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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Peace in Heaven and on Earth

The death of Aharon Hakohen in Parshas Chukas had a significant impact on Klal Yisroel. Chazal note that the mourning for Aharon was even greater than the response of the Jewish People following the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu. In his role as one who interceded to promote peace between spouses and within the greater community, Aharon was sorely missed by all. Even the day of his death is noted by the Torah in Parshas Masei.

Rosh Chodesh Av is not only the day to mourn the individual Aharon Hakohen; it became a day associated with mourning for future generations. Chazal teach us that the halachic period of mourning preceding Tisha Ba'v begins on Rosh Chodesh

Av. Although there are several customs that are observed during the period of the Three Weeks, actual prohibitions begin on Rosh Chodesh which begins the period known as The Nine Days.

Is it just coincidental that the day that begins the formal observance of commemorating the churban is the yohrtzeit of the first kohen gadol, or is the death of Aharon linked to the subsequent churban?

In Parshas Yisro we are commanded not to use metal when preparing the stones of the mizbeach. Chazal comment that the role of the mizbeach is to bring peace between Hashem and the Jewish People, and it is therefore inappropriate for metal, which is associated with weapons, to be used in the construction of the mizbeach. When there is a distance between Hashem and His people it is analogous to a lack of peace. Korbanos, which reconnect us to Hashem, are a vehicle of shalom. Hashem blessing us with closeness and a peaceful relationship with His people is contingent upon our seeking peace with one another. The same kohen gadol who performs the avodah on Yom Kippur, thereby repairing the rift between Hashem and us, is the same kohen gadol who is instructed to be the lover and pursuer of peace which was the hallmark of the first kohen gadol, Aharon Hakohen.

There are numerous prophecies relating the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash to a breakdown in the realm of being adam lachaveiro. When there is strife within the Jewish People, Hashem distances Himself from us.

Chazal point to an unwillingness to compromise in monetary matters as a cause of the churban. When peace and harmony are replaced by every individual's demand for his own rights, Hashem declares there is no need for the Beis Hamikdash which is a source of peace between Himself and His nation. As we are approaching the period of aveilus for the churban, it is appropriate to look to Aharon Hakohen as a role model. The day of his death, which marked the loss of a great force of peace, became the beginning of churban. We must emulate the traits of, "ohev shalom v'rodef shalom" and by doing so bring about the gift of peace from Above. May we soon witness, "haporeis sukkas shalom aleinu v'al kol amo Yisroel, v'al Yerushalayim."

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Descartes' Error

CHUKAT

In his 2011 bestseller, *The Social Animal*, New York Times columnist David Brooks writes:

We are living in the middle of the revolution in consciousness. Over the past few years, geneticists, neuroscientists, psychologists, sociologists, economists, anthropologists, and

others have made great strides in understanding the building blocks of human flourishing. And a core finding of their work is that we are not primarily products of our conscious thinking. We are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness.[1]

Too much takes place in the mind for us to be fully aware of it. Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia estimates that the human mind can absorb 11 million pieces of information at any given moment. We can be conscious of only a tiny fraction of this. Most of what is going on mentally lies below the threshold of awareness.

One result of the new neuroscience is that we are becoming aware of the hugely significant part played by emotion in decision-making. The French Enlightenment emphasised the role of reason and regarded emotion as a distraction and distortion. We now know scientifically how wrong this is. Antonio Damasio, in his *Descartes' Error*, tells the story of a man who, as the result of a tumour, suffered damage to the frontal lobes of his brain. He had been known to have a high IQ, was well-informed, and had an excellent memory. But after surgery to remove the tumour, his life went into free-fall. He was unable to organise his time. He made bad investments that cost him his savings. He divorced his wife, married a second time, and rapidly divorced again. He could still reason perfectly but had lost the ability to feel emotion. As a result, he was unable to make sensible choices.

Another man with a similar injury found it impossible to make decisions at all. At the end of one session, Damasio suggested two possible dates for their next meeting. The man then took out a notebook, began listing the pros and cons of each, talked about possible weather conditions, potential conflicts with other engagements and so on, for half an hour, until Damasio finally interrupted him, and made the decision for him. The man immediately said, "That's fine," and went away.

It is less reason than emotion that lies behind our choices, and it takes emotional intelligence to make good choices. The problem is that much of our emotional life lies beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

That, as we can now see, is the logic of the *chukim*, the "statutes" of Judaism, the laws that seem to make no sense in terms of rationality. These are laws like the prohibition of sowing mixed seeds together (*kelayim*); of wearing cloth of mixed wool and linen (*shaatnez*); and of eating milk and meat together. The law of the Red Heifer with which our *parsha* begins, is described as the *chok par excellence*. As it is written: "This is the statute of the Torah."

Num. 19:2

There have been many interpretations of the *chukim* throughout the ages. But in the light of recent neuroscience, we can suggest that they are laws designed to bypass the prefrontal cortex, the rational brain, and create instinctive

patterns of behaviour to counteract some of the darker emotional drives at work in the human mind.

We know for example – Jared Diamond has chronicled this in his book *Collapse* – that wherever humans have settled throughout history they have left behind them a trail of environmental disaster, wiping out whole species of animals and birds, destroying forests, damaging the soil by over-farming and so on.

The prohibitions against sowing mixed seeds, mixing meat and milk, combining wool and linen, and so on, create an instinctual respect for the integrity of nature. They establish boundaries. They set limits. They inculcate the feeling that we may not treat our animal and plant environment however we wish. Some things are forbidden – like the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The whole Eden story, set at the dawn of human history, is a parable whose message we can understand today better than any previous generation: Without a sense of limits, we will destroy our ecology and discover that we have lost paradise.

As for the ritual of the Red Heifer, this is directed at the most destructive pre-rational instinct of all: what Sigmund Freud called *thanatos*, the death instinct. He described it as something "more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides".[2] In his essay *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, he wrote that "a portion of the [death] instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness", which he saw as "the greatest impediment to civilisation."

The Red Heifer ritual is a powerful statement that the holy is to be found in life, not death. Anyone who had been in contact with a dead body needed purification before entering the sanctuary or Temple. Priests had to obey stricter rules, and the High Priest even more so.

This made biblical Judaism highly distinctive. It contains no cult of worship of dead ancestors, or seeking to make contact with their spirits. It was probably to avoid the tomb of Moses becoming a holy site that the Torah says, "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34:6). God and the holy are to be found in life. Death defiles.

The point is – and that is what recent neuroscience has made eminently clear – this cannot be achieved by reason alone. Freud was right to suggest that the death instinct is powerful, irrational, and largely unconscious, yet under certain conditions it can be utterly devastating in what it leads people to do.

The Hebrew term *chok* comes from the verb meaning, "to engrave". Just as a statute is carved into stone, so a behavioural habit is carved in depth into our unconscious mind and alters our instinctual responses. The result is a personality trained to see death and holiness as two utterly opposed states – just as meat (death) and milk (life) are.

Chukim are Judaism's way of training us in emotional intelligence, above all a conditioning in associating holiness with life, and defilement with death. It is fascinating to see how this has been vindicated by modern neuroscience.

Rationality, vitally important in its own right, is only half the story of why we are as we are. We will need to shape and control the other half if we are successfully to conquer the instinct to aggression, violence, and death that lurks not far beneath the surface of the conscious mind.

[1] David Brooks, *The Social Animal*, Random House, 2011, x.

[2] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *On Metapsychology*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984, p. 294.

<https://www.5tjt.com/the-quickening-and-realignment-of-history/>

The Quickening And Realignment Of History

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

July 8, 2024

After a forty-year detour we finally arrived at the doorstep of Israel. The ground began to shake with historical tremors. Bilaam and Balak, normally sworn enemies, hastily built a coalition to defeat the Jewish occupiers who, they feared, would consume them "as an ox consumes the grass." Rachav, the woman who lived in the walls of Yericho, and secretly hosted Yehoshua's spies, reported that the inhabitants of Canaan, upon hearing of the miracles of kriyas Yam Suf, resigned themselves to defeat. The entire region and everyone who stood in the way of Jewish destiny, trembled.

In truth, the regional political upheaval started well before we arrived. The end of Parshat Chukat describes legendary wars between the armies of Emor and the warriors of Moab. Emor, led by its mighty warrior-king Sichon, emerged as the big winners and saw their empire vastly expanded.

The Return of Hashgachah

The Torah describes these "unrelated" wars for several reasons. Firstly, the Emori victory showcased their ferocious military prowess. Yet, facing off against the children of Hashem, their armies collapsed like a house of cards. This impressive defeat of the "invincible" Sichon demonstrated that Hashem had restored His hashgachah to us after a forty-year dark period of limited miracles and little prophetic communication. Defeating Sichon, who himself had routed Moab, gave us the confidence that, with Hashem's help, we could easily vanquish the 30 chieftains of Canaan.

The Quickening and the Accounting

Additionally, the Emori-Moab wars reflect the broader instability that spread throughout the region. Jewish redemption wasn't a local or national event, but radiated to the entire planet. Jewish redemption introduces heightened spirituality and broader prosperity to the world. Our initial

arrival in Israel was meant to conclude history, leading to a Messianic utopia. Whenever history reaches a redemptive "end," it must account for itself. Empires rise as others fall so that history ends with a balanced ledger. Therefore, as history lurches toward redemption, its pace accelerates. As history advances toward its redemptive terminus, it rocks and sways...and it quickens. The quickening of history always brings rapid change and severe political turmoil.

Three Pharaohs

Our first geulah also brought rapid political shifts. Egyptian Pharaohs possessed absolute authority and reigned for the duration of their lifetimes. Yet, as Yetzias Mitzrayim approached, three different Egyptian kings ascend the stage: the Pharaoh of the beginning, of Sh'mot, the "new king" who didn't recall Yosef and who hatched the hateful conspiracy against us, and the Pharaoh who succeeded him after his sudden death. It is difficult to determine the exact timelines of the three Pharaohs, but at least textually, they were all coronated in rapid succession.

The Carousel of Babylonia and Persia

The first geulah from Bavel was no different. In a span of about eighty years, numerous Babylonian empires ruled and suddenly, the indomitable Babylonian empire was unseated by Persia. Approximately four or five Persian Emperors sat on the throne until we finally returned to Israel. Depending on the timelines, seven or eight different dictators ruled this region between our exit from Yerushalayim and our return. Political tumult and instability are harbingers of Jewish redemption. It was true in the desert as we approached Israel, and it is just as true as we began the complicated process of returning to Yerushalayim after the Babylonian exile. It remained true in the 20th century as we embarked on the final redemption.

The Quicksand of the 20th Century

During this fraught century two World Wars took the lives of over 100 million people. Powerful ideologies such as Fascism, Naziism, and Communism came and went. Long-standing maps were redrawn and, a few years later, redrawn again. Vast European empires receded, as former colonies achieved their independence. We have just begun the 21st century, but it appears to be even more chaotic. As we arrive at the end of history, history itself quickens.

Chazal assert that that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is "chishev et haketz," which means that He calculates the exact time of the geulah. This commonly refers to Hashem commuting our exile and redeeming us prior to our designated time.

Additionally, though, chishev et haketz means that He recomputes the overall historical calculus. As we approach geulah, history accounts for itself and political tumult ensues. It was true in Egypt; it was true forty years later on the East Bank of the Jordan; it was true 1,300 years later in Persia; and it was true during the past century.

Redemptive Realignment

There is an additional reason that the Torah describes the wars of Emor and Moab in such detail. Evidently, there is a different message and a different reason that we were informed of the precise territories conquered by Emor. The outcome of this war and the redrawing of maps directly influenced Jewish history. Moab was a descendant of Lot and therefore, we are banned from any military encounter with them and prohibited from settling their lands. Had the Moabite armies triumphed in this war, the East Bank of the Jordan would not have been available for Jewish settlement. Once the victorious Emorite kingdom absorbed these lands, they could now be included in future Jewish settlement. The final borders of Eretz Yisrael depended on the outcome of this seemingly “unrelated” war. Of course, nothing is unrelated to Jewish history. History was realigned to facilitate Jewish destiny.

Jewish history is cyclical. What happened once, happens again. Just as history was rearranged to accommodate our arrival from the desert, it was similarly reengineered as we arrived home from our 2,000-year journey through the desert of exile. Once again, historical realignment began well before our arrival.

The 17th Century

Two important events of the 17th century deeply influenced our return to Israel three hundred years later. The Puritan Revolution of the 1640s led by Oliver Cromwell established an environment of relative religious freedom, making the UK more hospitable to Jews. Two decades later, in the aftermath of the horrific Khmelnytsky rebellion in Poland, during which hundreds of thousands of Jews were brutally murdered, we began to look westward to the British Isles for safe haven. In a perfect historical confluence, Britain and the West became more hospitable to us just when we most needed it. Jews settled into Britain, gaining political and cultural influence. About three hundred years later, this influence was crucial for the establishment of the Jewish State. In addition to broader Jewish lobbying, several politically well-placed British Jews including Chaim Weizman, who would eventually become the first President of Israel, and Edmond de Rothschild were instrumental in garnering British support for the State.

Of course, WWI had a lot to do with this as well. Britain emerged from the war with both a vastly expanded empire and a greater global influence. By contrast, the Ottoman empire suffered catastrophic losses, disappeared as a political entity, and ceded Palestine to a more friendly Great Britain.

While British influence in Europe increased after the war, Germany and Austria-Hungary, two countries with far less affection for the Jews, lost much of their political influence. All historical circumstances were well-aligned to facilitate the return of Hashem’s people, to His land. It is hard to imagine the events of 1948 without these after-effects of WWI.

The “Century of America”

The 20th century, often nicknamed “the century of America,” saw the U.S. become a dominant military, economic, and cultural superpower. In 1948, at the height of its powers, U.S. support for the State of Israel was decisive, and in the ensuing decades, they have been our staunchest ally. During the 20th century Britain passed the torch of its international influence to the United States. It also passed the torch of supporting Jewish destiny to the new emergent superpower.

A Brief Window

Let’s not forget Russia. For the overwhelming majority of the past 200 years, Russia was antagonistic to our people. The 19th century was marred by malicious state-sponsored antisemitism and discrimination in Tzarist Russia. In the 20th century, Stalin persecuted, executed, and deported millions of Jews. In the more recent past Russia launched a virulent propaganda crusade against Israel, portraying us as an aggressor and oppressor of Palestinians. Much of the false canards being hurled at us in 2024 originated from their venomous campaigns.

However, there was a brief pocket of history during which the Soviet Union supported us. Without their endorsement in 1947 and their support in 1948, we would not have achieved statehood. A few months after we declared independence, the Soviet Union turned against us, aligning with our Arab enemies. For a very brief period of history—no more than a year or so—our most aggressive enemy aligned themselves with Jewish destiny.

Redemption is the inevitable conclusion to history. As the horizons of redemption appear, history quickens. It also realigns to pave the path to redemption. n

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<https://en.yhb.org.il/supporting-rabbis-through-tithes-and-offerings/>

Supporting Rabbis through Tithes and Offerings Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The commandment of giving tithes and offerings from agricultural produce is intended to maintain the spiritual-religious dimension in the People of Israel through the priests and Levites, whose role is to engage in Torah study and education * From the right of every person in Israel to decide which priest and which Levite to give their gifts, we should learn that the public is the one who should choose their rabbis * The proposal to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis is bad * It is appropriate for lecturers in synagogues and teachers in schools to teach how to separate tithes and offerings through practical demonstration in front of the students

In this week's Torah portion, 'Korach', we learn about the commandment of terumot and ma'asrot (tithes and offerings) from agricultural produce, which is intended to maintain the spiritual-religious dimension in the People of Israel through the Kohanim (priests) and Levites, whose role is to engage in Torah study and education, as the Torah says: "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel" (Deuteronomy 33:10). This is how the Jewish nation is built in a proper manner, as a nation with its feet planted on the ground, and its head reaching the heavens, making both the people of action and the people of spirit partners in maintaining a meaningful life, full of content.

Israelites Choose to Whom They Give Their Gifts

This partnership is also expressed in the fact that the owner of the produce has the right to choose which priest and Levite to give his gifts to, as it is written: "Every man's holy things shall be his, and what a man gives to the priest shall be his" (Numbers 5:10) (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 7:4). This right creates a personal connection between the Israelites and the priests and Levites, and encourages the priests and Levites to be dedicated to their holy work among the members of their communities, so that in turn, the community members will want to give them their gifts. One who has made an effort to teach Torah to children and adults, and from whom people benefited counsel and wisdom, merits that they prefer to give him the gifts. On the other hand, one who has alienated himself from his community members, refused to participate in the war to defend the People and the Land, or was lazy and did not teach Torah, receives similar treatment when the gifts are distributed.

The Public's Influence on Selecting Rabbis

From the right of every Jew to decide which priest and Levite to give their gifts, we can learn that the public are the ones who should choose their rabbis, and indeed, this is how it was practiced in all Jewish communities from time immemorial. Therefore, the proposal currently being promoted to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis is a bad proposal. The Ministry of Religious Affairs already has too much power in selecting rabbis, and instead of correcting the situation and transferring all selection authority to public representatives in cities, neighborhoods, and synagogues, they are going in the opposite direction, and continue to degrade the status of the rabbinate. Although rabbinic ordination is granted by rabbis, the public has the right and authority to determine which ordained rabbi they will choose.

Example from the Elections of Chief Rabbis

We recently received an example of the negative influence on the selection of rabbis from the issue of postponing the elections for Chief Rabbis for more than a year. Various people whom I consider reliable are certain that the only reason for this is that the decision-makers in different parties

have not yet managed to decide whom to support, or have not managed to secure a majority for this in the electing body. There is no certainty that this is the reason, but the very fact that reliable people are certain of this, indicates that these improper considerations are plausible. It's important to note that these same individuals are also pushing the proposal to strengthen the power of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in selecting city rabbis at the expense of community representatives.

The political situation is very complex, and not just in this area. To begin the process of correction, each community needs to choose a rabbi and strengthen his status, regardless of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The more communities do this, the more the status of the rabbinate will rise thanks to the good example of rabbis who study and teach the true Torah, elevating the honor of the Torah.

Regarding the selection of Chief Rabbis and other rabbis, the electing body should be greatly expanded to include various representatives from all parts of the public, as long as the Torah and Jewish tradition are very important to them.

Fruits Growing in the Yard

Q: Does every fruit we pick from a tree growing in our yard need to have terumot and ma'asrot separated immediately, or only after bringing the fruit into the house are we obligated to separate terumot and ma'asrot, and as long as I'm in the yard, can I eat it without separating the tithes?

A: If you pick only one small fruit that is eaten in one bite, you can eat it without separating terumot and ma'asrot. But if you pick two small fruits, or a larger fruit that is not eaten in one bite, it is forbidden to eat from it without separating terumot and ma'asrot.

This is because we are dealing with a guarded yard, meaning, a yard that a stranger is not allowed to enter. In such a case, it is permitted to eat from the fruits growing there in a casual manner only before 'gemar melachtam' (the "completion of their work") that is, before their 'isufam' ("gathering"). For example, one grape or one fig, which are eaten in one bite. But if one picks two grapes, or two figs, or a large fruit that is not eaten in one bite, like an apple or a large fig, already upon picking them they are considered "gathered" and "their work is completed", and they become obligated in terumot and ma'asrot, because this is the way of their "gathering" in the yard. And since they are in a guarded yard that establishes obligation for tithes, even casual eating is forbidden before separating terumot and ma'asrot from them (Rambam Ma'aser 4:15; 17; Radbaz ibid. 18; Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 8:8). However, if one climbed the tree and picked many fruits there in a way that "completed their work", as long as he is on the tree and has not descended to the ground of the guarded yard – the fruits have not yet been established for tithes, and since his eating on the tree is casual eating, he is allowed to eat from them without separating terumot and ma'asrot (Rambam ibid.).

What Should One Do Who Doesn't Know How to Separate Terumot and Ma'asrot

Q: What can be done when we are not sure that we know how to properly separate terumot and ma'asrot? Until now, for this reason, we have refrained from eating from the fruits.

A: The best advice is to learn how to separate terumot and ma'asrot. For this purpose, I will write here the order of separating terumot and ma'asrot with explanations in parentheses. It seems that if you read the text slowly and carefully, you will understand the order of the commandment, and will be able to merit fulfilling it whenever you want to eat from the fruits.

In addition, it is appropriate for synagogues lecturers and in schools teachers to teach how to separate terumot and ma'asrot through practical demonstration in front of the students. When it appears that the students still have not gained confidence that they know how to fulfill the commandment, repeat it several times, and perhaps, appoint a different student each time to perform the commandment himself, until everyone knows how to separate terumot and ma'asrot.

Another Solution: Declaring the Fruits Ownerless

Another solution is to declare the fruits hefker (ownerless), and then, since the fruits are ownerless, they are exempt from terumot and ma'asrot. The act of declaring them ownerless is done as follows: One needs to say in front of three people "My fruits are ownerless," and by doing so, they become hefker, and any person can acquire them. At least two of the listeners need to be qualified to testify, so that if the third comes to acquire the fruits, the two will testify that he acquired them legally (Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 273:7). However, you can announce that anyone who wants to pick from the fruits can come at a certain time of the day, because even though the fruits are ownerless, the yard is not ownerless, and as long as you allow anyone who wants to pick at a certain time, the declaration of hefker is valid.

The declaration of hefker that is effective to exempt the fruits from tithes is from the time they became fit for eating in pressing circumstances until they are picked, but after they are picked, they have already become obligated in terumot and ma'asrot, and the declaration of hefker does not exempt them (Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 8:3).

Introduction to the Order of Separating Tithes and Offerings
Terumot need to be separated and removed from the fruits, because they are intended for the Kohanim and have kedusha (holiness), and since there is no possibility to eat them, they are placed, wrapped, in the trash. In contrast, the ma'asrot are separated by designating a place on one side of the fruits, such as the right side, or the north side, thereby separating them from the rest of the fruits, with the intention to give the value of the ma'aser rishon ('first tithe') to the Levite, and the value of the ma'aser ani ('tithes for the poor') to the poor, and to redeem the ma'aser sheini ('second tithe') on a coin.

Afterwards, those fruits that were designated for tithes will be eaten together with the rest of the fruits.

Order of Separating Terumot and Ma'asrot

First, bless: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to separate tithes and offerings" (when there is doubt whether tithes and offerings have been separated from the fruits, we do not bless).

Take a little more than one percent of the fruits and separate it from the rest of the fruits, and it is designated for terumah gedola ('great offering') and terumat ma'aser, and say: "The part exceeding one hundredth of what I have separated that is on my right side shall be 'terumah gedola' (in what was initially separated, there is a percentage and a bit more, and we intend that the part exceeding the percentage will be 'terumah gedola', and its place is on the right side of the fruits designated for terumot). The one hundredth that remains here (in what was initially separated for terumot) with nine more parts like it on the right side of these fruits shall be 'ma'aser rishon' (thus, we have separated 'ma'aser rishon' – the fruits, or their value, will be given later to the Levite). That one hundredth that I made 'ma'aser rishon', and is placed separated from the fruits, is 'terumat ma'aser' (and with this, we have separated 'terumat ma'aser'. The terumot are wrapped, and placed in the trash).

A tenth of what remains (ten percent of what remains after what we have already separated) on the left side of the fruits shall be 'ma'aser sheini' (and with this we have designated a place for 'ma'aser sheini'), and if they are obligated in 'ma'aser ani' – they are 'ma'aser ani' (because in years 1, 2, 4, 5 of the Shemita cycle, we separate 'ma'aser sheini', and in years 3, 6 'ma'aser ani'). (When separating 'ma'aser ani', give the fruits, or their value, later to a poor person)."

Redemption of Ma'aser Sheini

When separating 'ma'aser sheini', like this year, 5784 (2024), it needs to be redeemed, to make it chulin (non-sacred). If the separation of terumot and ma'asrot is done from fruits that are certainly not tithed, and it is clear that they are from a year from which we separate 'ma'aser sheini', one should first bless: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to redeem the second tithe". And if there is doubt in the matter, we redeem without a blessing.

And say: "This 'ma'aser sheini' (referring to what we designated a place for on the left side), it, and its fifth (it's a Torah commandment to add a fifth during redemption), shall be redeemed on one pruta (low-value coin) from the coin I have designated for redeeming 'ma'aser sheini'." One who has not designated a coin for this, can redeem it on a spoonful of sugar worth a pruta, and rinse the sugar in water in the sink, or place it respectfully in the trash.

Blessings for the Approval of the Settlements

Blessings to Minister Bezalel Smotrich and all his partners in the legal regularization of five settlements in Judea and Samaria, and in the constant strengthening of the settlement in Judea and Samaria, and the removal of the danger of enemy takeover of the Land of Israel. This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated

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**Parshat Chukat: From Jerusalem to Ashes to Life Eternal
Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh
HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone**

“This is the statute of the law which God commanded, saying, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer.’” (Numbers 19:1–2)

One of the most profound mysteries of the Bible is the rite of the red heifer, called a chok (statute) because it belongs to the group of divine decrees which human logic cannot penetrate. Detailed in the first twenty-two verses of our Torah reading, the ceremony certainly sounds strange to the modern ear: a heifer, which is completely red, without blemish, and upon which no yoke has been brought, shall be slaughtered outside of the encampment of Israel; cedar wood, hyssop, and a scarlet thread shall be cast into the burning pyre of ashes, and a “personage of purity” (ish tahor) shall gather the ashes in a sacred place, mix them with spring water (mayim chayim, waters of life) and use the mixture to purify those who have been contaminated by contact with a corpse. What can we possibly make of such a primitive sounding ritual?

We must be mindful of the fact that all other impurities other than a death impurity find their purification by the defiled individual’s immersing himself or herself in a mikveh, a gathering of freshly running spring water or specially collected life-giving rainwater; in effect, in all these instances, the defiled individual actually purifies him- or herself! Only in this rite of the red heifer does the kohen, representing God Himself, effectuate the purification. It is as though the Bible is teaching us that we can save ourselves from many of our weaknesses, we can rise above many of our temptations, but only God can ultimately redeem us from death.

And from this perspective, the symbolism of the red heifer ritual begins to make sense. A heifer is the consummate symbol of life, the cow’s mother-milk serving as the universal expression of maternal nurturing of her young; red is likewise the color of blood, and blood is the life-force, the very nefesh of the living organism. However, although human beings come in various shapes, sizes, personalities, and powers – they can be as tall and proud as the cedar tree and as mean and humble as the hyssop plant – the angel of death ultimately conquers

them all, because the scarlet thread of human sin condemns each of us to the common destiny of mortality. Following the sacrifice, the personage of purity gathers the ashes of the remains, mixes them with the life-giving waters of the divine and, born-again, purified life emerges even from the surrealistic specter of death itself. Inherent in this symbolism is that historic Israel – mother nurturer of the continuity of humanity by means of the Abrahamic “compassionate rightness and moral justice” which Israel taught and must continue to teach – is destined to be slaughtered, but will always rise again to life and to the fulfillment of her mission and destiny.

This symbolism of the red heifer assumed new significance for me after a trip to Frankfurt and Berlin I took just a few years ago. Ohr Torah Stone’s Joseph Straus Rabbinical Seminary has sent close to three hundred rabbis and their families to communities throughout the world, from Caesarea to Curacao to Guatemala City to Johannesburg to Lincoln Center – with eight of our graduates presently in Germany. While in Berlin, I made it my concern to visit their newly completed Holocaust Memorial at the very center of the city, not far from the last bunker from which the “mad Führer” (may his name be blotted out) committed suicide.

The open-air memorial consists of 2,711 stones, monuments of various shapes and sizes. Walking amongst the narrow, massive slabs of stone, one becomes lost within a giant cemetery, feeling helplessly and hopelessly minute and insignificant within a maze of monuments whose eerie, death-imbued caskets seem to have overtaken world and life; I even felt a panic attack, was almost ready to scream out loud in fear and anxiety, when I saw the sight of blessed steps of exit from this mass and massive tomb. One then descends into a netherworld of hell, where pictures and stories of Holocaust victims evoke their life experiences and all of their future potential that was snuffed out, inexplicably and cruelly torn asunder from the tree of life by monstrous and subhuman hands. How many medical and scientific advances were simply burned to ashes in the death factory called Auschwitz! How many Nobel Prize winners, how many giants of humanity! I stumbled away from the experience feeling as though I had just awakened from a horrific nightmare. The symbolism of the monuments continued to haunt me months after I returned to Efrat; after all, those who lost loved ones in the Holocaust don’t even have graveside monuments to weep over. Each empty stone screams out with any name, with every name, with my name, and with my children’s names, because a part of each human being was killed in those death camps whose perpetrators attempted to destroy every last vestige of humaneness.

But I also came away from the experience feeling cheated by the memorial. Something was missing, the essence was missing, the victorious ending was missing. Because, you see,

the Jewish people won the war which Hitler tried to wage against us. Yes, he succeeded in destroying six million of us, but as he records in Mein Kampf, he wasn't waging a war against six million Jews. He was waging a war against the last Jew, against Judaism, against what he called a slave morality of compassionate righteousness and moral justice, of sensitive concern for the weaker vessels, of a God of ultimate power who insists upon human protection of the powerless. And in that war, Hitler failed!

Yes, we won that war. Alas, the brilliantly alive "red heifer," a metaphor for the Jewish people, a people who nurture the world with the milk of morality of the Ten Commandments and the milk of human kindness of "You shall love the stranger" and "You shall love your neighbor like yourself" was, to a large extent, tragically and inexplicably slaughtered beyond the "human encampment" in Auschwitz and Treblinka. But the Almighty God, the "Personage of Purity" Himself, gathered the ashes, Himself mixed them with living waters of rebirth, and Himself transformed those ashes into the fertile soil of the recreated sovereign State of Israel. And the "Personage of Purity" Himself mixed the ashes with the life-giving wellsprings of Torah, our tree of eternal life, and in addition to our national physical being, likewise revived our spiritual being, Torah centers, and Daf Yomi Talmud study groups to an unprecedented and unparalleled degree all over the world. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, who could have predicted the rise of the State of Israel; who could have foreseen hundreds of thousands of Jews studying Daf Yomi every day?

Indeed, it boggles the mind to think that Judaism is reawakening even in the failed Führer's own capital city of Berlin, where three new yeshivot have been dedicated over the past several years. Imagine the historical irony of the fact that the only two growing Jewish communities in the world today are in Israel and in Germany!

And take note: there are 2,711 monument stones in the memorial, and when the artist Peter Eisenman was asked as to the significance of that number, he said there was no significance, it was purely arbitrary. However, if you check Google, you will find that there are 2,711 folio pages in the Babylonian Talmud studied in Daf Yomi! And this is more than coincidence. Adolf Hitler is now mercifully long dead. Curiously enough, one of his personal effects within his self-inflicted suicide bunker was the tractate Pesachim, a Gemara of the Vilna Shas (six orders of the Talmud) which tells of the Pesach festival of Jewish freedom and redemption. The American State Department decided to give this sacred text to Rabbi Herzog, then chief rabbi of Israel, whose wife showed it to me in the early 1970s. Apparently the devil incarnate, who was obsessed with Judaism, had hoped to bury the last Talmud tome in existence. Instead the Talmud tome buried him! Indeed, 2,711 pages of the Talmud have literally walked out of

the 2,711 monument stones, and have granted to the Jewish victims the eternal life of Jewish victors, who will yet teach the world the message of universal freedom and redemption which is the vision of the Pesach Seder.

A Biblical and Historical Postscript

We learn from the rite of the red heifer that only God, the Personage of Purity, can redeem from death; and in our post-Holocaust generation, He has certainly done so. There ought to be a final glorious exhibit in the Berlin Holocaust Memorial which features pulsating present-day religious Jewish life in Germany, as well as a magnificent tribute to the reborn State of Israel.

"Thus says the Lord your God... 'I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves and bring you into the Land of Israel.... And I shall put My spirit in you and you shall live and I shall place you in your land.'" (Ezekiel 37:13-14)

Shabbat Shalom

from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Jul 11, 2024, 7:01 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Chukas

"וַיִּךְ אֶת-הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ. וַיַּעַן לְאֶתְחַנְנֵלֵם בִּי לְהַקְדִּי שָׁנִי"

"And he hit the rock with his stick...because you had not trusted in Me to sanctify Me" (Bamidbar 20:10-11)

Moshe Rabbeinu performed a great miracle of bringing forth water from the rock. However, Moshe was punished and barred from entering Eretz Yisrael because he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l states that this was a neis no matter what means was used to bring forth this supernatural occurrence. What was lacking by Moshe's failure to speak to the rock?

Rav Moshe explains that this event was intended to demonstrate the importance of delivering words of instruction even to one who may not be able to fully grasp the concept. For example, a young child who appears to a parent as not quite ready to understand a certain message. Hashem demonstrated that just as a Divine message can penetrate even a rock and compel it to serve Hashem, we must speak to and be mechaneich even someone with limited understanding, as eventually the lessons will penetrate.

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net>

date: Jul 11, 2024, 3:22 PM

subject: A Finger on the Pulse of Our Generation - Essay by Rabbi YY

A Finger on the Pulse of Our Generation: Why Was Moses Denied The Promised Land?

Slaves Respond to a Stick; Free People Need Inspiration

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

From Abstract to Concrete

There was a rabbi known for his constant preaching about the need to nurture children with warmth and love. One time he noticed some children who were playing in the freshly laid concrete outside his newly renovated home, their little feet leaving lasting impressions. He became irritated and started chastising the children.

A congregant asked, "How can you, a person who devoted his entire life to teaching warmth to children, speak this way?" To which the rabbi replied: "You must understand. I love children in the abstract, not the concrete."

Speak to the Rock

At last, the moment had arrived. For 40 years they had wandered together in a wilderness. Most of the older generation had already passed on. Even the beloved Miriam was no more. By now, the young nation of Israel was finally ready to enter the Promised Land, under the leadership of Moses. However, an incident occurred that would transform the nation's destiny.

"The congregation had no water," the weekly Torah portion Chukas relates[1], "so they assembled against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses, saying, 'If only we had died with the death of our brothers before the Lord. Why have you brought the congregation of the Lord to this desert so that we and our livestock should die there? Why have you taken us out of Egypt to bring us to this bad place; it is not a place for seeds or fig trees, grapevines, or pomegranate trees, and there is no water to drink...'

"G-d spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and speak to the rock in their presence so that it will give forth its water. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock, and give the congregation and their livestock to drink.'

"Moses took the staff from before the Lord as He had commanded him. Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock, and he said to them, 'Now listen, you rebels, can we draw water for you from this rock?' "Moses raised his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice when an abundance of water gushed forth, and the congregation and their livestock drank.

"G-d said to Moses and Aaron, 'Since you did not have faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them.'"

The Questions

What exactly was Moses' and Aaron's sin? What did they do wrong? G-d instructed them to produce water from a rock and quench the thirst of the people. This they did. Why were they penalized?

The most famous answer is presented by Rashi. A subtle examination of the text reveals the nature of Moses' and Aaron's transgression. G-d told Moses to speak to the rock. Instead, Moses struck the rock (his brother Aaron complied). It

was this error of Moses that prevented him from entering the Holy Land.

Yet, this explanation leaves us with many questions. Here are a few of them.

- 1) What compelled Moses to make the change? If G-d instructed him to speak to the rock, why did he strike it?
- 2) Does it make a difference whether you communicate to a rock verbally or by force? The miracle is the same if you get the water through your mouth or your staff!
- 3) Why was Moses punished so severely for this sin, as to be denied his dream to enter the Promised Land? A penalty ought to be commensurate with the sin!
- 4) G-d claimed that by striking the rock, Moses and Aaron failed to sanctify His name. How so?
- 5) Why did Moses need to strike the rock twice before it would emit abundant water? If G-d did not allow the water to come out after the first blow because it was contrary to His will, why did He allow the water to flow after the second blow?

Forty Years Earlier

Forty years earlier, shortly after the Egyptian exodus, a similar incident occurred. But in that instance, G-d told Moses to strike the rock[2].

Here is the story in Exodus: "There was no water for the people to drink. So the people quarreled with Moses, saying, 'Give us water that we may drink!' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test G-d?'

"The people thirsted there for water, and complained against Moses, saying, 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to make me and my children and my livestock die of thirst?'

"Moses cried out to G-d, saying, 'What shall I do for this people? Just a little longer and they will stone me!'

"G-d said to Moses... 'take into your hand your staff, with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I shall stand there before you on the rock in Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, and the people will drink.'

"Moses did so before the eyes of the elders of Israel. He named the place Massah [testing] and Meribah [quarreling] because of the quarrel of the children of Israel and because of their testing G-d, saying, 'Is the Lord in our midst or not?'"

This episode might explain why 40 years later Moses was under the impression that striking the rock was the way to go. After all, G-d Himself commanded him once before to smite the rock in order to produce its waters.

Why did G-d indeed change His position? What is the reason that in the first incident, G-d instructed Moses to strike the rock, while in the second incident, He insisted on verbal communication? And the difference must have been so colossal -- as to jeopardize Moses' entry into the Land!

A Process of Education

Over the centuries, more than one hundred different interpretations have been offered to explain this disturbing

episode. Today, I wish to present only one, based on a Midrashic tradition.

This particular Midrash, known as Yalkut Shimoni, makes the following comment[3]: "Speak to the rock, do not strike it. G-d told Moses, "When a child is young, the educator may [at times] hit the lad in order to teach. When the child grows into adulthood, however, the educator must rebuke verbally. Similarly, when the rock was but a 'small child,' I instructed you to strike it; but now [after 40 years when it has grown larger] you must only speak to it. Teach it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water."

This is a strange Midrash. What is the comparison between a rock and a child? And how are you supposed to teach a rock a chapter of the Torah? Obviously, according to the Midrash, the story with the rock was more than a physical event concerning an attempt to draw water from a hard inanimate object. It was also a psychological and moral tale about how to educate and refine human "rocks" so that they can produce water.

"A Rock Feels No Pain"

"I am a rock," goes the famous ballad. "A rock feels no pain, and an island never cries." How do you open a sealed heart? Do you smite it or do you speak to it? Do you impact the rock by force or do you negotiate with it verbally, attempting to explain, persuade and enlighten?

When the Jewish people departed from Egypt after decades of physical and psychological oppression, they were slaves. Recall Moses' cry to G-d shortly after the Exodus[4], "What shall I do for this people? Just a little longer and they will stone me!"

There is a critical difference between slaves and free human beings. Slaves respond to orders. Free people do not. They must be educated, informed, instructed, and inspired – for if not, they will not internalize the message and will never make it their own. Slave masters compel obedience through the stick, either literally or figuratively.

Free human beings must not be struck. They respond, not to power but to persuasion. They need to be spoken to. The difference between G-d's command then and now ("strike the rock" vs. "speak to the rock") represented the souls of two different generations: Jews who grew up in slavery and Jews who grew up in freedom. You strike a slave, but speak to a free person.

That is why the generation that emerged from Egyptian bondage was constantly rebelling, hollering, fighting, and arguing. They had simply been through too much trauma to develop a sense of loyalty, confidence, optimism, hope, and an attitude of trust. They had been beaten for too long. The first time Moses encounters a Jew in Egypt he is being beaten by an Egyptian officer. Ultimately, this generation was emotionally unequipped to conquer and settle the Holy Land. They died in the desert.

The generation that departed Egypt possessed extraordinarily lofty souls, never to be repeated in our history. They are the founders of Jewish nationhood, the only generation to experience G-d face-to-face and enjoy His miracles for forty years. Their inner light was infinite, but the outer "rock" needed to be cracked. The "hard skin" they developed over 210 years in exile, needed to be penetrated before its inner vibrant and fresh waters could be discovered. That is why, immediately after the Exodus, G-d instructed Moses to strike the rock. At this point in Jewish history, smiting the "rock" was appropriate, indeed critical.

We all have moments in our lives when our hearts are in jail when we are so emotionally numb that we need a tough wake-up call, to break through the dense husks we created to protect ourselves from pain, love, and truth.

A New Generation

Forty years later, their children and grandchildren, born and raised in liberty and a highly spiritual environment, developed a sense of self quite different from their parents and grandparents. Forty years in the wilderness, in the presence of Moses, Aaron, and divine miracles, the nation had spiritually matured.

But suddenly, they, too, began to lament and kvetch about a lack of water. Yet a subtle reading of the text exposes us to a tune quite different from the tune present in their parents' cry 40 years earlier. This new generation of Jews asks only for water, not for meat or other delicacies. They do not express their craving to return to Egypt. Nor do they wish to stone Moses. They are simply terrified of the prospect of death by thirst. G-d was sensitive to the nuanced distinctions. He commanded Moses to speak to the rock, rather than strike it. "Now you must speak to it, teach it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water," in the above-recorded words of the Midrash. The Jews have come a long way.

The model of smiting must be replaced with the model of teaching and inspiring. The husk is not thick, you need not a staff, you need empathy and compassion. At that critical juncture, Moses was unable to metamorphose himself. Moses, who came to identify so deeply with the generation he painstakingly liberated from Egyptian genocide and slavery and worked incessantly for their development as a free and holy people, could not assume a new model of leadership. Moses, calling the people "rebels," struck the rock. He continued to employ the former method. And he struck it twice because when you attempt to change things through pressure, rather than through persuasion, you must always do it more than once.

Because of Moses' profound love and attachment to that generation — about whom he told G-d, that should He not forgive them, He could erase Moses' name from the Torah[5] — Moses did not abandon his connection to them even now.

That is why G-d told Moses, "You did not have faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel." Instead of trusting G-d's assessment of the new generation, and exposing their elevated spiritual status, instead of trusting G-d who trusted the people, believing in their potential to get it on their own, Moses diminished their state of consciousness. Moses' place, it turned out, was in the desert with his beloved people, these heroic souls who began the march from slavery to freedom.

The fact that Moses was not destined to enter the promised land was not a punishment, but the result of the truth that he belonged to the generation that left Egypt.

Two Types of Stones

The above explanation will explain another curious anomaly in the biblical description of the two incidents with the water. The description for the "rock" in the first incident is the Hebrew term "tzur." The description of the rock in the second incident is the Hebrew term "selah." Why? In English, we translate both Hebrew words — tzur and selah — to mean a rock.

But in Hebrew, there is a significant difference between the two terms. A tzur is a rock that is hard and solid both in its exterior and interior parts. It is all rock. A selah, on the other hand, is a rock that is hard and rocky on its outside, but its interior contains water or moisture[6].

When you are dealing with a "rock" that has no moisture stored in it, you have no choice but to smite it. However, when you are confronted with a rock that is merely rocky on the outside but soft on the inside, you have no right to smite it. Now, you must speak to it and inspire it to reveal its internal waters of wisdom, love, and inspiration.

Understanding the Generation

Leaders, parents, and educators must always understand and feel the zeitgeist of their generation. There is a time when you strike the rock, and there is a time when you must talk to the rock.

To be sure, discipline is vital. It fosters self-confidence and responsibility, but only when it follows genuine love, safety, and attachment. If my child and student do not feel understood, celebrated, cherished, and safe, all forms of emotional striking might cause the rock to retreat behind heavier layers of rockness. You defeat your objective.

In the wise words of King Solomon[7]: "There is a time for everything under the heaven... A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to wreck and a time to build... A time to embrace and a time to shun embrace... A time to love and a time to loathe; a time for war and a time for peace." May we add: A time for smiting a rock and a time for speaking to a rock. We must always be ready to change our mentality based on the reality confronting us.

But we can only do this for others if we do it for ourselves. If the only method I know is to strike my own inner rock, this is what I will do to my children and students. Only when I learn

how to speak with empathy to my own inner rock, can I radiate this to my loved ones.

When the opportunity is ripe for love and respect, when you see that you can change reality through empathy, enlightenment, and seeing the infinite light stored inside the rock, you must employ this path with the same vigor and passion that you employed previously the method of coercion. Only then can you mold a generation that is ready to change the world and enter their Promised Land.

(This essay is based on a discourse by the Tzemach Tzedek, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, the third Chabad Rebbe (1789-1866); and on a discourse of the year 1872 by his youngest son, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch, the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1834-1882); and on a discourse of 1909 by his son, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch (1860-1920) [8]).

[1] Numbers 20 2:12.

[2] Exodus 17:2-7.

[3] Yalkut Shimoni Chukas Remez 763 toward the end. This book is one of the most popular early Midrashic collections on the Bible, compiled by Rabbi Shimon Ashkenazi HaDarshan of Frankfurt (circa 1260). Many Midrashim are known only because they are cited in this work.

[4] Exodus 17:2-7.

[5] Exodus 32:32.

[6] An interesting observation only demonstrates the extraordinary meticulousness of the Hebrew tongue. The word selah is comprised of three Hebrew letters, samach, lamed and ayin. Now, when you spell out the letter samach fully, the middle letter will be mem. When you spell out the letter lamed, the middle letter is mem. Finally, when you spell out ayin, the middle letter is yud. Together they make up the word mayim, which means water. This represents the fact that the selah is only rock on its outside. But if you probe its strata, and you reach its most inner point, you will encounter water. (Beer Mayim Chaim Chukas).

[7] Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

[8] These discourses are published in Or HaTorah Chukas; Sefer Hamaamarim 5632 vol. 2 Parshas Chukas; Sefer Hamaamarim 5669 Parshas Chukas. Some of their ideas may be based on Klei Yakar's final explanation of this episode (Klei Yakar to Numbers Ibid.).

Office of the Chief Rabbi - Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Chukat

The best way to influence people.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

People will most likely be influenced by you, if they know that you love them.

In Parshat Chukat, we're told about the sad passing of Aharon, the High Priest, and the reaction of the people to his passing was quite extraordinary.

The Torah tells us 'vayivku oto shloshim yom kol Beit Yisrael' – the entire house of Israel wept for him for thirty days.

When Aharon's brother Moshe, the leader of the nation, passed away, as is described in the last chapter of the Torah, again we are told there that the nation wept for him for thirty days.

However, we are not told 'kol Beit Yisrael', the entire house of Israel.

Why this difference?

The sifrei explains Moshe's role was to be the national authority.

Rav Yisroel Salanter used to say, "If I am a Rabbi and everybody loves me, I am not a Rabbi, and if I am a Rabbi and nobody loves me, I am not a mensch."

You cannot be an authority and carry out leadership with conviction, if you are trying to please everybody all the time. Some decisions will be unpopular because you have to do what is right. And that was why the grief for Moshe was not as intense as it might have been.

Aharon's role however was very different.

He was the high Priest. He was the spiritual role model. He reached out to people with compassion and with love.

In Pirkei Avot, Hillel tells us 'Hevei MiTalmidav shel Aharon', all of us should be like the disciples of Aharon: 'ohev shalom v'rodef shalom' – like Aharon we need to love peace and pursue it.

'Ohev et habriot umerkarvan laTorah' – and like Aharon we should love everybody and bring them close to Torah.

Notice, the two are connected, because you only stand a good chance of bringing people close to Torah, if they know that you love them.

If you want to enhance the lives of others, if you want them to improve their ways, if you want to inspire, guide and influence them,

they need to know that you're doing it because you're interested in them – because you love them.

From Aharon we learn that if I would like to influence and inspire you, then you need to know that I want you to be the best you that you can possibly be and not because I want you to be just like me.

Shabbat Shalom

<https://rabbierefgoldberg.org/>

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

The Infinite Depth of Profundity of Each and Every Mitzva

Parshas Chukas begins with the mitzva of פרה אדומה, which is often seen as the quintessential חוק – law whose reasoning and

rationale elude our comprehension. We cannot possibly understand how burning a red cow, and then mixing its ashes with water, which is sprinkled on a person who had become tamei (impure), makes him tahor (pure). This all seems very random. This mitzva does not appear to have any logic. The Torah therefore introduces this section with the words התורה חוקת זאת, pronouncing that these laws are a חוק, a law which we must faithfully obey despite our inability to understand its reason.

Many commentators raised the question of why the Torah introduces this mitzva with the expression התורה חוקת זאת, rather than הפרה חוקת זאת. If the Torah wants to teach us that the law of the פרה אדומה is a חוק, then it should refer to it as הפרה חוקת – the inscrutable law of the פרה אדומה. But instead, the Torah speaks of this law as התורה חוקת – the statute of the Torah," as though it somehow embodies the entire Torah. Why?

The Beis Ha'levi explains that this mitzva is called חוקת התורה because it sheds light on the nature of all mitzvos in the Torah. Many other mitzvos have reasons which we can understand, and numerous scholars throughout the ages have uncovered these reasons. However, the Beis Ha'levi writes, we must not make the mistake of thinking that these explanations exhaust the full depth of the meaning and significance of the mitzvos. To the contrary, any reasons that we can find barely begin to scratch the surface of the profundity of the Torah's laws. The true reasons behind the mitzvos are far deeper than the furthest limits of human comprehension can grasp.

In this sense, the Beis Ha'levi explains, the law of the פרה אדומה is called חוקת התורה – the statute of the Torah." The mysterious, inscrutable nature of this mitzva must inform our attitude toward all mitzvos. Just as we cannot even begin to understand the reason behind the פרה אדומה, we are similarly incapable of fully comprehending the reasons behind any other mitzva.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, adds that the Beis Ha'levi's insight is expressed in the term used by halachic texts in reference to the third Shabbos meal – סעודות שלוש, which means, "three meals." This term seems very odd. After all, this is just one meal, not three. Indeed, many prefer the term שלישיית סעודה – the third meal," which more accurately expresses what this meal is. In halachic jargon, however, this meal is known as סעודות שלוש. The common explanation for this term is that this meal reflects the nature of all three Shabbos meals. When we eat a meal on Friday night, there is no clear indication that we eat for the sake of honoring Shabbos, because we eat supper every night. The same is true of Shabbos lunch. סעודות שלוש, by contrast, is generally eaten when we do not have much of an appetite. In the winter, particularly, סעודות שלוש is eaten not long after we completed a big lunch, when we are not very interested in eating a meal. This meal, then, is truly סעודות שלוש – the

embodiment of all three Shabbos meals, as it demonstrates that they were all eaten not simply because we wanted to eat, but in fulfillment of the mitzva to give honor to Shabbos.

By the same token, the mitzva of פְּרֹחַת אֲדוּמָה reflects the nature of our observance of all the Torah's mitzvos. Just as we clearly recognize our inability to understand this mitzva, so must we acknowledge the infinite depth and profundity of all the mitzvos, even those whose reasoning we can comprehend on some level.

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Weekly Parsha CHUKAT
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah interrupts, so to speak, its narrative of the events that befell the Jewish people in the desert with the description of a commandment that admittedly has no rational human understanding in logical terms. Even the great King Solomon, the wisest and most analytical of all humans, was forced to admit that understanding this parsha of the Torah was beyond his most gifted intellect and talents.

If the Torah is meant to instruct us in life and its values, to improve and influence our behavior and lifestyle and to help us achieve our goal of being a holy people then why insert this parsha in the Torah when it can seemingly have no practical impact on our daily life or broaden our understanding of God's omnipresence in our lives?

Though there is a section of Mishna devoted to the laws and halachic technicalities of the sacrifice of the "red cow" it does not deal with the underlying motives for the existence of this commandment, and it also does not address why this parsha is inserted in the midst of the description of the events that occurred in the desert to the generation of Jews who left Egypt and stood at Mount Sinai.

We have historical record and description in the Mishna and from non-rabbinic sources as to the actual performance of the commandment in Temple times. This comes as a reminder of our necessary obeisance to God's commandments even if they are not always subject to actual human understanding. Yet, some glimmer of comprehension is demanded by us to make this parsha meaningful to us.

I think that perhaps the Torah comes to point out the very fact that human life is in fact always irrational and that human behavior many times defies any logic or good sense. How could the generation that left Egypt and witnessed the revelation at Sinai complain about food when there was adequate Heavenly food? How could they prefer Egypt or the desert itself over living in the Land of Israel? And how could

Moshe's and Aharon's own tribe and relatives rise against them in defiant and open rebellion?

Are these not basically incoherent and irrational decisions with a terrible downside to them? And yet they occurred and continue to recur constantly in Jewish and general life throughout history. In spite of our best efforts and our constant delusion that we exist in a rational world, the Torah here comes to inform us that that is a false premise.

If everyday life defies logic and accurate prediction then it is most unfair and in fact illogical to demand of Torah and God to provide us with perfect understanding of commandments and laws. The Torah inserts this parsha into the middle of its narrative about the adventures of the Jewish people in the desert to point out that the mysteries of life abound in the spiritual world just as they do in the mundane and seemingly practical world.

One of the great lessons of Judaism is that we are to attempt to behave rationally even if at the very same time, we realize that much in our personal and national lives is simply beyond our understating.

Shabbat shalom
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Parshas Chukas
The Power Of Prayer

"And Moshe sent emissaries from Kadesh to the king of Edom..."(20:14)

Moshe sends a delegation to the king of Edom requesting permission to pass through his country. He instructs his emissaries to relate the Jews' experience in Egypt to the king. The Torah records that one of the statements which was made to the king was "vanitz'ak el Hashem vayishma koleinu" – "and we cried out to Hashem and He heard our voice".¹ From the fact that the verse states that Hashem heard our voice, rather than our cries, Rashi interprets that Moshe is sending a warning to Edom that we have the legacy of our Patriarchal blessing received from Yitzchak, "hakol kol Yaakov", the power of the voice of Torah; Bnei Yisroel are infused with the blessing that when we pray, we are answered.²

The king of Edom responds by saying that he will come out with sword in hand if Bnei Yisroel attempt to traverse his land. Rashi again comments that through his words the king of Edom is invoking the Patriarchal legacy which was conferred upon Eisav, the father of Edom, "by the sword you shall live".³

Moshe must have been aware that just as Bnei Yisroel have the power of prayer to facilitate their success, the Edomites have the power of war. Why does Moshe assume that Bnei Yisroel's Patriarchal legacy is superior?

The key to solving this dilemma lies in Rashi's comment on the preceding verse. The emissaries relate "and with us the Egyptians dealt evilly and with our fathers."⁴ The construct of the verse appears convoluted. Why does the verse not simply state that "the Egyptians dealt evilly with us and our fathers"? Rashi explains that the verse is stressing the notion that the affliction suffered by our fathers is a byproduct of our affliction. The "fathers" referred to in the verse are not our biological fathers who endured the servitude in Egypt with us, rather our Patriarchal Fathers who, although they were not present with us in Egypt, suffered our pain.⁵

Why is it necessary for Moshe to allude to this concept in his message to the king of Edom? The power of prayer which Bnei Yisroel have rests not only in our capacity to extricate ourselves from our own predicament, but also in our ability to relieve our Patriarchs of the distress caused to them by our situation. It is this ability which motivates Hashem to answer our prayers, not only in our merit, but in the merit of our Forefathers as well. The ability with which Edom is imbued benefits only them, and not their forefathers. Their forefathers do not feel the distress of the later generations, for they do not enjoy a closeness to them as do the Forefathers of Bnei Yisroel to the Jewish nation.

1.20:16 2.Rashi ibid. 3.Ibid. 4.20:15 5.Ibid.

Community Minded

"And Moshe raised his arm and struck the rock..." (20:11)

The Talmud relates that after Miriam died, the well, which was a water source for Bnei Yisroel in the desert, disappeared. 1 Hashem commanded Moshe to bring forth water from a rock. The Torah records that Moshe and Aharon sinned. 2 However, the exact nature of the sin is not specified in the verses. Rashi understands that Moshe's sin was a result of striking the rock to bring forth water rather than communicating with it. 3 The Ramban questions Rashi's approach, for Hashem instructed Moshe to take the staff from the Holy of Holies and bring it with him. If Hashem had not intended for Moshe to strike the rock, why had He commanded Moshe to bring the staff along with him?⁴

The Maharsha points out an apparent contradiction between two Talmudic statements: The Talmud in Tractate Ta'anis relates that the well, the source of water for the entire Bnei Yisroel, was in the merit of the prophetess Miriam. 5 However, the Talmud in Tractate Bava Metzia relates that since Avraham Avinu supplied the angels with water, his descendants had water in the desert. Was the well in the merit of Avraham or Miriam?⁶

The Talmud states that the merits of an individual help for the needs of that individual. However, an environmental change

that will benefit the needs of many can only be achieved through the merits of the entire community. 7 An individual is generally concerned with his own short-term needs and of those close to him, while the responsibility and concern for long-term needs is borne by the community. A community, by nature, is an ongoing perpetual entity and therefore, it has the responsibility to ensure that not only its short-term needs are met, but, to whatever extent possible, that all of its future members' needs will be met as well. Consequently, all matters that might have long-term societal implications such as ecological and environmental issues must be addressed on a communal level, and then filtered down to the individuals. For a miracle to occur which would create a long-term environmental change, Bnei Yisroel had to ask as a community.

Once the well of Miriam was no longer available in the desert, the individual was concerned with his immediate need for water. Hashem instructed Moshe to give over the message to Bnei Yisroel that they should not request water to satiate only their individual needs, rather that their concern should be on a communal level, for this would ensure the availability of a long-term reservoir that would serve as a perpetual source of water. The staff symbolizes leadership, as we find in the blessing to Yehuda "the staff will not depart from Yehuda". 8 Moshe was not instructed to bring along the staff in order to strike the rock, rather as a representation of his leadership, for as leader he would herald the energies of the entire community, bringing them together to request a perpetual water source.

In Avraham's merit the needs of the individual were met. What Miriam's merit accomplished was that Bnei Yisroel would have a perpetual source of water for the ongoing community. The Talmud refers to this quality of Miriam as a "parnes", a person who ensures that all of the needs of the entire community are met.⁹

1.Ta'anis 9a 2.20:12 3.20:11 4.20:1 5.9a 6.86b, See Maharsha 7.Ta'anis 9a. 8.Ibid., See Rashi 9.Ta'anis ibid