



Likkutei Sichos

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Moshe and the Mysterious Purification

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1.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE MITZVAH

On the verse which introduces the law of the Red Heifer, “This is the statute of the Torah,”¹ the *Midrash* says:

The evil inclination challenges four things, each of which is called a “statute”: a) the law regarding one’s brother’s wife (levirate marriage — *yibum*); b) the law regarding mixed seeds {*kilayim*}; c) the law of the scapegoat that is sent away {on Yom Kippur}; and d) the law of the Red Heifer.²

All of these laws are suprarational because they each contain a contradiction, as the *Midrash* goes on to explain.

Yet, in another *Midrash*,³ King Shlomo is quoted as saying:

About all these things I have knowledge; but in the case of the law of the Red Heifer, I have investigated it, inquired into it, and examined it. Still, “I thought I could fathom it, but {the reason for} it eludes me.”⁴

If King Shlomo could grasp the reason of every law besides that of the Red Heifer, it is clear that the quintessential suprarational “statute,” “a decree I have decreed,” is the Red Heifer.

It is therefore understood why the Torah refers to the Red Heifer as “**the** statute of the Torah,” implying that the Red Heifer is the **only** statute of the Torah. The true “statute” of the Torah, that which is entirely outside the realm of rationality, is the Red Heifer.⁵

¹ *Bamidbar* 19:2.

² *Bamidbar Rabbah*, “*Chukkas*” 19:5; *Tanchuma* 7.

³ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, 19:3 (end); *Tanchuma* 6.

⁴ *Koheles* 7:23.

⁵ The exceptional irrationality of the Red Heifer is not due to its “purifying the impure and contaminating the pure,” for the same logical inconsistency is present in all the other statutes mentioned in the *Midrash*. Besides, that inconsistency is attributed to the “evil inclination,” hardly a reliable source for the

2.

GRASPING THE UNGRASPABLE

According to this, we have to clarify a different *Midrash* which implies that the Red Heifer is comprehensible:

Hashem said to Moshe, “To you I will reveal the reasoning behind the Red Heifer.”⁶

Consequently, we must raise the following difficulties: a) If there is a rationale for the Red Heifer, how could King Shlomo, “the wisest of all men,”⁷ have been unaware of this rationale? b) When Hashem gave the “*pilpul* (dialectical analysis) of Torah” to Moshe alone, Moshe shared it with the Jewish people “generously.”⁸ Why, then, did he not also share the reasoning behind the Red Heifer?

We must say that Moshe did not willfully and intentionally withhold this rationale. Rather, the “reasoning” behind the Red Heifer is not within the realm of human reason whatsoever. If he would have revealed it, it would never have been understood. As Hashem told Moshe about the purification affected by the Red Heifer: “It is a statute; I have decreed a decree, and **no created being can fathom** My decrees.”⁹

This is why Shlomo could not grasp the reasoning behind the Red Heifer — “it is far from me.” Even Moshe, “the epitome of humankind,”¹⁰ could not understand it on his own, because it was not within the bounds of human rationality.

profundity of the statutes. Rather, the uniqueness of the Red Heifer is in its very ability to purify the impurity conveyed by a corpse, as will be explained in sections 7-8.

⁶ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, 19:6; *Tanchuma* 8.

⁷ *Melachim I* 5:11.

⁸ *Nedarim* 38a.

⁹ *Koheles Rabbah* 8:1 (5).

¹⁰ *Peirush HaMishnayos*, “*Chelek*,” the 7th foundation.

Only **Hashem**, Who is omnipotent, who has no limitations, can, with **His** power, reveal the “reasoning” behind the Red Heifer to Moshe. “To you, **I will reveal** the reasoning,” despite not being **inherently** achievable by a created being.

The difficulty: Just as Hashem **revealed** the reason to Moshe with His limitless power, He could have (with the same power) revealed the reason to others, as well. Why didn't He?

3.

IT IS ALL DIVINE WILL

The explanation is as follows:

There is a well-known interpretation as to why the verse says, “This is the **statute of the Torah**,” as opposed to, “the statute of the Red Heifer,”¹¹ or the like. The verse means to imply that this law of the Red Heifer is “the Torah,” the fundamental principle of the entire Torah.¹²

Since this idea is expressed in the word “statute,”¹³ it is understood that what makes the Red Heifer emblematic of the entire Torah is its quality as a “statute.” As a “statute,” the Red Heifer is the fundamental point of the entire Torah.

This applies both to *mitzvos* and to the study of Torah. It has often been explained that all *mitzvos* — even the intellectually comprehensible “testimonies,”¹⁴ and “rational laws”¹⁵ — are, in essence, an expression of a Divine will that transcends human reason. *Mitzvos* are only intelligible because Hashem wanted His will for *mitzvos* to be clothed in human

¹¹ As the Torah says “this is the statute of the Paschal lamb.” (*Shemos* 12:43)

¹² *Likkutei Torah*, “*Chukas*.”

¹³ {*Chok* in the Hebrew original; *chukim* do not have a rational basis.}

¹⁴ {*Eidos* in the Hebrew original; *eidos* are testimony to past events, such as Shabbos and Pesach.}

¹⁵ {*Mishpatim* in the Hebrew original.}

reason. Even after being clothed in reason, however, the Divine will (in its essential, original state) remains above human reason.¹⁶

The same applies to Torah. Even those elements of Torah understood by a person are, in truth, higher than reason. Because the Torah is **Hashem's** wisdom, it is evident that “just as no created being can grasp its Creator, so, too, no created being can grasp”¹⁷ His wisdom. As it says, “It (Divine wisdom) is hidden from the eyes of all living.”¹⁸

4.

TOIL IN STUDY

This idea is relevant to every Jew's service of Torah and *mitzvos*. Every *mitzvah*, even a rational one, must be performed with *kabbalas ol*, with the awareness that it is a **command** of Hashem. “I have decreed a decree and commanded a statute.”¹⁹ Like the formula for every blessing on a *mitzvah* — “and He **commanded** us.”

So, too, and even more so, regarding Torah study. Torah is infinite. No matter how masterfully a person grasps Torah, his **comprehension** will always be incomplete. Therefore, a person must toil to understand even that which, until now, was above his understanding. Then {after understanding what was previously incomprehensible to him}, the “statute” of Torah will apply for him to loftier matters {which in the meantime he still finds incomprehensible}. Ultimately, he will arrive at the truth of Torah's “statute” — the recognition that Torah entirely transcends reason.

Therefore, the Torah says, “**this is the statute of Torah.**” Even though there are comprehensible aspects of Torah and *mitzvos*, **in essence**, they are above reason. Torah (and all of its *mitzvos*) is a “statute.”

¹⁶ This is because a desire, even when it has a rational justification, remains simple and essentially unjustifiable {there is ultimately no reason for a deep-seated desire}. (See *V'Ani Tefillasi* 5694, as well as *Iggeres Hakodesh* 19.

¹⁷ See *Shaar Hayichud Vebaemunah*, ch. 4 and 8.

¹⁸ *Iyov* 28:21.

¹⁹ *Midrash Tehillim*, Buber ed., 9b.

Furthermore, they are all a statute of the Red Heifer sort, which is **completely** beyond the parameters of wisdom and comprehension.

5.

A REMINDER OF TRANSCENDENCE

In light of this, it is clear why there had to be at least one Torah concept that would remain a “statute,” to show that, in truth, everything in Torah is above reason. Accordingly, Hashem did not reveal its rationale to the Jews.

If the entire Torah were to be clothed in human reason (not only would there be a lack of mindfulness to fulfill a *mitzvah* simply because this is the Divine will, but more critically), if a situation were to call for self-sacrifice, a Jew would be unable to bring himself to it. Because if the entire Torah were rational, and everything a Jew did was rational {why would he sacrifice his life, the ultimate expression of irrationality?} This would affect many details of *mitzvah* performance, not just a literal life or death scenario — for every time a rational being has to do something irrational, it is, for him, self-sacrifice.

{If the foundation for observance was reason, and all *mitzvos* were comprehensible} a person could even become (as *Ramban* says), “a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah,”²⁰ Hashem forbid. For if a person only relates to the rationality of Torah, but not to transcendent levels higher than reason, he will be able to find “Torah-like” explanations and excuses for his negative behaviors.

The same applies to the **study** and comprehension of Torah. To “find” a lofty level of understanding in Torah, beyond a person’s intellect,

²⁰ *Ramban’s* commentary on *Vayikra* 19:2. {Meaning, he could engage in gluttonous behavior, rationalizing that such behavior is not explicitly forbidden by the Torah.}

he must “toil” in Torah.²¹ As long as a person relies on expending a regular amount of effort in delving into Torah, he has not toiled.

Only when a person toils in Torah more than his nature dictates, to the point that his exertion is irrational, will he “find” {unparalleled understanding which comes} “without knowledge,”²² beyond the rules of rationality (This is similar to the advantage of the Babylonian Talmud over the Jerusalem Talmud, as explained in a number of places).²³

All of this is possible only when something in Torah is **obviously** above the limits of reason. From this, a Jew knows that deep within, this is true of everything in Torah. No matter how much a person understands, there is yet more that transcends reason. This motivates his “toil” whereby he sets aside and nullifies his reason. Ultimately, he reaches the level of Torah as it is in essence, above the limits of rationality — “The culmination of knowledge is to not know.”²⁴

6.

THE MYSTERY OF DEATH

The inverse question must then be asked: Since Hashem revealed the reason for the Red Heifer to Moshe, this should have caused a deficiency in Moshe’s quality of self-sacrifice in *mitzvah* performance as well as in his toil and effort in the study of Torah.

In general, how is it possible to say that through revealing something to Moshe, Hashem caused him to lose such a fundamental element of divine service?²⁵

²¹ *Megillah* 6b.

²² *Sanhedrin* 97a.

²³ *Shaarei Orah*, s.v. “On the 25th of Kislev,” ch. 54, et passim; *Hemshech* 5666, s.v. “Vayitein Lecha”; 5708; s.v. “Amar Rava,” ch. 11.

²⁴ *Bechinos Olam* 7:2; *Ikkarim*, 2:30; *Shelah* 191b.

²⁵ The same question can be asked regarding every Jew. The *Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6) says that, in the World to Come, every Jew will see and understand matters that were hidden from them in this world. How could we lack this critical element of our Divine service in the World to Come?

To understand this, we need to first understand another *Midrash*. The *Midrash* says²⁶ when Moshe heard about impurity conveyed by a corpse, he asked Hashem, “If this person became impure, how will he become pure? Hashem did not answer him. At that moment, Moshe’s face turned pale.” Even after Hashem explained that the purification would come through “bringing the ashes of the burnt sin offering to the impure person,” Moshe still asked, “This is purity?”²⁷

We need to clarify: There are other forms of impurity that are more stringent in many important details than the impurity of a corpse,²⁸ such as the impurity of a *zav*²⁹ or a *metzora*.³⁰ Someone with impurity contracted from a corpse could not remain in the innermost camp of the *Shechinah*. But he could remain in the Levite camp. A *zav*, on the other hand, must be expelled from the Levite camp. And the rules regarding a *metzora* are even stricter, since he must leave all three camps, even the Israelite camp. Additionally, the impurity of the *zav* emanates from the *zav*’s own body, while the impurity contracted from a corpse comes from {an external source —} touching a corpse.

Why, then, was Moshe baffled (to the extent that his face turned pale) as to how one could be purified from the impurity contacted from a corpse, but not about more stringent forms of impurity? This question is especially poignant considering that these other impurities were taught earlier in the Torah!

²⁶ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, 19:4; *Tanchuma*, “*Chukas*,” sec. 6 (end).

²⁷ *Koheles Rabbah* 8:1.

²⁸ *Pesachim* 67a.

²⁹ {A man who has an abnormal emission.}

³⁰ {*Tzaraas* is a spiritual affliction with physical symptoms, affecting the skin.}

SOUL AND BODY

The explanation is as follows:

All other impurities {aside from corpse impurity} affect a living Jewish body that contains a soul. Therefore, even when the body becomes impure {by contracting these other impurities}, it is understood that the soul, which is “truly a part of **Hashem** above,³¹” has the Divine ability to prevail upon the impurity. In the end, the body can be purified (through immersion) of its impurity.

Impurity conveyed by a corpse, on the other hand, flows from an inanimate body that has been separated from its soul. By itself, it is nothing more than dust of the earth. This prompted Moshe’s question: How can a person be purified from corpse impurity, especially since it is conveyed from a body that no longer has a connection with Divine power — the power of the soul?

A deeper perspective: Impurity is not physical filth that requires cleansing.³² It is spiritual soil and deficiency in a Jew’s attachment with Hashem (through Torah and *mitzvos*). By virtue of this attachment, Jews are called “alive,”³³ as it says, “and you who cleave to Hashem your L-rd are alive.”³⁴

When, Hashem forbid, a Jew falls as a result of sin, his attachment to Hashem, his “life,” is weakened, and he becomes “impure.” The many gradations in the severity of impurity correspond to how weakened a person’s attachment is to Hashem. Even in severe cases of impurity and detachment, however, if he remains connected to Hashem and to Torah and *mitzvos* in some way, it is understood that he has the ability to become pure

³¹ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 2

³² See *Mishneh Torah* at the conclusion of “*Hilchos Mikvaos*.”

³³ *Avos D’Rabbi Nosson*, ch. 34 (end).

³⁴ *Devarim* 4:4.

— to strengthen his attachment to Torah and *mitzvos*, until he restores it to perfection.

Not so when a Jew, Hashem forbid, transgresses the Divine will in a way that completely severs his attachment to G-dliness, his spiritual life. This spiritual death causes physical death; the impurity caused by a corpse is thus created.

This is why “Moshe’s face turned pale.” {He was perplexed:} How could there be purification for impurity conveyed by a corpse, an impurity that is conveyed by a dead body whose attachment to G-dliness, Torah, and *mitzvos* had been completely severed?

8.

PERMANENT RESIDUE

Hashem answered, “This is the statute of the Torah” — purification is possible with the power of Torah.

Even when a body is torn from the soul and from Torah and *mitzvos*, since the soul once studied Torah and performed *mitzvos* in **that body**,³⁵ the soul (being eternal, “a veritable part of G-dliness, in actuality”) has the ability, with the power of Torah (which is eternal), to affect the body, to leave on the body a permanent trace of the holiness of the soul and of the Torah. It is this trace that persists even when the body is separated from the soul.³⁶ For this reason, even the impurity conveyed by a corpse can be purified.

³⁵ Note the Alter Rebbe in *Tanya* ch. 34, that one who studies Torah “is a host to the Almighty.”

³⁶ According to this, we can explain that the assurance that every Jew will repent, “No one banished from Him will remain banished” (*Tanya*, ch. 39) is not just due to the soul, but to inherent holiness of the body as well.

[This is one of the reasons why the Sages said, “The {bodies of the} righteous do not convey impurity.”³⁷ A righteous person’s body is really just a vehicle for the soul, because “the life of a righteous person is not physical, but rather a spiritual life of faith, awe, and love.”³⁸ This is the life-force and true existence of his body. Therefore, it is understood that even when the soul departs the body, it leaves an eternal impact on a righteous person’s body.]³⁹

This is, however, a “statute” that transcends intellect and reason. Human reason dictates that one thing can influence another only as long as there is some relationship and connection between them. (If there is no relationship between them, and they oppose each other, one cannot influence the other.) This {the soul’s enduring effect on the body, even after death,} can only happen because of the power of the Creator, Who transcends all definitions and limitations.

9.

MOSHE — A PARAGON OF HUMILITY

Accordingly, we can understand how Hashem revealed the reason for the Red Heifer to Moshe (without detracting from Moshe’s humility and self-sacrifice, and even to the contrary):

Moshe’s spiritual station is the Divine attribute of “wisdom {*chochmah*}.”⁴⁰ Due to its self-effacement, “wisdom” is a vessel for Hashem’s Infinite Light. As the Alter Rebbe says, “*Ein Sof* is the true *One*, which means that He alone exists, and there is nothing besides Him. This is the level of *chochmah*, wisdom.”⁴¹

³⁷ See Ramban here, *Midrash Mishlei*, ch. 9, sec. 2; *Bava Metzia* 114b, *Tosfos*, s.v. “mah”; *Zohar*, vol. 1, p. 125a, 168a (and *Nitzutzei Zohar*, ad. loc).

³⁸ An elucidation on *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 27.

³⁹ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 84 and citations there — that when G-d chose the Jewish body, (*Tanya*, ch. 49; *Toras Shalom*, p. 120) the body itself acquired eternity. As the *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 10:1) says, “All of Israel has a portion in the World to Come {as a soul vested in a body}.”

⁴⁰ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Maasei*,” 89d, 92a.

⁴¹ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 35 (note).

In Kabbalaistic terminology, “The inner dimension of *abba* (wisdom) is truly the inner dimension of *atik*.”⁴²⁴³ One of the explanations of this is doctrine:⁴⁴ When one who is superior communicates something to an underling (e.g., a teacher and his student), generally, the idea, to be successfully transmitted and received, needs to be a glimmer of the original. When we say, however, that “the inner dimension of *abba* is truly the inner dimension of *atik*,” we mean that the lower level, *abba*, does not receive {just} the influence of *atik* in a vertical fashion, but rather, the inwardness of *abba* is the inner level of *atik* — i.e. Hashem’s Essence.

It is, therefore, understood why Hashem told Moshe, “to you I will reveal the reasoning behind the Red Heifer.” The “reasoning” behind the Red Heifer is really the inscrutable Divine will, what we refer to as the “inner dimension of *abba*,” the ultimate “statute” of Torah. This was revealed to Moshe because this level of selflessness and identification with Hashem himself was his spiritual identity.⁴⁵ Hashem merely revealed to Moshe his own true identity.

10.

THE DIVINE BODY

This also explains why the “statute” that was revealed to Moshe concerned the impurity conveyed by a corpse:

When a superior shares a diminished version of something with his subordinate, their relationship only exists during the time of the communication, not afterward. Since the recipient is clearly a separate entity from the giver, they can only be considered connected during the time of this communication.

⁴² {*Atik* is the higher level of *Kesser*. *Kesser* — literally “crown” — is the highest level of the *sefiros*, similar to the crown, which sits on the top of the head. In a human being, the two components of *kesser* — *ratzon* {will} and *taanug* {delight}, which is associated with *atik* — control and motivate the other faculties. See Rabbi J.I. Schochet, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, 1988, pp. 59-71.

⁴³ See *Likkutei Torah, Nitzavim* 49d. *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5700, p. 49 and the footnote there.

⁴⁴ *Hemshech* 5666, p. 95 ff.

⁴⁵ {In the original Hebrew, “*madreigas*”; lit. “level,” or “station.”}

When, however, the giver does not lower or diminish himself in the process, but rather, the essence itself is imparted, as with the inner dimension of *abba*, then it is impossible to say that the effect is temporary and that there remains a “recipient” who is distinct from the giver. Wherever Hashem’s Essence is manifest, all that exists in that space is Hashem’s Essence.

Accordingly, we can understand how purification from corpse impurity is possible, even though the body has no **revealed** connection with the power of G-dliness in the soul and in Torah and *mitzvos*. For deep within, the body is itself an entity of Divine holiness.

Nowadays, however, this is not revealed because Hashem Essence is not revealed {so the essential holiness of the body is concealed}. There is, therefore, room for **corpse impurity**, and its **purification** is considered an irrational “**statute**.”

In the Messianic Era, however, when Hashem's Essence will be revealed, the revelation of the inner dimension of *atik*,⁴⁶ we will see how the true identity of the body is its Divine soul. The entire concept of corpse impurity will therefore be irrelevant. The “statute” {the mystery} decreeing purification {from corpse impurity} will then be revealed to everyone.

11.

ONE WITH HASHEM

We can now understand why revealing the reason for the Red Heifer to Moshe did not diminish his humility or self-sacrifice.

The “reason” revealed to Moshe was not a rational one, clothed in the language of reason. Rather, the Divine will of Hashem Himself was revealed

⁴⁶ *Pri Etz Chaim*, “*Shaar Krias Shema*,” ch. 15; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shir Hashirim*,” 51c.

within Moshe's mind, to the extent that Hashem's will defined Moshe's entire being, even his mind.

So, too, the opposite can be said: About whom can it be said that their devotion and self-sacrifice to Hashem is lacking? About a person who is a separate entity from Hashem, and who nonetheless has to defy his nature in order to sacrifice himself for Hashem (or toil contrary to his rational self in order to understand Torah). Moshe, on the other hand — whose entire identity was G-dliness — his essential self was self-sacrifice!

12.

THE MIRACULOUSLY NATURAL REDEMPTION

We can also say that this is the connection between *parshas Chukas* and the 12th and 13th of Tammuz, the holiday of redemption of the Previous Rebbe:

The Previous Rebbe lived a life full of literal self-sacrifice. This was especially true regarding his work of spreading Torah and *mitzvos* in the country in which he was imprisoned {the Soviet Union}, where every action — large or small — required literal self-sacrifice.

Therefore, his redemption from prison combined the miraculous with the natural. It was an open miracle, yet clothed in nature.

To explain: Hashem directs the world in several ways:⁴⁷

The law of nature derives from Hashem's name "*Elokim*" (which {in Hebrew} has the numerical value of הַטְּבַע "the nature"). This refers to the dimension of Hashem that is invested in Creation and also allows room for the natural world. {This is also known as} "The force that fills all worlds."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See *Or Hatorah*, "*Acharei*," p. 564, "*Bereishis*," p. 18b ff.; *Hemshech* 5666, "*Hachodesh*."

⁴⁸ {In the original Aramaic, מַמְלָא כּל עֵלְמִין.}

Hashem's miraculous intervention stems from the Tetragrammaton, Hashem's essential name that transcends nature. {This is also known as} “The force that encompasses all worlds.”⁴⁹ When this force is revealed, natural law is nullified.

Still higher are miracles that are clothed within nature. This stems from a dimension of Hashem that transcends both {the names} *Elokim* and *Havaya*,⁵⁰ the natural and supra-natural modes. These are miracles that are essentially above nature, yet are so beyond definition that they can even be assimilated within nature itself. Meaning, the miracle transforms nature, causing it to concur with the miracle itself.

For example, the Purim miracle, which featured miracles clothed within nature to the extent that “the mouth that forbade was itself the mouth that permitted” {a reference to Achashverosh who first decreed the Jews destruction, then decreed their right to defend themselves}.⁵¹

The redemption of the Previous Rebbe occurred in a similar manner. The same people who ordered his arrest were the ones who were forced to order his release.⁵²

We can say that this is similar to “The inner dimension of *abba* is truly the inner dimension of *atik*.” Through living a life defined by literal self-sacrifice, the Previous Rebbe drew down the Essence of Hashem Himself which, when manifest, did not nullify the natural world, but rather became the identity of the world itself — causing that same world to support holy endeavors.

-From talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Parah*, 5728 (1968); Shabbos *parshas Chukas-Balak*, and 12 Tammuz, 5729 (1969)

⁴⁹ {In the original Aramaic, סובב כל עלמין.}

⁵⁰ {I.e., the Tetragrammaton.}

⁵¹ *Torah Or*, p. 94d.

⁵² Like the Purim miracle, while the events were all natural, it was evident that the catalyst for those events was higher than nature. (*Torah Or*, 93c, 100a, et. al.)