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Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chukas

How Does the "Mother Cow" Make Up for the Mess Made by Her "Child"?
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion:
#1343 – Making a Mi'she'bairach for a Choleh on Shabbos – Is It Permitted?
Good Shabbos!

How Does the "Mother Cow" Make Up for the Mess Made by Her "Child"?
The Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Chukas (quoted by Rashi) discusses the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer). The only way a person can regain tahara (purity) after becoming tamei through contact with the dead is via the ritual of the Parah Adumah. Therefore, nowadays when we no longer have access to the ashes of the Parah Adumah, we all remain contaminated with tumas meis (death impurity).

The Medrash gives an analogy for the Parah Adumah: It can be compared to the child of the king's handmaiden, who soiled the palace. The king will command, "Let the mother come and clean up the mess made by her child." The Medrash means to say that the purpose of the Parah Adumah is for the "mother cow" to come and atone for the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf).

The obvious question is that other than the fact that the parah is a cow and the eigel is a calf, which is the offspring of a cow, what is the connection between Parah Adumah, which is related to tumas meis and the purification therefrom, and the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav? The cheit ha'eigel (Sin of the Calf) was a form of Avodah Zarah, or at least an aveira bordering on Avodah Zarah. How is that related to tumas meis and the Parah Adumah? I would like to give two interpretations of this Medrash:

The first is a beautiful Kli Yakar on the parsha. When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, the Gemara says they went through a spiritual purification process. Had we not sinned with the eigel, there would have been no such thing as tumas meis. That doesn't mean that there would not be death in the world. No. People would still die, but they would die a different type of death. They would not die at the hands of the Malach Hamaves. They would

die with what is called a misas neshika (death by a 'kiss'). Somehow, the Ribono shel Olam would 'kiss them' and their souls would leave them. It is for this reason that some people say that the death of the righteous does not engender tumah, but rather the death of the righteous comes via a 'kiss'. Death via a 'kiss' does not cause tumas meis.

This, says the Kil Yakar, is what Chazal mean when they say that the Parah Adumah atones for the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav. The caused a descent of the whole concept of death, such that from that point forward, death engendered tumas meis. Now we need a Parah Adumah to regain a state of tahara. Therefore, the Parah Adumah is an appropriate kapara for the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav.

I saw another understanding of why the Parah Adumah is a kapara for the cheit haeigel in the sefer Meorei Ohr. Rashi notes on the fact that the Parah Adumah must be temima (without blemish) that the symbolism represents Klal Yisrael, who were without blemish (prior to the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav) and then became ba'alei mumim (blemished). They were given the Parah Adumah to allow them to return to their blemish-free status.

What does this mean? The author notes that Rashi says in Chumash on the pasuk, "Tamim you shall be with Hashem your G-d" (Devorim 18:13) that a person should just accept what the Ribono shel Olam gives and not try to figure out what is happening or what will happen in the future. The Meorei Ohr states that when they did the cheit haeigel, they were guilty of this very thing that they were warned against in the pasuk "Tamim you shall be with Hashem your G-d." They tried to "outsmart" the Ribono shel Olam or to be more pro-active than the Ribono shel Olam himself.

All the Rishonim say that when they made the Eigel Hazahav it was not literally an idol. They were desperate: "Here we are in the wilderness. Until now, Moshe Rabbeinu was taking care of everything. Now what are we going to do?" They decided they needed to take matters into their own hands. They made an Eigel Hazahav in the hope that this calf would be the medium through which Hashem would speak to them. What were they actually supposed to do? They were supposed to follow the dictum of "Tamim you shall be with Hashem your G-d." They should have said, "If the Ribono shel Olam took us out of Mitzrayim and the Ribono shel Olam gave us the mann and the be'er (well), etc., then the Ribono shel Olam will figure this out Himself. It is not for us to try to figure out new ways to interact with the Ribono shel Olam." That is the temimus that was required under those circumstances.

Parah Adumah is all about nullifying our seichel (intellect) to a Higher Authority. As we all know, Parah Adumah is the quintessential chok (unfathomable mitzvah). It is a paradox that makes no sense. While purifying the impure, it makes those who are pure impure. So then why do we do it? Because the Ribono shel Olam said so! We accept that. We have no questions. And we go further. Parah Adumah represents the antidote of what they did by the cheit haeigel. The unblemished (tamim) Parah Adumah represents this concept of temimus / innocence that they lacked when they made the Eigel Hazahav. That is why it is the "mother cow who comes and cleans up the mess made by her offspring (the calf)."

Mission Accomplished!

The pasuk in Parshas Chukas says, "And Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon on Hor Hahor, on the boundary of the Land of Edom, saying: Let Aharon be gathered to his nation for he will not come into the land that I have given to the Children of Israel..." (Bamidbar 20:23-24) The time for the death of Aharon has arrived. The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 11a) says "Hashem sits and completes the lives of the righteous from day to day." This means that a tzadik only dies when his time is up. He is allotted X number of years to his life, and when that time is up he leaves this world. However, because he is a tzadik, the Ribono shel Olam doesn't take him away early. He lives his life to the full extent of the time he was granted at birth.

The Sefas Emes asks that the previously quoted pasuk seems to contradict the principle of a Gemara in Rosh Hashana. The pasuk implies that Aharon is not dying here because "his days are full and his time is up" but rather because he does not have permission to enter Eretz Yisrael with Bnei Yisrael (because of his involvement in the incident at Mei Merivah).

To answer this question, the Sefas Emes makes a beautiful observation: When it says that tzadikim live their full lives," it does not mean in terms of days and years. It means in terms of purpose. Every person is put here on this world to fulfill a mission. When that mission is fulfilled, then the person leaves this world. With a tzadik, until he fulfills the mission that the Ribono shel Olam had in mind for him when He put his neshama on this earth, the tzadik won't die.

The Sefas Emes elaborates: Had Aharon been allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael, there would have been more mission for him to accomplish. He would have done the avodah; he would serve as the Kohen Gadol; he would have been in charge of the avodah in the Mishkan. He would have what to do. But because of the aveira of Mei Merivah, he couldn't go into the land and consequently, his mission had ended, so he had to die.

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Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org.

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THE STORE CAN WAIT

Brisk on Chumash compiled by Rabbi Asher Bergman

Zos Hatorah Adam Ki Yamus BiOhel

Rav Chaim Brisker

This is the law of a man who dies in the tent (Bamidbar 19:14)

The Talmud (Berachos 66b) interprets this verse homiletically: "This is the law (or Torah) of a man who dies in the tent" - Torah knowledge cannot be sustained in a person unless he 'kills himself' (i.e., endures self-deprivation) in the 'tents' of Torah." Rav Chaim once explained the significance of this particular figure of speech- "unless he kills himself (or makes himself dead)" - by means of a parable:

Once there was a man who worked very hard to make a living, spending almost all his waking hours buying merchandise or minding his store. He had no time to even go to shul for communal prayer, let alone study the Torah. One day the man took a good look at himself and began to think about his spiritual lot in life. He was getting older and less energetic. In a few more years he would be called to the heavenevaluated and to be rewarded or punished accordingly. Was he ready for this judgment day?

He decided that he would begin to cut down on his business pursuits and spend some time in the beis midrash every morning. The first day he came late to the store, his wife asked him where he had been. The man managed to concoct some excuse for his lateness that day and the next, but eventually his wife, suspecting something foul, went for herself to search and find out what her husband was up to. When she finally found him slouched over a pile of books in the beis midrash, she was furious.

"Don't you know that the store is full of customers at this hour?" she demanded. "I can forgive you for the loss of revenue that you cause us by not showing up at the store - but you are losing customers, and thus undermining our whole source of livelihood!"

The man turned to his wife and said, "What would you have done if the Angel of Death had come to claim my soul this morning? Would you shout and complain to him as you do now? 'You can't do this! My husband needs to attend to his business affairs! There are customers in the store who need to be served!' These pleas would certainly fall on deaf ears. So simply make believe that I have died. And then, two hours from now, when I get back to the store, you can be all the more relieved that I have returned to life!"

This, Rav Chaim explained, is what the Sages meant when they said that Torah study requires one to "make himself dead." Just as when death strikes there can be no arguments or excuses whatsoever, so too, if one expects to accomplish anything in the study of Torah he must be firm in his resolve to

keep up his learning in the face of all adversity and hardship, without any excuses or justifications for laxity. -Toras Chaim

From **Chaim Ozer Shulman** cshulman@gmail.com

Chukas

In the Parsha of Mei Merivah Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon, "Yaan Ki Lo Heemantem Bi Lehakdisheini Leeinei B'nai Yisroel Lachen Lo Saviu Es Hakahal Hazeh El Haaretz Asher Nasati Lahem". (Perek 20 Pasuk 12). Because you didn't trust me and failed to make a Kiddush Hashem in front of B'nai Yisroel therefore you may not bring the nation into Eretz Yisroel. What is difficult to understand is how this particular punishment of not bringing the people into Eretz Yisroel relates to the Chet of Mei Merivah? What is also troublesome is how Moshe and Aharon could make the mistake of hitting the rock, when Hashem told them explicitly: "Videebartem El Haselah", to speak to the rock?

Rashi on Pasuk Yud-Alef states that at first they spoke to the rock but it was the wrong rock and therefore no water came out. So they thought, maybe we ought to hit the rock, and the proper rock appeared and they hit it. But this doesn't entirely explain their actions, because if Hashem told them specifically to speak to the rock then even if at first water didn't come out, why did they think that it was proper to hit the rock, and why did they think that hitting it would help?

I would like to suggest the following: As we know, there are two types of miracles. There is a Neis Nistar, a hidden miracle, and Neis Nigleh, an open miracle. The Seforno, however, in explaining the Chet of Moshe & Aharon states that even Neis Nigleh itself has two categories.

First, there is a Neis Nigleh that cannot be accomplished by natural means in those particular circumstances but in other circumstances could be accomplished naturally. An example would be hitting the rock, where in other circumstances hitting a rock could naturally cause water that is blocked by the rock to flow. Second, there is a Neis Nigleh that cannot be done naturally in any form, and which can be accomplished only by Hashem's words. An example would be speaking to the rock. This second level is obviously a higher form of miracle.

Hashem intended to perform the highest form of miracle to show B'nai Yisroel his dedication to them so that they should repent and do Teshuvah. So Moshe & Aharon sinned by performing a lesser miracle.

Now Rashi seems to learn a little differently from the Seforno. He states that the Chet of Moshe & Aharon was, that if they had spoken to the rock B'nai Yisroel would have learned a lesson that if a rock, which doesn't hear or speak and doesn't need Hashem's sustenance, keeps the words of Hashem, we B'nai Yisroel Al Achas Kama Vikamah should listen to Hashem's words.

But I believe that Rashi can still agree with the Seforno that to bring forth water by speaking to the rock would have been a higher level of miracle. With this explanation one can understand how Moshe & Aharon could make the mistake of hitting the rock. They understood that Hashem said to speak to the rock in the first instance, so that if B'nai Yisroel were worthy at that moment of the highest level of miracle then water would flow at Moshe's words. But once they saw that speaking to the rock did not help they understood that B'nai Yisroel were not worthy of the highest level of miracle, and therefore a lesser miracle, one of hitting the rock would have to be performed.

The fact that Hashem said to Moshe (in Pasuk 8) "Kach Es Hamatch", take the rod, perhaps led them to this mistaken conclusion. They understood that the rod was necessary so that if B'nai Yisroel would not turn out to be worthy of the highest level of miracle they would be prepared to hit the rock with the rod. In reality, however, the rod was to be taken, as the Mizrachi states, not to do anything with it but because of the miraculous powers that Hashem placed in the rod, even by just being in Moshe or Aharon's hand.

So Moshe and Aharon's Chet was in believing that even when Hashem promises that he will do something for B'nai Yisroel he only does it if they are worthy of it. And that was for Moshe & Aharon a grave error, since much of what Hashem does for B'nai Yisroel they are not worthy of, but Hashem does so by his good will.

So now we can understand what the Midah Kineged Midah - measure for measure - was in Moshe & Aharon's punishment. Since Moshe & Aharon believed that B'nai Yisroel would have to earn all that is promised to them, they could not take the people into Eretz Yisroel, because the actual gift of Eretz Yisroel is not something that the people necessarily earned. It's something that Hashem promised and will fulfill whether or not B'nai Yisroel merit [deserve] it.

One last thought. In the beginning of Vaeschanan on the Pasuk of "Vaeschanan El Hashem BaEis Hahi Leimar ... Eebra Na Viereh" And I beseeched Hashem at that time saying ... Let me cross and see the Land, Rashi says Ein Chinun Bichol Makom Elah Matnas Chinam, that Vaeschanan means Moshe asked for it as a gift. This fits in nicely with my explanation. Moshe Rabeinu understood now that Bnei Yisroel can receive Eretz Yisroel even without meriting it, and he sinned by not realizing it. But now he's asking that he too should receive a gift without meriting it, and should see Eretz Yisroel as a Matnas Chinam. But H'K'B'H' Midakdek Im Chasidav Kichut Hasaara.

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parsha Insights

Big, Brash, and Blonde?

"This is the (unexplainable) decree of the Torah" (19:02)

I couldn't help thinking as I watched pictures of President Donald Trump sitting in the operations room, watching the attack on the Iranian nuclear plant at Fordo, that he epitomized the United States of America.

There he was, flanked by two flags: to his right, the Star-Spangled Banner, and to his left, the seal of the President of the United States.

On his head was America's gift to the headwear of the world: a red baseball cap, with the slogan, "Make America Great Again." Trump is the perfect American icon: big, brash and blonde.

And then, in his formal announcement about the bombing at the White House, President Trump said, "We love you G-d. We love our great military – protect them! G-d bless the Middle East! G-d bless Israel! And G-d bless America!"

In Genesis 12:3, Hashem said to Avraham, "I will bless those who bless you (i.e., the Jewish People) and whoever curses you, I will curse."

The Book of Daniel opens with Daniel's interpretation of Nevuchadnetzar's dream in which Nevuchadnetzar sees a great statue. The parts of this statue represent the empires that would exile the Jewish People. The head represents Babylon, the two arms represent Media and Persia, the torso represents Greece. The two feet represent Edom (Esav) and Yishmael - Christianity and Islam.

There is a basic difference between the arms and the legs. A person can function with one arm, but with one leg, he is essentially powerless.

The two final exiles work as a team and they cannot oppress the Jewish People without the co-operation and assistance of the other. So, which is it? Are Edom's spiritual heirs, the West, the partners of Islam and its dogmatic concept of a world subjugated to Islam, or do they love Israel like President Trump?

It must have been about ten years ago that I realized that something had changed at the BBC. Suddenly, I saw reports about Muslim festivals, informing their viewers of the details of, say, Eid al-Fitr, and how this was a beautiful time of feasting, prayer, and gift-giving. It's not that the BBC never covers Jewish Festivals, but the tone of the piece was more than informative. To my mind, it bordered on proselytizing. It smacked of a trailer for Islam 101.

Arab investors have significantly invested in the UK. For example, Qatar's sovereign wealth fund owns stakes in Barclays Bank, Sainsbury's, and Heathrow Airport, and they also own Harrods and the Ritz. The UAE has also made major investments, such as Abu Dhabi's investments in the UK's renewable energy sector. All of these investments show the strong economic connections between the Gulf states and the UK. The BBC is primarily

funded by the UK television license fee and does not receive direct funding from Arab states, but there is a definite Arab bias there for all to see. The pro-Arab tendency in British society is not new. The connection between the Brits and the Arabs goes back to the late nineteenth century, and before.

Several notable English Arabists include writer, archaeologist, and political officer Gertrude Bell, who played a significant role in the formation of modern Iraq and was deeply involved in Middle Eastern politics in the early 20th century. Harry St. John Philby, also known as Jack Philby, was an advisor to King Abdulaziz ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. He converted to Islam in 1930 and later became an adviser to Ibn Saud, urging him to unite the Arabian Peninsula under Saudi rule. The Arab Legion in Jordan was founded and led by another Englishman, Glubb 'Pasha,' whose full name was John Bagot Glubb. He was instrumental in organizing and commanding the Arab Legion, which became a key part of Jordan's military forces. And of course, most famous of all was T.E. Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, who played a crucial role in fomenting the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War One.

Why do the English and the Arabs have this mutual 'love affair'?

It could be that they are so opposite – the climate and topography of Devon could not be more different than the Nedy desert – and opposites attract. Both nations place a high premium on honor.

But there is also a significant pro-Jewish strain that runs through English culture: George Eliot, Lord Palmerston, and Benjamin Disraeli, were notable philo-Semites of the 19th century, along with Sir Robert Peel, who supported Jewish emancipation, and Thomas Babington Macaulay, who spoke in favor of Jewish civil rights. Also, Charles Dickens shifted later in life toward a more positive view of the Jews. Historian Paul Johnson points out that in the First World War, just at the time when the British government was in a position to create a Jewish national home in the Middle East, the leaders or that government, including David Lloyd George were largely low-church Presbyterians who had all been brought up on a diet of Tanach. To them, the return of Israel to its Land was axiomatic.

So which is it? Is Edom, the West in a symbiotic partnership with Islam to dominate the Jews – or are they like Donald Trump who says, "May G-d bless Israel?"

The Midrash says that when Hashem was giving us the Torah, everything in the world stopped. Everything was silent. The nations of the world, fearing another giant flood, sent for Bilaam, their prophet, to ask him what was happening. Bilaam replied with the words of Psalm 29, that Hashem was not bringing a flood or destruction, but "Hashem was giving 'Oz' — the Torah — to His People." To which the Nations replied, "May Hashem bless His people with peace."

If we want to ingratiate ourselves with the nations of the world, they will turn around and say, "You are not like us. You are a nation that dwells alone. (Bamidbar 23:9)"

But when we, as proud Jews, sanctify the name of the Torah, when we behave like Jews who stood at Sinai, then the whole world will put on its Donald Trump hat and proclaim, "May Hashem bless His people with peace!"

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

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Chukat and July 4th: American Independence and Moses' Mysterious Mistake

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Just what exactly did Moses do that was so, irreparably, wrong?

Commentators have struggled for centuries to identify the unforgivable mistake that Moses commits in this week's Torah reading, which seals his fate and blocks his entry into the land of Israel. According to Rashi (Num. 20:12), his choosing to hit the rock rather than speak to it was the crucial error; Nachmanides, however, argues on this. If the concern is, as the verse indicates, that an opportunity to impress the people with a miraculous display was lost, it is no more natural for a rock to produce water when being struck

than it is when being spoken to. What, then, was so different about the path that he took?

A further question revolves around the apparently unforgivable nature of Moses' action. The Torah later will tell us again about Moses' repeated entreaties to have his fate reversed, and to be allowed entry into the lands. And yet it is all to no avail. Not only was this devastating for him, it is discouraging for us; we read about this again (Deut. 32:48-52), right before Yom Kippur, a time when belief in the power of repentance is crucial and axiomatic. And yet we enter into those days with a message of apparent futility in undoing a divine decree, and hopelessness in an effort to change the consequences of a mistake.

The ambiguity in the text as to the precise nature of Moses' offense has led to a multiplicity of suggestions in the commentaries, which in turn has heaped much more guilt on Moses than he deserves; in the words of Shadal, he "committed one sin but the commentators piled upon him thirteen sins and more, as each invented a new sin". And yet, Moses, who bore so much for the Jewish people, is doing so once again; he is serving as the tableau for the "seventy faces of the Torah", which allows for multiple messages to emerge from a single source.

To address first the irrevocability of the decree upon Moses, some suggest that it reflects the fact that it was actually not a punishment, which should have been responsive to repentance. Rather, it cemented the reality that Moses was not the leader who met that moment in time. (See Rabbi Jacob J. Schachter, *Mitokh HaHa-Ohel*, I, pp. 477-482, for a fascinating suggestion along these lines, and for a detailed discussion of this topic.)

Perhaps there is room for yet one more interpretation in that vein. If indeed it is to be understood that the consequence for Moses was not a punishment but rather a reflection of his incapability for the role of leader of the next phase, this can inform our understanding of what went wrong at that moment.

This point in time was a transition from a state of slavery in Egypt to a state of independence and freedom in the Land of Israel, with a transitional phase in between of overt miraculous divine protection in the desert. The crucial difference between slavery and freedom is that of personal agency. The slave has no control over his choices; he can only carry out his master's will, and should he hesitate or refuse to do so, his master will coerce him physically, perhaps by striking him. In fact, Moses's first entry into the lives of the Jewish people was his intervention when one such master was striking a Jewish slave.

In contrast, a free person has agency and free will to make his own choices. In the Torah's vision, this does not mean simply so that he can do whatever he wants; it is so. In this exposition of the verse, the words 'this is the Torah' are taken to refer to the study of Torah, and the tent mentioned in the verse is taken to refer to the study hall of Torah. One may ask why this principle is derived specifically from a verse found in the laws of the red heifer. What is the connection between these laws and the study of Torah? Rav Mordechai Ilan, in his work *Mikdash Mordechai*, cites a midrash which says that the parah adumah is actually an allusion to the Jewish nation. He offers two explanations to this midrash. First, he says that a unique characteristic of the Jewish nation is its readiness to accept all of God's laws even before knowing what they entailed, as reflected in their statement at Mt. Sinai, 'we will do and we will listen,' meaning that they agreed to observe the Torah's commandments before learning what they entailed. In this way, they were accepting all of the Torah as, ultimately, being a chok, a decree from God which they accepted upon themselves without first understanding it. The parah adumah is the classical example of a chok, whose purpose is extremely hard to fathom. The Jewish nation, thus, accepted all of the Torah upon themselves as if it consisted completely of laws such as the parah adumah, and that is why the midrash says that the parah adumah alludes to the Jewish people. Rabbi Ilan's second explanation of the midrash is that the parah adumah is able to bring about purity and impurity, and this is also something that the Jewish people has been able to do historically. Achaz, for example who worshipped idols and closed down the study halls, gave birth to Chizkiyahu, who, in his years of king of Yehudah, made sure that everyone in the nation was learned in even the most esoteric laws of the

Torah, such as the laws of purity and impurity. According to both of these explanations, in any case, the midrash is telling us that the red heifer, or parah adumah, alludes to some special characteristic of the Jewish nation as a whole.

Based on this midrash, we can understand why the principle of the need to 'kill oneself' in the tents of Torah in order for one's Torah study to have permanence is derived from a verse that is found in the middle of the laws of the red heifer. The verse states, 'when a man dies in a tent, the word used for 'man' here is 'adam.' As we have mentioned many times in the past, Rabbi Ephraim of Lunshitz, in his *Olelos Ephraim*, points out that of all the words for 'man' in the Hebrew language- ish, gever, enosh and adam- only the word adam retains its singular form when used to indicate the plural. This is because the individual Jew is always associated with the nation as a whole, which is a characteristic nit shared by any other nation. That is why, according to one opinion in the Talmud, the corpse of a non-Jew does not cause defilement to someone who is in the same tent, because the verse from which this kind of defilement derived, the word adam is used to refer to the corpse. Only a Jew is referred to by the term 'adam.' We can, then, extrapolate that when the Talmud in Berachos derives a principle regarding Torah study from the verse introducing the laws of defilement through being in the same tent as a human corpse, this principle has something to do with the corporate nature of Torah study by the Jewish people. The Torah has been described by many great rabbis, including Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, as the soul of the Jewish people. When one studies Torah, he must do so with a recognition of this fact, and gear his study toward the actualization of the Jewish soul. Someone who studies for his own personal benefit, out of intellectual curiosity, or to be known as a scholar, is certainly meritorious in that he is, after all, studying God's word, but he is missing the wider picture. Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook explained the statement of the Talmud that the land lay waste because people did not make the blessing over the Torah before they engaged in its study to mean that they did not take into consideration, in their Torah study, the message of that blessing, which says that God chose us from among all the nations and gave us His Torah. In other words, people studied Torah for their own purposes, and not in order to develop the soul of the nation and help it actualize its national destiny. Perhaps, then, the idea of killing oneself in the tents of Torah is to minimize one's personal interests when he studies Torah, and emphasize the importance of the Torah for the proper development of the Jewish nation. Only when Torah is studied with this goal in mind will it have permanence.

Rav Kook on Chukat: Beyond Human Logic

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

Thu, Jul 3, 5:03 AM (19 hours ago)

Rav Kook Torah

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)

Dvar Torah - Carrying a Big Stick
Project Genesis Jul 3, 2025, 8:27 PM

Dvar Torah **By Rabbi Label Lam**

Parshas Chukas - Carrying a Big Stick

HASHEM spoke to Moshe, 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. (Bamidbar 20:7-8) It's not so easy to pinpoint the mistake that caused Moshe and Aaron not to enter the Holy Land. It seems purposely obscured. Was it that Moshe hit the rock rather than speaking to it? Was it that he hit it twice? Was it that he

spoke disparagingly about the congregation? Was it a loss of patience? In any case, why was Moshe told to take a stick if he was to speak to the rock? Is that not a mixed signal and a cause for confusion? Is he to speak to the rock or to hit it? What was the purpose of telling Moshe to take the stick if the intention was for him to speak?

A friend of mine shared with me an educational point. It helps to speak to the rock when you have a stick in your hand! Even if you don't use the stick, having that giant symbol of authority, helps pry open the ears of the listener. It's no mystery that a policeman gets a little more respect because of the billy club he swings or the fire power he carries on his hip. It's like Teddy Roosevelt had famously uttered, "Speak softly and carry a big stick!" This is a good thing for everybody if properly understood!

Someone told me that a young man came to visit the previous Skverer Rebbe and he sat down in a very casual manner, bordering on disrespect. The Rebbe was noticing his posture when the young man declared confidently, "I am only afraid of HASHEM!" The Rebbe responded, "Do you know how many "Yiras" — "Layers of fear" — that you have to go through to come to Yiras HASHEM!?"

The impressive part about speaking while holding a stick is that the authority figure is choosing to speak even though he has a license to employ a stick. Rabbi Kalish told our teachers at an in-service session, "Let's say a young high school boy in my Yeshiva misses Davening in the morning. I have enough clout and leverage to guarantee that he will come to Davening the next day.

However, I want him to come to Davening 30 years from now." He went on to explain the famous verse from Mishlei 22:6, "Chanoch L'Naar Al Pi Darcho, Gam Ki Yazkin, Lo Yasir Mimena" — "Raise the child according to his way, so that when he grows old, he will not depart from it". He said that everybody emphasizes the first part of that verse but too many lose sight of the second part. Whatever methodologies we employ when educating, we should have the long game in mind. We can win a single battle by using force but lose the war or we can lose many battles and still win the war. There is a world of difference between Chinuch — Education and Control. I read in a book entitled, "Spare the Child", multiple cases of parents, who with noble intentions, by exercising control, turned what would otherwise have been pleasant and holy experiences, into something so supercharged with negative neuro-associations that their child can no longer enter a Shul or open a Siddur, and the parent insists, "I emphasized Davening!" It was not Chinuch though!

The Prophet Zacharia (4:7) writes, "Not with force and not with power, but by My spirit, says HASHEM the G-d of Hosts". The Piascenzo Rebbe writes in the introduction to Chovos HaTalmidim that Chinuch, education is a process of mining out from inside the child rather than piling on from without.

I have become proficient at starting fireplace fires in recent years. There is a lot to be learned from this exercise. You start a fire with small stuff, not big logs. They are the last to catch on! Once the little branches and twigs are burning long enough, then the big logs start to catch on and the fire is a success.

Our job as parents and teachers is to provide gentle encouragement, long enough, until the young adult has developed a fire of their own. The big stick is like a match to catalyze, but the real fire is the inspiration that has been awakened within. This is what can happen when we speak softly even though we are carrying a big stick!

Tidbits • Parashas Chukas 5785

Ira Zlotowitz <iraz@klalgovoa.org>

Thu, Jul 3, 7:00 PM (5 hours ago)

Parashas Chukas • July 5th • 9 Tamuz 5785

In memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

The final opportunity for Kiddush Levana is on Wednesday night, July 9th. Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 17 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan 3b-5b ... The Y'mei Bein Hametzarim, the Three Weeks, begin Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Balak, July 12th. The fast of Shiva Asar B'Tamuz

is on Sunday, July 13th. Rosh Chodesh Av is Shabbos Parashas Matos Masei, July 26th. Tisha B'av begins Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Devarim, August 2nd.

Summary: CHUKAS: Laws of the Parah Adumah - its preparation and use in the Tahara process • Miriam dies; the be'er well stops producing water, and the people complain • Moshe and Aharon are told to bring forth water by speaking to the rock; Moshe eventually hits the rock instead • Moshe and Aharon are told of the punishment for their sin • Bnei Yisrael ask for passage through Edom and are rebuffed • Aharon passes away at Hor Hahar • The Canaanites (really Amalek) attack and are defeated at Chorma • The people complain about the Mon and are attacked by snakes • The 'healing' copper snake • The great miracle of Nachal Arnon • Shiras Habe'er • The defeats of Sichon and Og

Haftarah: The parashah relates the capture of the lands of Sichon by the Bnei Yisrael. The pesukim in Shoftim 11:1-33 tell us that certain lands initially owned by Amon and Moav were forbidden to be captured, as antagonizing those nations was forbidden. However, once they were captured by Sichon, the Bnei Yisrael were allowed to take them.

Parashas Chukas: 87 Pesukim • 3 Obligations 1) Kohanim should oversee the preparation of the ashes of the parah adumah. 2) Observe the laws of tumas meis. 3) A Kohen shall purify someone who is tamei using the ashes of the parah adumah. Mitzvah Highlight: Zos Chukas HaTorah - Parah Adumah is the prime example of a mitzvah (chok) that we perform solely to fulfill Hashem's command, even though we do not understand it.

“וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַסֵּלַע בְּמִשְׁהוֹ... יָשָׁן לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתָּם כִּי לִהְיוֹתִי יֵשֵׁן”

“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 points out that this was a neis, no matter by 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.

https://blog.artscroll.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/artscroll-shabbos-newsletter_chukas-pgs.pdf

LANGUAGE LESSON

On the Shoulders of Giants by Rabbi Shmuel Bloom

An incident that occurred in a camp in the Catskills sheds light on the importance of words.

While I was attending Camp Munk in Ferndale, New York, Rabbi Michael (Yechezkel Arieh) Munk, the camp director, once suspected that a camper had uttered a word that was, shall we say, not quite one of the holiest words in the English language. An outstanding mechanech and former principal of Bais Yaakov of Borough Park, Rabbi Munk asked a favor of the young man: to bring him a Shulchan Aruch and open it up to Chapter 275 in the Orach Chaim section. Try as he might, the young man simply could not find the chapter. Rabbi Munk then asked him to find Chapter 344. Again, despite his best efforts, the young man could not find the chapter.

Rabbi Munk explained to the perplexed young man: “These chapter numbers spell out words. Chapter 275 spells out the word ‘reish ayin hey — evil.’ Rav Yosef Caro wanted to avoid the appearance of this word in his work; he therefore changed the letter sequence to ayin reish hey. Chapter 344 spells out the word ‘shmad — destruction.’ He therefore changed the lettering to shin daled mem. He did this to teach us that words do matter; that mere words can affect the purity and wellbeing of a person's soul. You should keep this in mind, young man.”

Yes, words do matter. They can affect us negatively and they can inspire us positively. Words, whether through the use of positive ones or the avoidance of negative ones, can be a catalyst for change. They can allow us to achieve spiritual and moral goals, and to pursue lofty personal and national aspirations as well.

from: The **Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Jul 3, 2025, 11:15 AM

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Losing Miriam

Chukat 2012

It is a scene that still has the power to shock and disturb. The people complain. There is no water. It is an old complaint and a predictable one. That is what happens in a desert. Moses should have been able to handle it with ease. He has been through far tougher challenges in his time. Yet suddenly at Mei Meriva (“the waters of contention”), he exploded into vituperative anger:

“Listen, you rebels, shall we bring you water out of this rock?” Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff.” Num. 20:10–11

In past essays I have argued that Moses did not sin. It was simply that he was the right leader for the generation that left Egypt but not the right leader for their children who would cross the Jordan and engage in conquering a land and building a society. The fact that he was not permitted to lead the next generation was not a failure but an inevitability. As a group of slaves facing freedom, a new relationship with God, and a difficult journey, both physically and spiritually, the Children of Israel needed a strong leader capable of contending with them and with God. But as builders of a new society, they needed a leader who would not do the work for them but who would instead inspire them to do it for themselves.

The face of Moses was like the sun, the face of Joshua was like the moon (Bava Batra 75a). The difference is that sunlight is so strong it leaves no work for a candle to do, whereas a candle can illuminate when the only other source of light is the moon. Joshua empowered his generation more than a figure as strong as Moses would have done.

But there is another question altogether about the episode we read of this week. What made this trial different? Why did Moses momentarily lose control? Why then? Why there? He had faced just this challenge before. The Torah mentions two previous episodes. One took place at Mara, almost immediately after the division of the Red Sea. The people found water but it was bitter. Moses prayed to God, God told him how to sweeten the water, and the episode passed. The second episode occurred at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1–7). This time there was no water at all.

Moses rebuked the people: “Why are you quarrelling with me? Are you trying to test God?” He then turned to God and said, “What am I to do with this people? Before long they will stone me!” God told him to go to a rock at Horeb, take his staff, and hit the rock. Moses did so, and water came out. There was drama, tension, but nothing like the emotional distress evident in this week's parsha of Chukat. Surely Moses, by now almost forty years older, with a generation of experience behind him, should have coped with this challenge without drama. He had been there before.

The text gives us a clue, but in so understated a way that we can easily miss it. The chapter begins thus: “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. Now there was no water for the community...” (Num. 20:1–2). Many commentators see the connection between this and what follows in terms of the sudden loss of water after the death of Miriam. Tradition tells of a miraculous well that accompanied the Israelites during Miriam's lifetime in her merit.[1] When she died, the water ceased. There is, though, another way of reading the connection. Moses lost control because his sister Miriam had just died. He was in mourning for his eldest sibling. It is hard to lose a parent, but in some ways it is even harder to lose a brother or sister. They are your generation. You feel the Angel of Death come suddenly close. You face your own mortality.

Miriam was more than a sister to Moses. She was the one, while still a child, to follow the course of the wicker basket holding her baby brother as it drifted down the Nile. She had the courage and ingenuity to approach Pharaoh's daughter and suggest that she employ a Hebrew nurse for the child, thus ensuring that Moses would grow up knowing his family, his people, and his identity.

In a truly remarkable passage, the Sages said that Miriam persuaded her father Amram, the leading scholar of his generation, to annul his decree that Hebrew husbands should divorce their wives and have no more children because there was a 50 per cent chance that any child born would be killed. "Your decree," said Miriam, "is worse than Pharaoh's. He only decreed against the males, yours applies to females also. He intends to rob children of life in this world; you would deny them even life in the World to Come." [2] Amram admitted her superior logic. Husbands and wives were reunited. Yocheved became pregnant and Moses was born. Note that this Midrash, told by the Sages, unambiguously implies that a six-year-old girl had more faith and wisdom than the leading rabbi of the generation!

Moses surely knew what he owed his elder sister. According to the Midrash, without her he would not have been born. According to the plain sense of the text, he would not have grown up knowing who his true parents were and to which people he belonged. Though they had been separated during his years of exile in Midian, once he returned, Miriam had accompanied him throughout his mission. She had led the women in song at the Red Sea. The one episode that seems to cast her in a negative light – when she "began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife" (Num. 12:1), for which she was punished with leprosy – was interpreted more positively by the Sages. They said she was critical of Moses for breaking off marital relations with his wife Tziporah. He had done so because he needed to be in a state of readiness for Divine communication at any time. Miriam felt Tziporah's plight and sense of abandonment. Besides which, she and Aaron had also received Divine communication but they had not been commanded to be celibate. She may have been wrong, suggested the Sages, but not maliciously so. She spoke not out of jealousy of her brother but out of sympathy for her sister-in-law.

So it was not simply the Israelites' demand for water that led Moses to lose control of his emotions, but rather his own deep grief. The Israelites may have lost their water, but Moses had lost his sister, who had watched over him as a child, guided his development, supported him throughout the years, and helped him carry the burden of leadership in her role as leader of the women.

It is a moment that reminds us of words from the book of Judges said by Israel's chief of staff, Barak, to its judge-and-leader Deborah: "If you go with me, I will go; but if you do not go with me, I cannot go" (Judges 4:8). The relationship between Barak and Deborah was much less close than that between Moses and Miriam, yet Barak acknowledged his dependence on a wise and courageous woman. Can Moses have felt less?

Bereavement leaves us deeply vulnerable. In the midst of loss we can find it hard to control our emotions. We make mistakes. We act rashly. We suffer from a momentary lack of judgement. These are common symptoms even for ordinary humans like us. In Moses' case, however, there was an additional factor. He was a prophet, and grief can occlude or eclipse the prophetic spirit. Maimonides answers the well-known question as to why Jacob, a prophet, did not know that his son Joseph was still alive, with the simplest possible answer: grief banishes prophecy. For twenty-two years, mourning his missing son, Jacob could not receive the Divine word. [3] Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, remained in touch with God. It was God, after all, who told him to "speak to the rock." But somehow the message did not penetrate his consciousness fully. That was the effect of grief.

So the details are, in truth, secondary to the human drama played out that day. Yes, Moses did things he might not have done, should not have done. He struck the rock, said "we" instead of "God," and lost his temper with the people. The real story, though, is about Moses the human being in an onslaught of grief, vulnerable, exposed, caught in a vortex of emotions, suddenly bereft of the sisterly presence that had been the most important bass

note of his life. Miriam had been the precociously wise and plucky child who had taken control of the situation when the life of her three-month-old brother lay in the balance, undaunted by either an Egyptian princess or a rabbi-father. She had led the Israelite women in song, and sympathised with her sister-in-law when she saw the price she paid for being the wife of a leader. The Midrash speaks of her as the woman in whose merit the people had water in a parched land. In Moses' anguish at the rock, we sense the loss of the elder sister without whom he felt bereft and alone.

The story of the moment Moses lost his confidence and calm is ultimately less about leadership and crisis, or about a staff and a rock, than about a great Jewish woman, Miriam, appreciated fully only when she was no longer there.

[1] Rashi, Commentary to Num. 20:2; Ta'anit 9a; Song of Songs Rabbah 4:14, 27. [2] Midrash Lekach Tov to Ex. 2:1. [3] Maimonides, Shemoneh Perakim, ch. 7.

Potomac Torah Study Center Devrei Torah for Shabbat Chuchat 5785
Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

BS"D I strongly recommend the Internet Torah Sheet, which normally posts shortly after midnight on Thursday nights -- available at parsha.net. I also strongly recommend Rabbi Marc Angel's history of the Sephardic community in the United States, going back nearly 371 years -- long before the founding of the United States. Shabbat Shalom, Alan
 BS"D July 4, 2025 Potomac Torah Study Center Vol. 12 #37, July 4-5, 2025; 9 Tammuz 5785; Chukat 5785

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. Mazal tov to Deborah & Josh Wilbur on the marriage of their daughter Ashley to Josh Kokhavim, son of Romina & Iraj Kokhavim. Mazal-Tov also to Ashley's grandparents, Merryll & Nat Shaffir.

Chukat represents a transition in the Torah in many ways. B'Nai Yisrael arrive at the base of Har Sinai approximately a month and a half after departing from Egypt – Rosh Hodesh Sivan 2448. They depart from the base of Har Sinai on 20 Iyar 2449 (the second year) (Bemidbar 10:11). Once the people leave the base of Har Sinai, they start looking for reasons to complain, and Moshe and God both immediately call the complaints evil. Behaalotecha, Shelach Lecha, and Korach record massive, continuous complaints. The three serious sins of the second year after the Exodus all take place in a single week (See Torah Anthology 13.333-34). Miriam speaks lashon hara about Moshe's wife Tziporah on 22 Sivan, and God strikes her with tzaraat. While the people wait seven days for Miriam to recover from tzaraat and become tahor again (29 Sivan), Korach and his followers rise up against Moshe and Aharon. The Meraglim depart on 29 Sivan to explore Canaan, the quality of the land, the strength of the people, and prospects for defeating them in battle). (They return of 8 Av, give their reports, and the people cry in fear all night). Hashem has enough and decrees that all the adults twenty years old or older at the time of the Exodus will die in the Midbar, and only their children will survive to enter the land. Chukat opens with chapter 19, the decree of the Red Heifer, which gives the procedure of becoming tahor again after exposure to a dead body. While God presents the decree to Moshe a year earlier at the base of Har Sinai, the Torah presents it here, after the death of many who sin during the last week of Sivan. Also, almost all of the adults still alive at that time will die during the following 38 years. The Torah concludes the story of the generation of the Exodus at this point, and there is no discussion of the rest of the wanderings until the Torah continues during the 40th year (chapter 21). After Miriam dies and her well dries up, the people complain of thirst. God tells Moshe to take his staff and ask Miriam's rock to give the people water. Moshe becomes angry, calls the people rebels, and strikes the rock.

Although the rock does give water for the people, Hashem is angry because Moshe does not use the opportunity to make a Kiddush Hashem. God wants Moshe to show that if an inanimate rock obeys a request of God, then how much more should we Jews, for whom Hashem has performed so many miracles and given so many gifts, also obey God's mitzvot. An important lesson of Chukat is that careless speech is the final shortcoming for which God denies Moshe and Aharon permission to enter the land.

What does Chukat mean to us today? For me, Kohelet gives one answer: there is a time and place for everything. During a long period of slavery, the Jews reach a low point in merit and must regain the status of Yosef and his immediate family. Through teshuvah and help from Moshe, Aharon, and Hashem, B'Nai Yisrael raise themselves high enough to merit God's direct intervention to lift our ancestors out of slavery and to bring them to the base of Har Sinai to learn Hashem's mitzvot. This generation, however, looks to Moshe, Aharon, and Hashem for all its needs. As long as God leads the people directly, with Moshe's immediate assistance, they can survive. However, living in Israel, with Hashem's hidden face (operating only in the background, out of direct observation of humans), is beyond this generation.

When the Meraglim return and the people fall apart, God sees that only a new generation, which has not been slaves, will be able to survive on its own (when God operates out of sight of humans).

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander teaches us that speech is vitally important, for good or for evil. Miriam lifts her voice in song several times to inspire the people to learn that with pure faith in Hashem, He will take care of the Jews. However, when Miriam speaks lashon hara about Tziporah (Moshe's wife), God punishes her with tzaraat. Ten of the Meraglim speak lashon hara about the land of Israel, and they die for the sin.

Korach exaggerates about several of the mitzvot, and he and his followers end up being buried alive for their sins.

The Chofetz Chaim may be best known for his focus on eliminating lashon hara. A lack of care with speech leads to several sins of the generation of the Exodus. Rabbi Brander recounts the story of Yiftach, subject of the Haftarah – a great military hero who saves the Jews from Ammon (in present day Jordan). Yiftach makes a vow to God that if He enables the Jews to defeat Ammon, he will offer as an olah (burnt offering) whoever is first to emerge from his house when he returns home. The first to emerge happens to be his daughter, an only child. Yiftach's reward for his great military victory is having to sacrifice his only child, his beloved daughter, because of his careless and evil speech.

Later in history, Chazal blame lashon hara for the destruction of the second Temple. (We often read this horrible story at some time during Tisha B'Av.)

Rabbi Brander summarizes his lesson as follows:

The underlying message of our parsha and Haftarah is timelessly relevant: Speech is the currency of connection, and has the power to work in ways both good and bad. With it, we build relationships, teach values, and shape community. Misused, it becomes a weapon that divides and destroys. Chukat reminds us that every interaction — with God, with family, with society — begins with how we speak and how we listen. In an age inundated by constant communication, may we never forget the sacred weight of our words, and may we use them wisely, as tools for healing, holiness, and harmony.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, helped generations of Jews appreciate Jewish mitzvot and history. He started me on my journey to greater knowledge, and he was thrilled watching his congregants learn and become leaders of their generation over half a century of leading congregations. His lessons certainly qualify as lashon tov!

I return to Kohelet with one more lesson for our times. The generation that founded the modern state of Israel has survived numerous wars and semi wars with enemies who want to eliminate Jews from the Middle East and the rest of the world. Those of us who were alive in 1948, and those born shortly after, have done what we could. A few countries in the Middle East have accepted Israel, and some have even entered into the Abraham Accords.

Perhaps it is time for a younger generation to move forward and try to bring Israel and our fellow Jews into peace with our enemies.

A time for everything. In the past week, we have observed yahrzeits for two grandfathers and for the Rebbe. On one of the yahrzeits, our friends Deborah & Josh Wilbur, and Meryll & Nat Shaffir, celebrated the wedding of their daughter/granddaughter Ashley (Wilbur) to Josh Kokhavim. Terrific young Jews like Ashley and Josh represent the future of our people, and may their mitzvot help start a golden period, with peace and safety for all our people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom, Hannah & Alan

from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabiyy@theyeshiva.net> info@theyeshiva.net
date: Jul 3, 2025, 6:13 PM

The Pain Does Not Dissappear, But It Can Heal Me

Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson

No Complaining

After seventy years of communist oppression and seven hours of flying, Boris, a burly immigrant from Moscow steps off the plane in a free land to begin his new life in his new home, Israel. Standing at the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, a young and enthusiastic Israeli reporter plunges a microphone in front of him with a level of excitement that is only seen when an inside scoop is about to be caught. The reporter asks with focus: "Tell me, what was life back in Russia like?"

To which the Russian immigrant replies: "I couldn't complain."

An obviously unexpected answer, the young reporter continues to probe:

"Well how were your living quarters there?" To which the Russian responds "I couldn't complain."

Not expecting this answer either, the reporter decides to hit him with a question that is bound to get the answer he is looking for: "What about your standard of living?" To which the Russian replies again: "I couldn't complain."

At this point, the reporter's frustration with the new immigrant's answers reaches a crescendo, and so in a derogatory tone the reporter yells out, "Well, if everything was so wonderful back in Russia, then why did you even bother to come here?"

To which the new immigrant replies with gusto: "Oh, here I can complain!"

The Serpents

It is a strange episode -- in this week's portion of Chukas.

When poisonous snakes attack the Jews in the desert, G-d instructs Moses to fashion a special healing instrument: a pole topped with the form of a snake. Moses sculpted a snake of copper and duly placed it on top of a pole. Those who had been afflicted by the snake bite would gaze on the serpentine image on the pole and be cured [1].

According to some historians, this was the forerunner of the caduceus, the snake-entwined rod which is today the emblem of the medical profession. Yet the question is obvious: What was the point of placing a snake on top of the pole to cure the Jews who were bitten? If it was G-d who was healing them miraculously, why the need to look up at a copper snake atop a pole? The question is raised in the Talmud [2]:

"But is the snake capable of determining life and death?!" the Talmud asks.

And the answer is this: "Rather, when Israel would gaze upward and bind their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would be healed; and if not, they

would perish." Fixing their eyes on the snake alone would not yield any cure; it was looking upward toward G-d, it was the relationship with G-d, which brought the cure.

But if so, why bother to carve out a copper snake in the first place, which can only make people believe that it is the copper snake that is the cause of healing?

In fact, this is exactly what occurred. The copper snake that Moses made was preserved for centuries. In the passage of time, however, its meaning became distorted, and people began to say that the snake possessed powers of its own. When it reached the point of becoming an image of idolatry, the Jewish King Hezekiah (in the 6th century BCE) destroyed the copper snake fashioned by Moses, and that was the end of that special copper snake [3]. Which only reinforces the question: Why ask people to look up at a man-made snake, which can lead down the path to a theological error of deifying the snake?

There is another question. The snake was the reptile that caused the harm in the first place. Healing, it would seem, would come from staying far away from serpents. Why, in this case, was the remedy born from gazing at the very venomous creature that caused the damage to begin with, which can only trigger more anxiety [4]?

A Tale of Two Snakes

The snake in the biblical story -- as all biblical stories capture the timeless journeys of the human psyche -- is also a metaphor for all of the "snakes" in our lives. Have you ever been bitten by a "venomous snake"? Poisoned by harmful people, burnt by life, or by abusive situations? Have you ever been crushed by a clueless principal, challenging parent, a manipulative boss, a deceiving partner, a toxic relationship? Were you ever back-stabbed by people you trusted? Is your anxiety killing you? Are you weary and demoralized by your life experience?

What is the deeper meaning of suffering? And how do some people know how to accept affliction with love and grace?

These are good questions that cannot be answered easily, if at all. But one perspective is presented in the story of the serpents. G-d tells Moses: "Make a serpent and place it on a pole. Whoever gets bitten should look at it and he will live." The key to healing, the Torah suggests, is not by fleeing the cause of the suffering, but by gazing at it. Don't run from the snake; look at it. Because deep inside the challenge, you will find the cure. Deep inside the pain, you will find the healing light.

But there is one qualification: you must look up to the snake; you must peer into the reality of the snake above, on top of the elevated pole, not on the serpent crawling here below.

The Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), who had three Jewish grandparents and was considered by many to be one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century, once said that his aim as a philosopher was, "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." The fly keeps banging its head against the glass in a vain attempt to get out. The more it tries, the more it fails, until it drops from exhaustion. The one thing it forgets to do is look to the sky.

Every experience in life can be seen from two dimensions -- from a concrete, earthly perspective, or from a higher, more sublime vantage point, appreciating its true nature and meaning from the Divine perspective. There is the "snake" down here, and there is the very same "snake" up there.

I can experience my challenges, struggles, and difficulties in the way they are manifested down here. But I can also look at these very same struggles from a more elevated point of view. The circumstances may not change, but their meaning and significance will. From the "downer" perspective, these challenges, curveballs, painful confrontations, and realizations can throw me into despair or drain me of my sap. From the "higher" perspective, the way G-d sees these very same realities, every challenge contains the seeds for rebirth. Within every crisis lies the possibility of a new and deeper discovery. Many of us know this from our personal stories: Events that at the time were so painful to endure, in retrospect were those that inspired the most growth. Those painful events moved us from the surface to the depths, challenging us

to become larger than we ever thought we can be, and stimulating conviction and clarity unknown to us before.

This is not about suppressing the pain. On the contrary, it is about taking the pain back to its deepest origin; going with it back to its primal source, seeing it for what it really is in its pristine state. We do not run from the snake, we rather look at it, but from a more sublime vantage point.

To perceive clarity from the midst of agonizing turmoil we are empowered to train ourselves to look upward. When faced with a "snake," with a challenge, many people look to their right or to their left. Either they fight, or they cave in. But there is another path: look upwards. See the "snake" from the perspective above.

Yes, I can feel the pain and have compassion for the grief. If I bypass this part, I may never find the higher snake, as I am just repressing or suppressing. Yet as I feel the "bite," I can now surrender and go deeper and higher.

And in that upward gaze, you might find a new sense of healing: the questions might become the very answers, the problems may become the solutions, and the venom may become the cure. Remarkably, snakebites today are cured with anti-venom manufactured from small quantities of snake venom that stimulate the production of antibodies in the blood. Sometimes, you will discover that you never really needed an intellectual answer. What you needed was to know that you are infinitely valuable and sacred, infinite and Divine. You are part of G-d even as you endure these experiences; essentially it was G-d who was experiencing all of this through you.

It's the same idea taught by Moses: The source of the affliction itself becomes the remedy [5]. This is true in all areas of life. As viewed by the Creator, from the perspective above, transgression is the potential for a new self-discovery; failure is the potential for deeper success, holes in a marriage are the seeds of "renovation" to recreate a far deeper relationship, the end of an era is always the beginning of a new one, pain is a springboard for deeper love and frustration is the mother of a new awareness [6].

Bless Me

This is the meaning in that famous, enigmatic passage in Genesis 32 in which Jacob, far from home, wrestles with an unknown, unnamed adversary from night until the break of day. The mysterious man maims Jacob, causing him to limp.

And yet at the end of a struggling night, a night to remember, Jacob says to the stranger/angel/God: "I will not let you go until you bless me."

"Bless me?!" Is this how you bid farewell to a man who attempts to destroy you?

Jacob was teaching us the secret of Jewish resilience. To be a Jew is to possess that unique ability to say to every crisis: "I will not let you go until you bless me."

I know that deep down your entire objective is to elevate me, to bring me to a higher place, to climb the mountain leading to the truth, allowing me to emerge stronger, wiser, and more blessed.[7]

[1] Numbers 21:6-10. [2] Rosh Hashana 29. [3] II Kings 18:4. [4] See Ramban: "This was a miracle within a miracle." The literal answer is that it was indeed insufficient to just ask G-d to save them, without the snake-on-a-pole therapy. The people had to gaze upon the snake and focus on the fact that only G-d, who created the snake in the first place, could transform that same venomous creature into a medium of healing. The people had to acknowledge that albeit they were bitten by a snake it was not the snake itself, but the creator of the snake, which was responsible for their life and death. They were looking at a snake but they were seeing G-d. The deeper perspective is presented below. [5] This same method of healing is used elsewhere. Moses used a bitter stick to sweeten bitter waters (Exodus 15:25). And it was salt that Elisha used to purify the harmful water (II Kings chapter 2). [6] The verse in Deuteronomy (13:4) "For G-d is testing you," is interpreted also as "For G-d is elevating you." In Hebrew, the same word -- Nesayon -- is used for a "test" and for "elevation." Every test, each challenge, is essentially also an invitation, an opportunity, for an elevation, for growth. In the story of the serpents too, the word used is "place it on a

pole," "sim oso al nes," on an elevated object. [7] This essay is based on Rabbi Schnuer Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Torah Chukas pp. 61d-62b. For an elaborate explanation of this discourse in Likkutei Torah, see Sichas 12 Tamuz, 5729 (1969). The final insight about Yaakov's struggle I saw in an essay by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

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שיעור שבועי בשיחות ראשי הישיבה תשפ"ה #34
חקת | טהרת מי חטאת – נצחון על המוות
הרב יעקב מדין תנ"ך
השיחה הועברה בפרשת חקת תשפ"ה, סוכה על ידי איתן סיון ונערכה על ידי שמואל ארגמן. סיכום השיחה עבר את ביקורת הרב
מה המצווה הזאת
פרשת חוקת נפתחת עם מענה לבעיה אשר נוצרת בעקבות טומאת המת. אדם אשר נטמא, אסור בקרבה אל המקדש ואל הקב"ה. על כן, ה' נותן פתרון לטמאת המת – הפרה האדומה. על ידי הזאת אפר שריפת הפרה בערבוב עם מים, האדם נטהר מטומאתו. מצוות פרה אדומה מזוהה עם קבוצת המצוות אשר איננו מבינים מה עומד בשרש המצווה, ואולי היא המצווה הכי פחות ברורה. מפורסמים דברי רש"י בפתחת הפרשה
זאת חקת התורה – לפי שהשטן ואומות העולם מונין את ישראל לומר מה המצווה הזאת ומה טעם יש בה, לפיכך כתב בה חקת: גזירה היא מלפני ואין לך רשות להרהר אחריה. (על במדבר יט, ב)
אומות העולם שואלים מה טעם במצווה זו, וטוענים שאין מאחוריה שום היגיון. אך מה ראו לנכון השטן ואומות העולם לדבר עם בני ישראל דווקא על הציווי של פרה אדומה, הרי יש מצוות רבות אשר לא מובנות לנו כלל. מה ראו לנכון להעדיף את מצוות פרה אדומה על פני ??מרכיבי הקטורת, הפרים המוקרבים בכל יום בסוכות, או החוקים המדויקים בתורת הנסכים נראה שעל מנת לענות על שאלה זו יש להתבונן בחלק ממנגנוני הפרה האדומה היחודיים לה, על מנת להבין את קטרוגם של השטן ואומות העולם. חרף התפיסה הרווחת כי אין טעם במצווה, ננסה לעמוד ולהבין חלק מצומצם מהציווי התמוה של פרה אדומה שחוטף חוץ
ראשית כל, יש להבין את המנגנון התמוה אשר מוכר לנו מתהליך ההיטהרות – בו דווקא בתהליך של טהרה שנוצר בעקבות אפר הפרה, האדם שמתעסק בה נהיה טמא והשער אף יכבס בגדיו במים ורחץ בשרו במים עד הערב... וכך האספסוף אפר הפרה אף יכבס בגדיו ורחץ בשרו עד הערב ורחץ בשרו עד הערב... (במדבר טז-ט)
מעין בפרשיית התורה, נדמה שהציווי אשר מופיעים בפרה אדומה, שחיתתה ושריפתה, מקבילים במידה רבה לדיני הקרבנות ביום הכיפורים
ישנה הקבלה בין השעיר המשלח ופרה אדומה, בכך ששניהם נשחטים מחוץ למקדש. השעיר לעזאזל, כידוע, לאחר סמיכה על ידי הכהן הגדול (המדמה תהליך של קרבן), נזרק מראש ההר ומושמד כליל. גם 'הקרב' הפרה האדומה נעשית מחוץ למקדש, בהר המשחה, הר הזיתים עוד מרכיב המדמה את יום הכיפורים הוא ההקבלה של פרה האדומה לפר כהן גדול. שניהם נשרפים באופן מלא מחוץ למשכן – פר הציבור נשרף לאחר הקרבת אימוריו, וגם בו יש מרכיב מסוים שמדמה את שחיתת החוץ
בא לו אצל פר ושעיר הנשרפין, קרען והוציא את אימוריהן, נתנן במגיס והקטירן על גבי המזבח. קלען במקלעות, והוציאן לבית השריפה. (משנה יומא ו, ז)
בדומה אליו, על מנת להפיק את אפר הפרה האדומה יש לשרוף את כל הפרה עד היסוד לכאורה, שלושת הקרבנות האלו אמורים לגרום לאדם מישראל לנוע באי נוחות, שהרי ידוע שיש איסור חמור להקרבת קורבנות מחוץ למשכן
איש איש מבית ישראל אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט שׂוֹר או כֶּשֶׂב או עֵז בַּמִּתְּנָה או אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט מִחוּץ לַמִּתְּנָה: וְאֵל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֹא תָבִיאוּ לְהַקְרִיב קָרְבָן לַה' לִפְנֵי מִשְׁכַּן ה' דָּם יִחָשֵׁב לְאִישׁ הָהוּא דָם שִׁפָּךְ וְנִקְרָת הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מִקֶּרֶב עַמּוֹ: (ויקרא יז, ג-ד)
נראה כי זוהי הסיבה שהשטן ואומות העולם בחרו להתמקד דווקא במצווה זו, שהרי לכאורה היא סותרת את רצונו של הקב"ה! אומות העולם מבקרים את עם ישראל, שגם הם מקריבים קורבנות בחוץ, לכאורה בדומה לעובדי עבודה זרה
נראה, שאכן יש בעיתיות בשחיתת הפרה ושרפתה מחוץ למקדש, ובשל כך כל אדם שמתעסק בשחיתת ובאיסוף האפר נטמא. לאחר שהבנו את הטומאה של המטהר, עלינו להבין מה עומד בשרש תהליך טהרתו של הטמא
אפר ומים חיים
בעת הזאת אפר הפרה האדומה, האדם אשר אפר הפרה נוגע עליו נטהר מטומאתו. תהליך הטהרה אינו טריוויאלי ממבט ראשוני – היה מקום לחשוב שאדם שנטמא בטומאת המת יהיה טמא נצחי, ממש כמו מותו של האדם שהוא נצחי. הבנה חדשה נלמדת מביטוי מפת שמופיע בפסוקים:
וְלִקְחוּ לְטָמֵא מִעֵפֶר שְׂרֵפֶת הַחַטָּאת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִים חַיִּים אֶל קָלִי. (במדבר יט, יז)

הביטוי 'עפר' ביחס לאפר שריפת הפרה תמוה מאוד. אמנם ניתן לטעון כי האפר התערבב עם העפר אשר על פני הקרקע, אך השימוש של התורה בביטוי עפר תמוה, שהרי עדיין יש כאן "אפר כתוצאה משריפת הפרה, ולמה בחרה התורה לקרוא לחומר זה 'עפר' השילוב בין עפר ואפר מופיע במילותיו של אברהם לה' בסיפור התחינה על אנשי סדום ויצן אברהם ויאמר הנה נא האלתי לדבר אל אדני ואנכי עֵפֶר נָאֶפֶר. (בראשית יח, כז) המדרש (בראשית רבה מט, יא) מסביר שבאמירת 'ואנכי עֵפֶר נָאֶפֶר' אברהם אומר שכבר היה עליו למות. נראה ששורש ביטוי זה נעוץ בדרכי הקבורה. בתרבויות העתיקות היה למת שני דרכים להתייחס לגופו ביציאתו מהעולם – שריפה וקבורה, אפר ועפר. כלומר ביטוי זה מסמל מוות וסופיות

האדם הראשון נברא כאדם אשר היה אמור להתקיים לנצח. ואכן, הרושם של הקורא את פסוקי בראשית בפעם הראשונה הינה שלאחר בריאת העולם יש אוטופיה גמורה, אך כוחות האופל בעולם – בדמותו של הנחש – גרמו לאדם לחטוא ולאבד את חייו ובכך 'להרוס' את התוכנית של הקב"ה. המוות מהווה אות ניצחון של כוחות האופל על ייעודו של ה' לאדם מנגד, אפר הפרה האדומה מתערבב עם מים חיים. המים מסמלים את הנצחיות התמידית – מים חיים. בפסוקי הבריאה, לא מוזכר כי הקב"ה ברא את המים יש מאין, אלא רק שינה בהם את 'הצורה בהם היו. כלומר, עוד לפני בריאת העולם המים היו קיימים, ונשארו עד היום 'חיים' בראשית בראשית אֵלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ יְיָאֵמַר אֲלֵהֶם יְהִי קוֹץ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם וַיְהִי אֵלֶיהֶם מְרִחָפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם: (בראשית א, א-ב) מְקַדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם: וַיַּעַשׂ אֲלֵהֶם אֶת הַקָּרָע וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִסַּתֵּחַ לְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מַעַל לְקִיעַ וַיְהִי כֵן: (שם, ו-ז)
המים מייצגים לידה מחדש, חיים מחודשים. כיוון זה מובן לנו בטהרתו של הזב, בו הטמא טובל במקווה מים חיים – מעין – וכתוצאה מכך נברא מחדש. הסמליות של המים כהתחלה חדשה עומדת כהפך הגמור למוות אשר מזכיר האפר

נראה כי השילוב בין האפר למים, בהזאה על האדם שראה וקרב אל המת, מסמל ניגודיות שנוצרת במוות. המת, גופתו נעלמת מן העולם ונבלעת בעפר, אך נראה שיש בו מרכיב שלא ימות לעולם, המים החיים שבו – הנשמה, שתחיה לנצח. הפרה האדומה מלמדת אותנו כי יש לאדם נצחיות, ויש תקווה ואמונה בעולמנו, יש לאדם משמעות לחיות את חייו – שהרי גם אם מחר ימות, חלק ממנו ימשיך להתקיים לנצח. הגיוני גם לקשר זאת לנצחון של הקב"ה והאור בעולם על החושך שהטיל הנחש על חיינו בכך שנהפך האדם לבן תמותה, ומעין תיקון על חטא האדם הראשון

כך גם הטהרה מסמלת תקווה שיש בעולם, הטומאה אינה תמידית – לאדם יש יכולת לצאת מהטומאה ולהיטהר ולחזור לתלם. הפרה האדומה בפרטיה, מסמלת את נצחיות הנשמה, את התקווה מאחורי הייאוש שמאחורי המוות ואיבוד הגוף לנצח