

## Indulgence and Intellect – Parshat Chukat

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Parshat Chukat discusses the quintessential *chok*, the *parah adumah* (red heifer). While we cannot understand the true purpose of this *mitzvah*, we can attempt to study its meaning. First, the *Medrash* states that it's meant to expiate the sin of the Golden Calf. Just as a mother is required to clean up the mess her child makes, so too must the cow purify the mess created by her young calf. Whether it provides a method of atonement for future generations or is specific to one sin (a part of which we all carry within us), the message remains that even when we think we understand a *mitzvah*, we do not know the real reason behind it.

Rabbi Kirzner citing the Ramchal explains that death was not a punishment for Adam's sin, but a direct consequence of his action. When God created Adam, He intended to create a body and a soul that together would elevate itself while on earth. If man kept his physical body aligned with his spiritual self, both would remain immortal. When Adam sinned, he created a disconnect. He allowed his body to dominate his soul instead of visa versa. Thus his body could no longer reach the elevation of the soul, and would therefore die and disintegrate while his soul rose heavenward. Death by definition is the loss of potential. The body did not live up to its ability and as a natural consequence decomposed. Yet there are recorded instances of *tzadikim* who, upon being reinterred, were found with their bodies intact, a testimony that their bodies were as dedicated to God's word as were their souls.

The purification for death is via ashes, to

remind us that we too are but dust and ashes. The lesson is to be humble before the Lord, to accept that our bodies, like our souls, are meant to serve our Creator. When *Bnei Yisroel* were at *Sinai* and declared, "We will do and we will hear," they rectified the sin of Adam, and death was vanquished. However, when they took the symbol of their physical existence, their wealth, and dedicated it to a physical entity in defiance of God's wishes, when they relied on their own logic instead of God's word, they reintroduced the impurity of sin and brought death back into the world. This is the lesson of the ashes of the red cow. We need not know Hashem's reason; we must obey. Accept first, as we did as a nation at *Sinai*. Keep our physical aspect as a servant to the spiritual and not the other way around.

One of the roots of the sin of the Golden Calf was the wealth *Bnei Yisroel* acquired as they left Egypt which they used sinfully. This explains why this passage appears after the incident of Korach. Korach's wealth led him to arrogance, and to defiance against Hashem and Moshe. Red is the symbol of physical passion. We take that symbol and burn it. This also explains says the *Letitcha Elyon*, why *Bnei Yisroel* paid exorbitant sums for a true *parah adumah*, actualizing the lesson that money is to be used in spiritual pursuits. Rabbi D. Hofstadter citing the last verse of Psalm 23, "May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life ...," notes that if I am to be pursued, let it be not by material problems, but by my involvement with good deeds. Before we left Egypt, Hashem told us to borrow gold and silver utensils from the

Egyptians. In truth, we were not borrowing from the Egyptians but as Rabbi Frand points out, we were borrowing them from Hashem to whom everything belongs. If we retain that mindset, that we are merely caretakers of Hashem's wealth, we will be less tempted to try to amass more than we need or to use what we were entrusted with inappropriately. The red cow symbolizes vitality and physical life, yet we reduce it to ashes and mix it with water, the symbol of the eternal soul, and sprinkle it on the one who has been defiled by death to teach him the primacy of the spirit.

Rabbi Roberts explains that Adam felt that his blissful state in *Eden* was too simple. He thought that if he actually engaged with the *yetzer hara*, he would triumph and elevate himself to a more worthy position. Although his motive was laudable, he disobeyed God's explicit command. He considered his own reasoning to be above God's reasoning. Now one can understand how the laws of the red heifer can atone for the sin that brought death to the world. The contradiction defies human logic but we obey God's will and suppress our own power of reason in the process and thereby atone for Adam's sin. We must follow Hashem with *temimus*, completely and with integrity, just as the red heifer must also be *tomim*, completely red. As the Chayei Moshe writes, the red heifer is not so much an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf as it is a means of returning us to our former status of accepting Hashem's authority with *temimus*, and as the Chasam Sofer concludes, that acceptance brings atonement.

## Levels of Chassidut

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilas Yesharim teaches us that there are three divisions of *chassidut* (piety). The first relates to deed, the second to performance of *mitzvot*, and the third to intent. The Ramchal teaches that *mitzvot* should be performed with *ahava* (love) and *yirah* (fear), the two key pillars of *avodat Hashem*. *Yirah* expresses itself in the verse, “*Et Hashem Elokecha tirah*,” one should fear Hashem. This refers not only to fear of punishment but *yirat haromemut* (awe of His exalted grandeur). *Ahavat Hashem* is expressed in the verse, “*V’ahavata et Hashem Elokecha*,” and you should love Hashem and “*U’vo tidbok*,” and you shall cling to Him. *Yirah* is *hachnaah* (humility) and *boshes* (shame). *Ahava* is manifested by performing *mitzvot* with joy and passion.

The Rambam teaches that there’s a constant *mitzvah* to love and fear Hashem. One should perform *mitzvot* out of love for Hashem, not out of obligation or routine. The Mesilas Yesharim explains that *yirat haromemut* is expressed when a person prays and is aware that he is standing in front of Hashem. Therefore the Gemara says when a person davens he should know before whom he is praying. Intellectually this understandable but in actuality it is very difficult because we cannot perceive it. The Mesilas Yesharim tells us that with minimal contemplation one can implant in one’s heart that one is entering into a discourse with Hashem. Just like if we speak to someone on the phone thousands of miles away we’re convinced the person is listening, otherwise why would we speak to him, so too

Hashem is certainly listening. The problem is we don’t think so.

The Rambam writes that when a person stands in prayer, no other thoughts should enter his mind. He should feel as if he is standing in front of the King of kings. If you had an interview that could make or break it for you, would your mind be on shopping for *Shabbat*? No, you’d be totally involved. Why not in front of Hashem? And if you’d say, maybe I understand this concept but I don’t see or feel it, the Rambam tells us, one must prepare, and one should do so before davening so that one can approach the King of Kings in a befitting way.

## The Connecting Thread of Chumash Bamidbar Part 4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Let us take an example of something seemingly negative about the generation in the desert and see how we can view it differently. The Jewish people’s request to send spies to the land of Israel was wrong and their reaction when they returned was wrong as well. When Hashem speaks about their punishment, He states that they will get 40 years in the desert corresponding to the 40 days that the spies were in the land of Israel. This seems unfair. Yet the Beis Yisrael tells us that while the spies were in the land of Israel, the Jewish people knew nothing. It was a very crucial mission and they prayed day and night for its success yet it ended tragically. But their *tefilot* did not go to waste. Hashem provided them with everything in the desert. They were able to see the Divine Presence in their midst clearly. There were no doubts or difficulties. If a Jew had a question Moshe would say, “Stay put, I’ll go and ask Hashem;” and he’d come back with a clear answer. For every day of prayer they got a year of *Gan Eden* which was what life in the desert was.

On the first day of creation, Hashem said the word *ohr* (light) five times. Each time it corresponded to a different *Chumash*.

*Chumash Bamidbar* corresponds to the fourth time where it says, “*Vayavdel Elokim ben haohr u’vein hachoshech*,” Hashem separated between light and darkness. The generation of the desert is compared to light. Their children, the second generation who entered *Eretz Yisrael* with Yehoshua, are likened to darkness. This seems contradictory as the *Torah* speaks about the sins of the generation of the desert while the second generation was known to be righteous. The first generation, like a *baal teshuva* at the beginning of his journey, received abundant Divine Assistance. The open miracles they experienced filled them with inspiration and passion in the same way the High Holidays at the start of the year inspire elevation. But then comes the day after and now one must take it further. The job of the second generation was to internalize and slowly switch from a reality where Hashem provided everything to a reality where they achieved it on their own. This meant dealing with darkness. The first generation experienced thunder and lightning. It was all in the open and then it was hidden. The second generation had to work to discover it. The book of *Bamidbar* tells us about the transition from the time Hashem revealed Himself freely to the time the second generation started the journey to re-discovery. That is why the book is replete

with ups and downs much like a child learning to walk.

The wells that Yitzchak dug correspond to the five *Chumashim*. The fourth *be’er* which corresponds to *Bamidbar* is called *sheva*. Chazal say there are really seven books of the Torah because the book of *Bamidbar* is a book made up of three separate *Chumashim*. We can see this in the *Chumash*. Before the second part there is an upside down nun and after the second part there is another upside down nun. The middle two verses are the link between the first reality where Hashem bestows and gives and the second reality where the Jewish people start to do it on their own.

The sojourn of the Jewish people in the desert is a paradigm for all generations. This is true both on an individual and national level. Every Jew faces the same tests and *Sefer Bamidbar* is the manual how to deal with it. Exile is called *midbar ha’amim*, the desert of the nations. The first generation paved the path so that we could ultimately bring the world to its true purpose