



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Moses and the Impossible Purification

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Chukas | Sichas 1

The Context:

Our *Parsha* opens with the *mitzvah* of the Red Heifer, used in the process of a person's purification after contracting impurity from a dead body. The Torah calls this "the statute of the Torah." (*Bamidbar* 19:2) A "statute" is a *mitzvah* that defies human comprehension. The Red Heifer, the Torah implies, is "**the** statute of the Torah," the definitive statute, entirely beyond the pale of human reason.

In truth, however, the unintelligible character of the Red Heifer is representative of the entire Torah. Even those laws that can be understood by human reason are, in essence, "decrees," the deepest expressions of the Divine will that are divorced from reason. Only because G-d desires that these laws be relatable to human beings did He allow some of the *mitzvot* to be garbed in reason.

And yet, G-d did not garb all *mitzvot* in reason, for if all of the *mitzvot* were intelligible, if everything were reduced to human reason, then we could never muster an irrational dedication to G-d's *mitzvot*. Suprarational self-sacrifice would be impossible.

The Red Heifer is an enduring reminder that rationality is limited, and that our relationship with G-d demands suprarational commitment.

The Question:

The *Midrash* relates that G-d revealed the “rationale” for the Red Heifer to Moses. (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6) If Moses understood even the incomprehensible, how could he attain true self-sacrifice?

The Preface to the Explanation:

The *Midrash* also relates that when Moses learned of the acute impurity conveyed by a corpse, he could not fathom how purity was possible. Even when G-d explained the ritual of the Red Heifer’s ashes, he wondered, “Is this a purification?” (*Ibid.*, 4)

Seemingly, there are more stringent forms of impurity than that imparted by corpse. A *metzarah*, for example, must remain outside all three Israelite camps, while a corpse can remain in the levite camp. Why was Moses so confused by the corpse-impurity?

The explanation is that all other impurities concern a living person. As long as the Divine soul resides in the body, it has the potential to cleanse impurity. But what recourse could there be for a type of impurity that is imparted by a body without a soul? With no potential for holiness and Divine life, how could purity ever be achieved? This was Moses’ concern.

G-d’s answer was: “This is the **statute** of the Torah.” The purification of this impossible scenario defies logic and the rules of the natural world. Even after the soul leaves the body, its effect on the body is eternal. There is residual holiness even in the corpse, and it is this lingering effect of the soul that enables the impurity to be undone. This is a true impossibility — for how can one entity maintain influence on another after they have separated? But this is the “statute of the Torah.” Purity is always possible because the soul’s influence is eternal.

The Explanation:

When the *Midrash* says that G-d revealed the rationale for the Red Heifer to Moses, it does not mean that it became intelligible for him. Rather, because Moses lacked any sense of self and identified completely with G-d,

he was able to absorb G-d's paradoxical truth — that the soul persists even after its departure.

Therefore, his “understanding” could not compromise his dedication, because Moses was “dedication personified.” His identification with the *mitzvah* of the Red Heifer was an indication that he and G-d were completely one.

The Natural Miracle:

Moses' humility and his identification with G-d that allowed him to “understand” the paradox of the Red Heifer is related to the miracle of the 12th of Tammuz — the release of the Previous Rebbe from the Stalinist prison. That miracle was a paradox: It defied the expected course of nature, yet it unfolded through natural channels. Because the Previous Rebbe lived with daily self-sacrifice to spread Torah and *mitzvot*, his salvation also defied the separation between the natural and miraculous. His suprarational dedication was a vessel for G-d's Essence that transcends rational boundaries.