](mailto:mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com)

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#### The Right Type of Help By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Since one of the sources for the prohibition of *bishul akum* is in *parsha Chukas*, this presents an ideal time to review these laws.

#### Household help

Shirley\* asks me: "We hired a very nice Polish lady to help around the house, keep an eye on the kids and do light housekeeping. Can we have her cook a bit for the kids while I am away at work?"

#### Commuter crisis

Mrs. Goldman is stuck in a typical commuter predicament. The traffic is not moving, and it is well past the time that she should be putting up supper. She calls the non-Jewish babysitter, Jenny, to apologize for the delay and asks her to find something in the freezer to warm and serve the kids. Jenny finds

some blintzes and some fish sticks, places them on ceramic cookware and pops them into the toaster oven. That evening, when Rabbi Goldman returns from *kollel*, Mrs. Goldman tells him about her frustrating commute home. Rabbi Goldman realizes that they may now have a *kashrus* concern in their house, as I will soon explain.

#### Surprise sous-chef

I received a phone call from Rabbi Black: "Our seminary has girls employed in work-study programs. We just discovered that a girl who was working as our cook is not *halachically* Jewish. Do we need to *kasher* the kitchen?" Each of these cases that actually happened shows the prevalence of *bishul akum* questions.

#### The source in the *parsha*

#### Sichon's folly!

It is noteworthy that the *Gemara* tries to find a source for the prohibition of *bishul akum* in this week's *parsha*. When the *Bnei Yisrael* offered to purchase all their victuals from Sichon and his nation, Emori, they could purchase only food that was unchanged through gentile cooking (see *Devarim* 2:26-28; and *Bamidbar* 21:21-25). Any food altered by Emori cooking was prohibited because of *bishul akum* (*Avodah Zarah* 37b). Although the *Gemara* rejects this Biblical source and concludes that *bishul akum* is an injunction of the Sages, early authorities theorize that this proscription was enacted very early in Jewish history; otherwise, how could the *Gemara* even suggest that its origins are Biblical (see *Tosafos* s.v. *vehashelakos*)? *Chazal* instituted this law to discourage inappropriate social interaction, which may lead to intermarriage, and also to guarantee that *kashrus* is not compromised (*Rashi*, *Avodah Zarah* 35b s. v. *vehashelakos*; 38a s.v. *miderabbanan* and *Tosafos* ad loc.). Food prepared in violation of the laws that *Chazal* instituted becomes prohibited as *bishul akum* and is fully non-kosher. The early authorities dispute whether equipment used to cook *bishul akum* becomes non-kosher. The *Shulchan Aruch* concludes that the equipment, indeed, becomes non-kosher and must be kashered, although the *halachah* for *kashering* from *bishul akum* is sometimes more lenient (*Yoreh Deah* 113:16). Please note that throughout the article, whenever I say that something does not involve *bishul akum*, it might still be forbidden for a variety of other reasons.

#### Three cardinal rules

When *Chazal* prohibited *bishul akum*, their prohibition was not all-inclusive, but covered only foods where the gentile's cooking is significant. For example, there are three major groupings of foods cooked by a gentile that are nevertheless permitted, because the gentile's contribution is not considered significant. One might find the following acronym useful to remember these permitted categories: **YUM, Yisrael, Uncooked, Monarch.**

#### I. Yisrael – a Jew participates

If a Jew contributes to the cooking in a significant way, the food is categorized as *bishul Yisrael*, cooked by a Jew, and is therefore permitted, even when a gentile did most of the food preparation. For example, if Mrs. Goldman had asked Jenny to warm food that was already cooked, there would be no *bishul akum* problem. I will soon explain some of the extensive details about this law.

#### II. Uncooked – edible raw

A food that could be eaten raw is exempt from the prohibition of *bishul akum*, even when a non-Jew cooked it completely. This is because cooking such an item is not considered significant (*Rashi*, *Beitzah* 16a). For example, if Mrs. Goldman had asked Jenny to bake apples or cook a fruit soup, there would be no problem of *bishul akum*, assuming that these fruits are all edible raw. However, baking potatoes does present a *bishul akum* concern, because potatoes are not eaten raw (*Chachmas Odom* 66:4; cf. *Aruch HaShulchan* 113:18).

#### III. Monarch

*Bishul akum* applies only to food that one would serve on a king's table alongside bread. *Chazal* did not prohibit *bishul akum* when the food is

considered commonplace, because one would not invite a guest for such a meal, and, therefore, there is no concern that inappropriate social interaction may result (*Rambam, Hil. Maachalos Asuros* 17:15).

#### ***Bishul Yisrael***

At this point, I want to explain in more detail one of the rules I mentioned above: When a Jew participates in the cooking, the food is permitted, even when a gentile performed most of the cooking. For example, if a non-Jew placed a pot of meat on the fire, and a Jew stirred the pot, this act is significant enough to permit the food, because it is considered *bishul Yisrael* (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 113:7). Similarly, if a Jew placed food in the oven and it baked until it became edible, and then the food was removed from the oven and returned later by a gentile to complete the cooking, the food is kosher (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 113:10, 11).

#### ***Ashkenazim versus Sefardim***

How much Jewish participation is necessary to avoid *bishul akum*? The answer to this question depends on whether one is *Sefardi* or *Ashkenazi*, since *Ashkenazim* are more lenient in these laws than are *Sefardim*. For example, *Ashkenazim* rule that if a Jew ignited the fire that is being used to cook, or even if all he did was add to a flame that the gentile is cooking with, this participation is sufficient to permit the food as *bishul Yisrael*. *Sefardim* rule that it is insufficient for a Jew to simply ignite the fire – the Jew must be involved in the actual cooking of the food. Either the Jew must place the food onto the fire or must participate in some other significant way; but if all the Jew did was ignite the fire and a gentile placed the food on the fire, the food is prohibited. Thus, an *Ashkenazi* household that utilizes non-Jewish help in the kitchen must have a Jew turn on or adjust the fires to avoid *bishul akum*. In a *Sefardi* household, someone Jewish must place the food on the fire to cook, or stir it once it is cooking.

#### **Food service cooking**

This dispute is especially germane to restaurants, caterers and other institutional cooking, where the kitchen help is often all non-Jews, thus potentially creating a *bishul akum* concern. According to *Ashkenazim*, to avoid *bishul akum*, it is sufficient if the Jew turns on the fire that is used to cook, or even for him to adjust the temperature setting upward. Thus, if the gentile already turned on the oven, but no food was finished cooking yet, the Jew can simply lower the setting and reset it, and all the food cooked is considered *bishul Yisrael*. However, according to *Sefardim*, a Jew must actually place the food on the stove to cook. If the food is already on the fire, but is not yet minimally edible, it suffices for a Jew to stir the food to make it into *bishul Yisrael*.

This *shaylah* often affects the *kashrus* arrangements germane to restaurants and caterers. Since most Jews in North America are *Ashkenazim*, most *hechsherim* simply arrange that a Jew turn on the fires so that the food is considered *bishul Yisrael*, an approach that does not satisfy some *Sefardic* authorities, although some permit the food after the fact, because of a combination of other *heterim* that we will discuss below (*Shu't Yechaveh Daas* 5:54).

On the other hand, proper *Sefardic hechsherim* insist that the *mashgiach* place all food into the oven or on the stove.

#### **A more lenient approach**

Some *Ashkenazi* authorities are even more lenient than described above; they permit food when the Jew lit a flame and the gentile used the Jew's flame to ignite a second flame that was used for cooking. According to this approach, it is sufficient if a Jew lights the pilot light that is then used to ignite all the stove and oven lights. Although pilot lights are now uncommon in household appliances, they are more common in industrial kitchens.

#### **Partly cooked**

Here is another case in which *Sefardim* and *Ashkenazim* differ in accepted *bishul Yisrael* practice. If a gentile began the cooking and it became minimally edible, *Sefardim* consider the food already prohibited because of *bishul akum*. Following this approach, if a gentile cooks the food at the beginning until it is edible, and a Jew then completes the cooking and makes

it quite tasty, the food is still prohibited, unless there is an extenuating circumstance, such as a major financial loss (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 113:9).

However, *Ashkenazim* rule that if a Jew cooked it past the point where it became minimally edible, it is permitted, since the product's delicious taste was created by a Jew.

#### **Not yet edible**

In the reverse case, one where a Jew cooked the food until it was barely edible and then the gentile cooked it past this point, the food is permitted according to both approaches (*Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 113:8). However, if the food was not edible when the Jew's cooking ended, and subsequently a gentile cooked it without any Jewish participation, the food is prohibited as *bishul akum* according to all authorities.

#### ***Bishulei blintz***

At this point, we can explain the concerns created by Jenny's warming the blintzes. *Kashrus* organizations usually make no arrangements to see that frozen blintzes or fish sticks are *bishul Yisrael* for a very simple *halachic* reason: The products are still inedible at the time the company freezes them, and therefore nothing is accomplished *halachically* by having a Jew cook them at this early stage. When you remove these products from your freezer and heat them, you are cooking them, whether you realize it or not.

However, when Jenny warmed these foods, she not only cooked them, but she also made them into prohibited *bishul akum*, thus rendering the foods and the equipment non-kosher, although she meant no harm.

We will find out more about the saga of Goldman family's *kashrus* situation next week...

\*Although these stories are true; names have been changed to maintain privacy.