

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

Look to Heaven

This week's Parsha talks about the red heifer, the Parah Adumah. Now, the Torah says: "Zos chukas haTorah—This is the decree of the Torah." A chok is a mitzvah that we don't understand, and we have no explanation for it. Parah Adumah is the quintessential chok. You take a red cow, without blemish, that has never borne a yoke, and you burn it. Then you mix the ashes with water, and you sprinkle it on someone who's tamei (impure), and that person becomes tahor (pure). But the Kohen who's doing the sprinkling, who started off pure, becomes tamei.

But why a red cow? If the Torah wanted to pick a mitzvah that we don't understand, why pick this one? Why the Parah Adumah? There are 613 mitzvos. Why choose this?

Rashi says: because the Satan and the nations of the world bother us about this mitzvah. They say, "What is this ritual with the red cow? What kind of magic is this? What sense does it make—sprinkling ashes and water? Sounds like idol worship. Like baptism or something."

So Hashem says, "Gzeirah hi milfanai—It's a decree before Me. Ein lecha reshus l'harher achareha—you don't have permission to question it." Don't try to figure it out. Don't try to rationalize it. Don't think about it.

And the question is: did the

yetzer hara ever bother any of you about the Parah Adumah? Did you ever sit at night thinking, "Why a red cow?" No! It bothers us about other things—tznius, our parents, keeping Shabbos. All the things the yetzer hara works overtime to make hard. But I never met a Jewish boy or girl crying about the red cow.

So what's Rashi talking about?

I do business with non-Jews. The number one question they ask me: "Why do you wear that on your head?" The yarmulke. No one asks me about taharas hamishpacha. No one ever said, "Hey Rabbi, what's up with the red cow?" Never. So why does Rashi say that this mitzvah specifically is what the non-Jews and the Satan will taunt us with?

Because it's not just about the cow. It's about what the cow represents.

The Parah Adumah makes the impure person pure, and the pure Kohen becomes impure. It's backwards. It's illogical. If I make you pure, how does that make me impure? That doesn't make sense. And Hashem says, "Don't think about it." Why not?

Because this is the question that the Satan uses on every Jew: Tzaddik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo. Why do bad things happen to good people?

The Kohen, the good guy, becomes impure. The impure guy, the sinner, becomes pure. It doesn't make sense. You're the chosen nation—but it seems like you were chosen to suffer.

The Beis Hamikdash destroyed, po-

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IN THIS ISSUE

Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l

Look to Heaven

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein

Mud to Merits

Rabbi Aharon Pessin

Your Chavrusa

DEDICATIONS

L'iluy Nishmat

R' Elchonon Yaakov z"l ben R' Shmuel Pinchos

Manish ben Esther

Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov

Bechor ben Rivkah

Shlomo Zalman ben
R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi

Esther bat
haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l

Moshe Simcha ben Doniel Dov Ber

Miriam bat Yeshayahu

Malka Bracha bat Shimon Chaim

R' Zechariah Shimon ben Yitzchok

L'refuah Sheleima

Deena bat Shoshana
Chaya Raizel bat Dena
Yerachmiel Eliyahu Ben Esther Riva
Reuven ben Rochel
Paysach Yosef ben Hinda

grooms, crusades, Holocaust, six million Jews murdered. And yet we're "chosen"?

Why is it that the best students in school are 45 and still not married? Why is it that couples who keep every mitzvah can't have children? Why do good people suffer?

That's the Parah Adumah. That's the symbol. And that's why Hashem says: "Don't try to understand it. Don't think about it."

Even Moshe Rabbeinu couldn't understand it. He said, "Hashem, why does the tzaddik suffer?" And Hashem said, "You can't understand. You'd have to see every reincarnation, every soul's process. I'm not redoing the whole universe to explain it to you."

And that's the message of the Parah Adumah.

There's another reason we don't talk too much about the Parah Adumah. The sin of the Golden Calf—the Egel HaZahav—was done with a calf. The Parah Adumah, the red cow, atones for that sin. The mother atones for the child. But to talk about the Parah, we have to remember the Egel. And Hashem doesn't want to bring that up again. He says, "Don't go there. Don't reopen that file."

So we leave it alone. But the bigger lesson is this:

We think bad is bad. But we don't know the cheshbon. The Kav HaYashar speaks about gilgulim. It's very deep, but it teaches us something: You're going through this now, but maybe it's not new. Maybe it's from a past life. And it's you—you're just fixing what you didn't fix last time.

There are things we just can't understand.

So Hashem says: "Don't think about it. You don't have the mind to grasp it. You don't have the capacity. You'll never get it."

That's the Parah Adumah. That's the beginning of Parshas Chukas.

Now let's move to another powerful part of the Parsha—the death of Aharon HaKohen.

Aharon's merit brought the Ananei HaKavod, the Clouds of Glory, that surrounded and protected Klal Yisrael in the desert. When Aharon died, the clouds disappeared. And when the clouds disappeared, the Jewish people panicked, because they were exposed, and they were attacked.

Let's read what happened next.

It says: "Vay'daber ha'am b'Elokim u'v'Moshe —the nation spoke against G-d and against Moshe. Lama he'elitunu m'Mitzrayim, lamus bamidbar—Why did You take us out of Egypt to die in the desert?" "There's no bread. There's no water. And we're sick of this 'lechem haklokeil'" —we're sick of the manna, the heavenly bread.

So what does Hashem do?

Hashem sent venomous snakes, and they bit the people, and many Jews died.

Why snakes? Why not lions? Why not wild animals? What's the connection between their sin and snakes?

Because the snake is the symbol of lashon hara. The snake was the original baal lashon hara; it spoke evil about Hashem to Chava. "Hashem told you not to eat from the tree because He doesn't want you to be like Him." The snake was punished by losing its legs and eating dirt forever.

So now, when Klal Yisrael speaks lashon hara—midah k'neged midah—the snake comes back to bite them.

And what do the people do? They

run to Moshe. They say, "Chatanu, we sinned. Ki dibarnu b'Hashem u'vach—we spoke badly about Hashem and about you. Please daven to Hashem to take away the snakes."

So what does Moshe do? He davens. But the snakes don't go away.

Instead, Hashem says: "Make a copper snake. Put it on a pole. Anyone who gets bitten should look at the snake—and they'll live." Moshe makes the copper snake, places it high up on a pole. And if someone was bitten by the snake and looked up at the copper snake, he lived.

What's going on here?

Why not just remove the snakes? Why not do what He did in Mitzrayim—get rid of the frogs, the lice, the wild animals? Why make a copper snake? Why not gold or silver?

Because the Hebrew word nachash (snake) and nechoshes (copper) share the same root. That's the connection.

But more importantly, why did Hashem require this whole process? Why not just forgive them and end the suffering? Because there's a lesson here.

Everyone in life gets bitten. Everyone experiences trauma. It might not be physical. It might not be abuse. But everyone faces pain: death of a loved one, business failure, emotional breakdown, personal collapse.

You have two choices: Face it, or succumb to it.

Hashem didn't say, "Tell Moshe to daven and the bites will stop." He said, "When they get bitten, tell them to look up at the snake." Why look at the very thing that hurt them?

You got bitten by a dog—you don't go hang out at the dog park.

It's counterintuitive. If the snake hurt you, why are you being told to stare at a snake? Because healing comes from facing your trauma. If someone drowns, what do you do? You get them back in the water—slowly. Otherwise they'll never swim again. If you're in a car accident, what do they tell you? Get back behind the wheel. Otherwise you'll never drive again.

Hashem was teaching us: Yes, you were bitten. Yes, you're in pain. But look up. Look at the snake. And see what's above it. When they looked up at the snake on the pole, what did they really see? Past the snake, past the pole—was the sky. Shamayim. And in shamayim—Hashem. The Gemara says: “V'chi nachash memis? Nachash mechaye?”—Does a snake kill? Does a snake heal? No. When the people looked upward, toward Heaven, and they submitted their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed. The snake

didn't heal them. Looking upward did. The pain didn't disappear. But their emunah gave them the strength to overcome it.

There's a famous story in the Gemara (Berachos 33a). A certain arod (a lizard-like creature) was harming people in a town. R' Chanina ben Dosa was summoned and stepped on the arod hole, whereupon the arod bit him, and the arod died. They asked him: “Why didn't you die?” He answered: “Lo hanachash memis, ela hacheit memis—It's not the snake that kills. It's the sin.”

When we do teshuvah, when we reconnect to Hashem, healing comes. This isn't just my opinion. This is Torah. When a Jew was bitten, he looked up, and he lived.

Anyone in the medical field knows that the emblem of medicine is a stick with a snake wrapped around it. Where does that come from? This week's Parsha. All the 12-step programs say

the same thing. They are not Jewish, and yet the second step is: You must believe in a higher power.

Not because they're religious. Because they know that without emunah, you cannot recover. It's a fact. Know there's something higher. Something beyond. If not, life becomes meaningless. Pain becomes random. And there's no way to survive that.

If there's no higher power, then everything is just bad luck. Cancer? Bad luck. Abuse? Bad luck. Poverty? Bad luck. That's a dark, hopeless world.

But if there's a Higher Power, if there's a G-d, if there's a purpose, then you can heal. Hashem didn't say you won't get bitten. He said: If you get bitten—and you will—then you must look up.

And when you look past the snake, past the pain, past the trauma—you'll see the Rofeh, the Healer.

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein

Mud into Merits

Zos Chukas HaTorah—This is the decree of the Torah.” So begins the Torah's instruction regarding the Parah Adumah. The Torah uses the word “decree” to refer to laws that are not rationally understood. These commandments, known as chukim, transcend human logic. They are expressions of divine will beyond our intellectual grasp.

The mitzvah of the Red Heifer is the essential chok. Why? Because it is the ultimate paradox. One of its defining laws is

this: it purifies the impure, and yet simultaneously renders the pure impure. The individual who is ritually impure is cleansed by the ashes of the Red Heifer. But the one who performs the purification—he himself becomes impure and must immerse in a mikveh to regain his own purity.

The Sefer HaChinuch, a classical source that normally provides rational explanations for each mitzvah, refrains from doing so here. Regarding the Red Heifer, even King Solomon—the wisest man who ever lived—declared, “I said I

would be wise, but it remains distant from me.” Despite his unparalleled understanding, he acknowledged that this mitzvah lay beyond his comprehension.

Still, while the full reason for this law eludes us, Rabbi Yitzchak of Vorka offered a powerful insight: the Red Heifer teaches us the true depth of Ahavas Yisrael, the love of a fellow Jew.

To be ritually impure, in a metaphorical sense, can represent someone who feels alienated or isolated; someone who is going through a painful time in life and has no one to lean on. Often, we show sympathy to people like this. We may express concern, offer polite words. But we keep our distance emotionally. We maintain boundaries to



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protect ourselves from being overwhelmed.

The Red Heifer teaches us something radically different. It purifies the impure, but renders the pure impure.

If we truly want to uplift those in pain—not just to comfort them, but to heal them—sympathy is not enough. We must practice empathy. We must step into their shoes. We must be willing to feel their pain, to share in their burden.

And when that happens—when we really enter someone else's suffering—we are changed. We become “impure.” We absorb some of their weight. It affects us. Just as the priest who helped another become pure had to take on impurity himself, so too when we help others, it can take a toll on us.

You may become emotionally drained. You may lose sleep. You may carry their hurt with you. You may even feel like it's taken over your life. But that is what true love of another Jew looks like.

The mitzvah of the Red Heifer calls us to step into the mud for someone else.

Rabbi Mottel of Chernobyl shared a profound story.

There was once a simple Jewish wagon driver—unlearned, spiritually distant, barely connected to Jewish life. Perhaps once a year, on Yom Kippur night, he would show up to synagogue. That was the extent of his observance.

One dark, rainy night, this wag-

on driver was traveling on a muddy road when he saw another wagon stranded off to the side. A Jewish family—husband, wife, and children—was stuck. Their wagon had slid off the path and was sinking into the mud.

Without hesitation, he jumped off his own wagon. He saw their desperate faces—their wagon, their belongings, and their very lives sinking before their eyes. He tied ropes from his horse to their wagon, and after hours of grueling effort—soaked, filthy, exhausted—he pulled them out and saved them from certain death.

Years passed. Eventually, the wagon driver died. His soul ascended to the Heavenly Court, and his judgment began.

The scales were not in his favor. Few mitzvos, many transgressions. The verdict seemed clear: he was headed to a place of punishment. But suddenly, an angelic defender appeared.

“Wait,” the angel cried, “what about the night he saved that entire Jewish family from the mud?”

The judges in Heaven agreed to place that act of kindness on the scale. The man, his wife, and their children—six lives. Still, the scale tipped against him.

Then the angel added, “But what about their future descendants? The children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren—for all generations—because of that one act? All of those Jewish souls should count

as well.” One by one, all the generations that would descend from that family were added to the scale. Slowly, the scale began to tip.

Almost even, but not quite.

Then the angel made one final plea: “What about the mud? The grime, the filth, the physical suffering he endured to save them. Shouldn't that count too?” And so they added the mud. The hours of struggle, the dirt on his hands, the exhaustion in his bones.

With that, the scale finally tipped in his favor. He was saved—for eternity.

One moment of compassion. One act of self-sacrifice. One decision to put another's needs ahead of your own. It may not make headlines in this world. But in the next world—they weigh the mud.

“He who purifies the impure... becomes impure.”

When a Jew enters someone else's suffering—when he gets dirty for the sake of another, even if he's not a saint himself—Hashem says: Because you made them pure, I will make you pure. When we are willing to lose comfort for the sake of love, Hashem rewards us far beyond what we can imagine.

That's the message of the Parah Adumah. Not everything is logical. Not everything is clean. But the Torah teaches us the greatest truth of all: Sometimes, to lift another soul—you have to get dirty.

And in that moment, you become holy.

Rabbi Aharon Pessin

Your Chavrusa

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky zt"l once completed a lecture on Tractate Shavuot late on Shavuot night. The students expected an uplifting closing message. Instead, he removed his glasses and began to cry.

“The Tanna Devei Eliyahu says that when someone studies Torah, Hashem sits opposite him and learns together with him.” He looked at them and asked, “Do you understand what that means? Even if you study alone, the Cre-

ator of the Universe is your chavrusa.” And he wept again.

That Shavuot night became one that his students would never forget.

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 9 Tammuz)

יוסי בן רצון (שרעבי)
שמות חיילים פצועים לרפואה שלמה
אביתר מנחם חיים בן זהבה
אברהם מרדכי בן יעל
אהרן בן שרה הנדל
אופק בו אלינור
אורי אברהם בן הדסה
אייל אליעזר בן חנה
אלון בן מרים
אלחנן יאיר בן דבורה
אליה בן רות
אלישע יהודה בן רות
אלעד בן שרית
אמיר בן אלה
בנימין בן ריינה
בנימין יצחק בן שרה
בר חיים בן נורית
גלעד איתי בן אפרת
דוד בן זיוה
חיים מרדכי בן שרה איטה
טל גרשון בן שרה
יאיר יונה בן דרורה צפורה מלכה
יהודה אהרון בן מרים אסתר
יהונתן יאשיהו בן כרמית
יהונתן יוסף בן שירה
יואל בן אילה
יוחאי יהודה בן סיגל חוה
ירין אליהו בן סיגל
ישראל בן ענבל אסתר
כפיר חיים בן מירה מרים
מיכאל בן פריידל
מישל בת אנג'ליקה
מנחם דוד חי בן מרים
משה אהרן בן לאה בילא
משה צבי בן עירית
מתן בן דבורה
ניר בן אורנה
עדי מנחם בן מורן מירה
עודד אפרים בן ויויאן
עוז חי בן סמדר
עידו בן ענבל
עמיחי בן סיגלית רחל
עמית יהונתן בן מאיה
רואי בן עופרה
רון בן אבישג
רון בן שרון
רועי חיים בן מירב
תום שאול בן דניאל
תומר בן צפורה

אבינתן בן דיצה תרצה (אור)
אביתר בן גליה (דוד)
איתן בן רות אדית (הורן)
איתן אברהם בן אפרת (מור)
אלון בן עידית (אהל)
אלקנה בן רוחמה (בוחבוט)
אריאל בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
בר אברהם בן גיליה (קופרשטיין)
גיא בן מירב (גלבע דלאל)
גלי בן טליה (ברמן)
דוד בן סילביה מוניקה (קוניו)
זיו בן טליה (ברמן)
יוסף חיים בן מרים (אוחנה)
מקסים בן טלה (הרקין)
מתן שחר בן ענת (אנגרסט)
מתן בן ירדנה עינב (צנגאוקר)
נמרוד בן ויקי (כהן)
עמרי בן אסתר ורוניקה (מירן)
רום בן תמר נועה (ברסלבסקי)
שגב בן גלית (כלפון)
תמיר בן חירות (נמרודי)

עמירם בן שרה (קופר)
אריה בן צבי (זלמנוויץ)
אסף בן אילן (חמימי)
דניאל שמעון בן דורון (פרץ)
דרור בן יובל (אור)
איתן בן סול (לוי)
אליה בן דבורה (מרגלית)
גיא בן מישל (עלוז)
הדר בן שמחה (גולדין)
עידן בן אלי (שתיבי)
אילן שלמה בן אברהם (וויס)
ענבר בת חיים (היימן)
איתי בן ראובן (חן)
ג'ושוע בן לויטו מולל
ליאור בן גיורא (רודאף)
מני בן יעקב (גודרד)
מוחמד אל אטראש
עומר בן רונן (נוטרא)
עוז בן עמיר (דניאל)
רונן בן תומר (ענגל)
רן בן יצחק (גוילי)
סהר בן אהרון (ברוך)
סונטאיה אוקארסרי
סותטיסאק (רינטלאק)
טל בן זהר (היימן)
תמיר בן משה (אדר)
אוריאל בן אמיר (ברוך)
יאיר בן אלפרד (יעקב)

Bring Them Home!

Names of Hostages in Gaza and Partial List of Injured Soldiers

(Updated: 9 Tammuz)

INJURED SOLDIERS

Evyatar Menachem Chaim ben Zehava
Avraham Mordechai ben Yael
Aharon ben Sarah Hendel
Ofek ben Elinor
Ori Avraham ben Hadassah
Eyal Eliezer ben Chana
Eitan Asher ben Devora
Alon ben Miriam
Elchanan Yair ben Devorah
Eliya ben Ravit
Elisha Yehudah ben Rut
Elad ben Sarit
Amir ben Ella
Binyamin ben Reina
Binyamin Yitzchak ben Sarah
Bar Chaim ben Nurit
Gilad Itai ben Efrat
David ben Ziva
Chaim Mordechai ben Sarah Itta
Tal Gershon ben Sarah
Yair Yonah ben Drora Tzipporah Malka
Yehuda Aharon ben Miriam Esther
Yehonatan Yoshiyahu ben Carmit
Yehonatan Yosef ben Shira
Yoel ben Ayala
Yochai Yehudah ben Sigal Chava
Yarin Eliyahu ben Sigal
Yisrael ben Inbal Esther
Kfir Chaim ben Mira Miriam
Michael ben Freidel
Michelle bat Angelika
Menachem David Chai ben Miriam
Moshe Aharon ben Leah Beila
Moshe Tzi ben Irit
Matan ben Devorah
Nir ben Orna
Noam Avraham ben Atara Shlomit
Adi Menachem ben Moran Mira
Oded Efraim ben Vivian
Oz Chai ben Smadar
Ido ben Inbal
Amichai ben Sigalit Rachel
Amit Yehonatan ben Maya
Roi ben Ofra
Ron ben Avishag
Ron ben Sharon
Roi Chaim ben Meirav
Tom Shaul ben Danielle
Tomer ben Tzipporah

Avinatan ben Ditzza Tirtza (Ohr)
Evyatar ben Galya (David)
Eitan ben Ruth Idit (Horen)
Eitan Avraham ben Efrat (Mor)
Alon ben Idit (Ohel)
Elkana ben Ruchama (Buchbut)
Ariel ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Bar Avraham ben Julia (Cooperstein)
Bipin Joshi
Guy ben Meirav (Gilboa Dalal)
Gali ben Talya (Berman)
David ben Sylvia Monica (Konyo)
Ziv ben Talya (Berman)
Yosef Chaim ben Miriam (Ochana)
Maxim ben Talleh (Herkin)
Matan Shachar ben Anat (Angrest)
Matan ben Yardenia Einav (Tzangauker)
Nimrod ben Viki (Cohen)
Omri ben Esther Veronica (Miran)
Rom ben Tamar Noa (Braslevsky)
Segev ben Galit (Chalfon)
Tamir ben Cheirut (Nimrodi)

Amriam ben Sara (Cooper)
Aryeh ben Tzvi (Zalmanovich)
Asaf ben Ilan (Hamami)
Daniel Shimon ben Doron (Perez)
Dror ben Yuval (Or)
Eitan ben Sol (Levy)
Eliyahu ben Devorah (Margalit)
Guy ben Mishel (Illuz)
Hadar ben Simcha (Goldin)
Idan ben Eli (Shtivi)
Ilan Shlomo ben Avraham (Weiss)
Inbar bat Chaim (Haiman)
Itai ben Reuven (Chen)
Joshua ben Luito Molei
Lior ben Giora (Rudaeff)
Meni ben Yaakov (Godard)
Mohammad El Alatrash
Omer ben Ronen (Neutra)
Oz ben Amir (Daniel)
Ronen ben Tomer (Engel)
Ran ben Yitzchak (Gvili)
Sahar ben Aharon (Baruch)
Sonthaya Oakkharasri
Sudthisak ben Thong Ma (Rinthalak)
Tal ben Zohar (Chaimi)
Tamir ben Moshe (Adar)
Uriel ben Amir (Baruch)
Yair ben Alfred (Yaakov)
Yossi ben Ratzon (Sharabi)