

# Unqualified Commitment

## Parshas Chukat -Balak

Parshat Chukat

<sup>1</sup> God spoke\* to Moses and Aaron, telling them that <sup>2</sup> the following is declared to be the Torah's decree as commanded by God:

Speak to the Israelites and have them bring you a completely red\* cow,\* which has no blemish,\* and which has never had a yoke on it. <sup>3</sup> Give it to Eleazar the priest,\* and he shall have it brought outside the camp. It shall then be slaughtered\* in his presence.\*

<sup>4</sup> Eleazar the priest shall take the blood with his finger\* and sprinkle it\* toward the Communion Tent seven times. <sup>5</sup> The cow shall then be burned\* in [Eleazar's] presence. Its skin, flesh, blood and entrails must be burned.

<sup>6</sup> The priest shall take a piece of cedar wood,\* some hyssop,\* and some crimson [wool],\* and throw it into the burning\* cow.\*

2 - *Man of Faith in the Modern World - Ed. R. Besdin.*

We generally assume that the *hukah* aspect of the ritual, its incomprehensibility, is in its manner of preparation, its strange effectiveness in removing ritual uncleanness, and the prescription that it be slaughtered outside the Temple grounds, *shehutei hutz*, which is strictly forbidden with other sacrifices (Lev. 17:3). A further paradox inheres in its contradictory effect of simultaneously cleansing the defiled even as it contaminates those who are handling the watery ashes, *metahor et hatemayim u' metaher et hatehorim*.<sup>5</sup>

3

The *mitzvot* of the Torah are intended to engage us emotionally and intellectually. Otherwise they are reduced to cold, mechanical performances, devoid of personal meaning. They become soulless experiences, when, in fact, they were intended "to purify the people therewith" (Gen. R. 44:1).<sup>1</sup> In the preceding chapter we established the premise that we are encouraged to interpret all *mitzvot*, even *hukim*, statutes, which are usually defined as incomprehensible and about which our Sages warned that we may be tempted "to dismiss them as meaningless" (Yoma 67b).<sup>2</sup> They can be interpreted in terms of their subjective meaningfulness to us even if their objective rationale eludes us.

4

Sichas Mussar

With this as an introduction, the Torah proceeds to delineate the laws of *פרה אדומה*, the red cow. The question arises: Why are the laws of *פרה אדומה* described as *תקנת התורה*, the universal statute of Torah?

5

Or HaChaim explains: "Performance of a *mitzvah* despite the fact that it has no apparent human rational basis is tantamount to the observance of the entire Torah. The fulfillment of a seemingly non-rational *mitzvah* bears testimony to one's unswerving faith and desire to fulfill Hashem's commandments."

This means that a person fulfilling a rational *mitzvah* has not yet demonstrated his commitment to fulfill the dictates of the Divine Will as such. It could very well be that he is performing the *mitzvah* by dint of his own reasoning. It is only through the performance of a commandment such as *פרה אדומה* that one demonstrates absolute commitment to fulfilling Hashem's will. Thus, it is indeed *פרה אדומה* which is rightfully considered *תקנת התורה*, the quintessential statute of Torah.

7

This intellectual dimension is, however, merely an extension of the Torah. The Torah's essence remains transcendent G-dliness, and cannot be contained within any limits — even the limits of intellect. To relate to this essence, man must approach the Torah with a commitment that transcends wisdom or logic.

6

*In the Garden of Torah*

The answer depends on insight into the nature of the Torah. The Torah is one with G-d, an expression of His essential will. Therefore, just as His will is above intellectual comprehension, so too is the Torah. Nevertheless, G-d gave the Torah to mortals, not because He desires their obedience, but because He is concerned for their welfare. He wants man to develop a connection with Him, and for that connection to be internalized within man's understanding, so that G-dly wisdom becomes part of his makeup. And with that intent, He en clothed the Torah in an intellectual framework.

To highlight this dimension, it was necessary for at least one part of the Torah to remain entirely above intellectual comprehension. This is the passage describing the laws of the Red Heifer. These laws, which transcend our understanding, help us to appreciate that the entire Torah — in its essence — is also beyond our understanding. This in turn heightens our sensitivity to its inner G-dly core.

9 Were the entire Torah to have been clothed in reason, man would be motivated to rely on his own understanding, and would have difficulty in rising to a challenge that requires *mesirus nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Indeed, limiting our spiritual commitment to the intellectual sphere would encourage man's natural, material inclination. There would be a tendency to follow one's desires, and to rationalize one's conduct, even when it is lacking.<sup>8</sup> Without making an unlimited commitment to the Torah, man would not be able to relate to its unlimited truth.

12 One characteristic of the human condition is a desire for growth.<sup>1</sup> This is a positive trait, an expression of the nature of man's soul. For the soul of man is "an actual part of G-d."<sup>2</sup> As such, no substitute for genuine meaning will ring true. Moreover, even when a person achieves an understanding of authentic truth, he will constantly seek to expand his awareness. For G-d is unlimited, and the G-dly potential within us reflects this boundlessness, never remaining content with any given situation, but rather striving to "proceed from strength to strength."<sup>3</sup>

14 The word *qan* means "engrave." Contrasting the difference between writing and engraving allows us to appreciate the inner meaning of the *chukim*, and the influence they have upon us.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, in contrast to writing, engraving involves strenuous labor. Writing is also considered one of the 39 categories of labor,<sup>7</sup> but the amount of effort required to write cannot be compared to that necessary to engrave.<sup>8</sup>

\* This is the first key to personal growth. There is no such thing as spirituality without sacrifice. A field will not yield crops unless one plows and sows. In order to make the Divine potential each of us possesses grow and blossom, an investment of hard work must be made.

17 Moreover, such a commitment to study does more than engender an awareness of the infinite dimension of the Torah's wisdom; as mentioned above, it enables this dimension to be internalized. In the process, a person's way of thinking changes, and the infinite dimension of the Torah becomes one with his own being.

18 *Worldmark - R. Tatz*  
 Torah and the world parallel each other exactly. Torah is the spiritual core, the world is its physical expression. Although this idea is quite well-known, at its heart is an element which is often entirely unknown or seriously misunderstood. Let us delve into the relationship between Torah and the world as deeply as possible in order to discover some of the true wonder which it contains.

The laws of the Red Heifer, however, imbue a person with an awareness of the unlimited nature of the Torah, stirring him to devote himself entirely to the Torah, both to its observance and its study.<sup>9</sup> Becoming conscious of the inner G-dly nature of the Torah awakens the inner G-dly nature of our souls, enabling us to develop a more complete bond with Him.

11 To underscore the unique contribution represented by the laws of the Red Heifer, the Torah refers to them as *chukas haTorah* ("the decree of the Torah"),<sup>10</sup> rather than *chukas haparah* ("the decree of the [Red] Heifer").<sup>11</sup> Use of the former term emphasizes that our connection with the entire Torah depends on a commitment which transcends intellect.

How does an individual find the never-ending path to personal growth? Answers to this question can be derived from our Torah reading, which begins with the phrase: *אם תלכו בחוקתי*, generally translated as "If you follow My statutes." *תלכו* translated as "follow," also means "proceed," and is used in several sources as an allusion to personal growth.<sup>5</sup> *בְּחֻקוֹתַי*, "My statutes," refers to a particular category of *mitzvos*, referred to as *chukim*. What is implied is that personal growth depends on internalizing the lessons of the *chukim*.

There is another difference between writing and engraving. When one writes, the surface upon which one writes and the ink which one uses remain two separate entities. When, by contrast, letters are engraved in stone, the writing and the stone form a single entity; they are inseparable.<sup>10</sup>

This points to the importance of internalizing the Torah, making its teachings part of one's own being. There is an advantage to compelling oneself to observe the Torah even when doing so runs contrary to one's nature.<sup>11</sup>

But the deepest commitment to G-d's service involves *remaking one's nature to reflect His will*.<sup>12</sup>

16 This is the second lesson of the *chukim* — that a person and the Torah should not be separate entities,<sup>13</sup> but rather a single whole.<sup>14</sup>

This approach leads to true growth, for one proceeds beyond the limited vistas of his own perception, and enters the unlimited horizons to which the Torah introduces him.

19 The nature of the parallel between Torah and physical reality is that Torah is the cause and the world is the result. It is not enough to understand that there is a correspondence between every detail of the physical universe and the Torah; it is essential to realize that each detail of the world exists because the Torah says so. In fact, every fine nuance of each detail exists exactly as it does in the world only because the Torah itself contains each of those details within details.

20 This idea is particularly difficult to grasp in the modern era. Western thought is firmly based in the finite, physical dimensions; the yardstick of reality is the laboratory, and that which is not tangible or measurable by experiment is not taken seriously. The entire world of spirituality is relegated to the domain of personal experience and personal belief. The classical Western mind does not engage transcendence. At center stage in this grasp of the world is the fact of physical existence; spiritual wisdom is seen, at best, as commentary.

21 The result of this worldview when applied to Torah is the notion that Torah describes, analyses, comments. One often hears admiring statements about Torah flowing from this perspective – how deep the Torah is, how penetratingly it perceives the almost imperceptible shades of all aspects of the world. But in reality this is nonsense and one who speaks thus speaks against Torah.

22 To make this point clearer, let us consider a typical example. One often hears it said that the idea behind the laws of kashrus (permitted and forbidden foods) is health – certain foods are not kosher because they are unhealthy. The Torah, in its great wisdom, prohibits such foods in order to safeguard the health of those who heed its commands. Some types of meat are prone to tapeworm infestation; shellfish inhabit parts of the seabed which are contaminated with hepatitis virus and other pathogens, and so on.

25 This is the grasp which a Jew should have. An effort must be made to break the patterns of Western thought which bind the world within finite boundaries if one wishes to become spiritually conscious. Transcendent wisdom must be primary.

26 Armed with the knowledge that Torah is primary, we must now ask: "Where is Torah?" Is the primary, causal Torah that we have been discussing a parchment scroll and no more? What exactly do we mean when we speak of Torah as the primary energy of the world?

27 The answer is that Torah is located in the Oral Law, the Torah she'b'al peh. The Torah lives and makes contact with the world in the Oral Law. And the Oral Law lives only in the hearts and minds of the Sages of the Jewish people and of all those who learn it. To the extent that Torah is studied, it lives in the world; if it is neglected, it is not here.

30 ענין התורה א"א להשיג רק ע"י ושרף את הפרה שהוא ביטול החומריות, משגם שא"א להגיע לתכלית הדבקות בה' ע"י התורה רק כשלומדה כראוי, כשאינו משוקע בחומריות. וכמו שאחז"ל (אבות פ"ו) כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה וכו', וכן כתב הרמב"ם (פ"ג מהל' ת"ת) שאין התורה נקנית לא מתוך עידונים ולא מתוך אכילה ושתייה וכו', שאין פירושו שצריך שיחסר לו איזה דבר, אלא אף אם יש לו כל טוב כדי שיוכל להגיע לתורה צריך שלא יהא משוקע בחומריות, וכל זמן שמשוקע בחומריות אינו יכול להתדבק בתורה, רק ע"י שממית עצמו עליה, ששורף ומבטל את חומריותו, רק אז יטהר גבר ודברי תורה יתקיימו אצלו.

23 Of course there is truth in this approach – Torah living is healthy; a major benefit of the Torah-observant way of life is in fact the physical and mental well-being which is an integral element of Torah observance. But a moment's thought will show the fundamental error of this point of view: such a person understands the physical world to be primary, the world is the way it is as a primary fact – some foods are unhealthy, some are not; that is simply the way things are. And now, after the fact, the Torah deals with that reality: eat this food, do not eat that. The Torah is secondary to a finite world, and of course it too must be finite. The absolutely inevitable next step is: of course, the Torah must be subject to change! Previously unkosher foods which are no longer unhealthy due to modern inventions or improvements can now be eaten! After all, the entire basis for the prohibition was a health consideration!

24 But the spiritual secret is quite the opposite. Certain foods are forbidden; the reason is entirely spiritual, whether we grasp some of that spiritual depth or not. The primary element is the spiritual, the transcendent. In fact, it could be that the physical attributes of the forbidden food are as they are because the spiritual essence is impure: the shellfish inhabits its contaminated habitat and may be physically unhealthy because it is unkosher!

28 ומבואר אומרו זאת חקת התורה ולא חקת הפרה או הטהרה, כי אמנם פרשה זו היא הכלל והיסוד איך לזכות לבחי' תורתו, לתורה המביאה לדביקות בה', שכל לימוד התורה תלוי בטומאה וטהרה, שרק אם יהודי לומד אותה בקדושה ובטהרה או התורה מביאה אותו להיות דבוק בה', אבל בלא טהרה אינו מסוגל כלל להגיע לדביקות בה', כי אין טמא מתדבק בטהור, וקדוש.

29 והרי שעיקר הפרשה היא חוקת התורה, חוקה איך לזכות לתורה. וכן מבואר שפיר דרשת חז"ל עה"כ אדם כי ימות באהל שדרשוהו לענין דברי תורה והקשר שלה במיוחד לפרשה זו, כי כאמור הפרשה היא לא רק חוקת הטהרה והפרה, אלא היא חוקת התורה, וע"ז אמרו זאת התורה וגו' אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שבכדי לקנות התורה ושיתקיימו אצלו דברי תורה צריך ראשית כל להיות ממית עצמו עליה, שימית עצמו וחומריותו, וזה התנאי הראשון ללמוד תורה כראוי ולהתדבק בהשי"ת ע"י התורה. ומבואר

Important as this principle may be to the proper fulfillment of Torah, it is, however, most difficult to observe. The human psyche finds it difficult to accept the notion that one is a servant to God, and must perform his commands purely as an obligation. Man, even while performing a mitzvah, would prefer to do so as a result of his own understanding and cognitive intellect.

32 A human being finds it very difficult to be a מחויב, to be obligated to do, or to be prohibited from doing something. So much so, that he will at all costs break the bonds restraining him, even if it means risking his life. This is demonstrated most vividly in the story of Shimi ben Geira and Shlomo HaMelech.

Shimi ben Geira had vilified and cursed David HaMelech during his lifetime. On his deathbed David HaMelech instructed his son Shlomo,

Now, therefore, do not hold him guiltless for you are a wise man, and you will know what you ought to do to him and you shall bring him to the grave with blood (I Melachim 2:9).

Shimon Muser - R. Bebuski - Ed

This concept has a remarkable corollary. If a person existed who had so perfected his body that it resembled his soul, then neither his soul nor his body would ever be subject to change. As we have explained thus far, Moshe was such a person. After Matan Torah, his body and soul were on equal footings, as the spirituality of the soul had totally pervaded his body. All other prophets underwent a complete change of personality during their revelations, whereas Moshe was unchanged, as he was in constant touch with the Divine and ready for God's word whenever it might come:

35 We are now able to see the jink: it was only after Moshe had maximized his development and entered the fiftieth gate that he could understand the rationale of the parah adumah. Once he stood, so to speak, in a spiritual locus never before or since trodden by any human, then he could appreciate the profound wisdom underlying the forty-nine purities of the parah adumah.

\* We may now suggest why this parashah is left out of the Torah until the last months of klal Yisrael's journey in the desert. We may assume that a man of Moshe's stature continued to develop in a spiritual sense until the last moment of his life. Therefore, in the last year of his life, he was presumably at his greatest. God wanted Moshe to understand the parah adumah, and this demanded supreme spiritual qualities. As such, God waited until this moment, toward the end of Moshe's mission to record the laws, to ensure that not only could His disciple fully understand them, but that this fact would be apparent for posterity.

4p קן הוא נפשו הנביא כל שנפשו יותר זכה ובהירה רואה הנביא את הפתרון של הנבואה באופן ברור וזאת. זהו שאמרו במשה רבינו שראה באספקלריה המאירה, היינו "שנפשו היטה צעופים המעלה". ויש להוסיף דודאי גם משה רבינו ראה דרך אספקלריה, שפירושו "מראה" כנ"ל, רק הכוונה היא שאכל כל הנביאים היטה נפשו כמו מחינה המפקדת, אבל אצל משה היטה המחינה מאירה צהירות, מפני עולם מעלת נפשו של משה רבינו כמו שביאר הגאון מהרי"ל דיקקין זוק"ל.

נסתכלו באספקלריה שאינה מאירה, משה רבינו נסתכל באספקלריה המאירה, וביאר בהנבואה יורדת מעולמות העליונים של נפש הנביא והנביא מסתכל בנפשו, באספקלריה פי מראה של זכויות, שכמו בזכויות אש תהי' נבועה ירוק, תיראה דרך הזכויות שכל הדברים הם ירוקים, ואם הזכויות תהי' אדום יהי' נראה כאלו כל הדברים אשר הוא מסתכל עליהם הם אדומים.

Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell therein, and do not leave it neither to here nor to there. For on the day that you will leave and cross the valley of Kidron, know that you will die, your blood is on your head (I Melachim 2:36-37).

Not only did Shlomo administer this solemn warning to Shimi, but in addition, he reinforced it with a stern vow. What was his intent? Where does Shlomo's legendary wisdom manifest itself? There are many old men who have lived all their lives in Jerusalem, not finding any imperative to leave. Certainly Shimi, who had solemnly sworn to remain there, and knew that he would be killed if he left, would not leave. And how, indeed, is it that for the loss of a mere two servants, Shimi would forfeit his life?

\* The answer is that certainly it is possible to live in Jerusalem, the joy of the entire earth (Tehillim 48), without ever leaving. However, on the day that a person is forced to stay, Jerusalem becomes for him an unbearable prison. His efforts to free himself from this jail will know no bounds. This is what Shlomo perceived in his profound wisdom, and this was the trap that ensnared Shimi. He knew that by forcing Shimi to stay in Jerusalem with so severe a penalty, reinforced yet with a solemn vow, Shimi would eventually be compelled to break these iron shackles in an attempt at freedom.

36 א"ר גזירה - מה ק"ח

במס' ז"ב (דף ק"ד): "משה כתב ספרו ופרשה בלעם וספר איוב", ופירש רש"י שפרשה בלעם אינה כשאר התורה שאינה אלא נבואה ומשלו של בלעם, ע"ש בלשונו שדבריו סתומים מאד, דמאי נ"מ בזה שאינה אלא נבואה בלעם, ולמה שונה פרשה זו משאר סיפורי התורה שכל אות ואות שבהם יש בה אותה קדושה שיש בעשרת הדברות, וכמש"כ הרמב"ם (בפ"י

37

ולפי כל הג"ל קשה מאד להבין מה שאמרו ח"ל (ספרי שם) "ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה" (דברים ל"ד - י), אבל באומות העולם קם, ומנו בלעם. הלא בלעם הי' מקולקל במדותיו, כדאיחא בצבות (פ"ה מ"ט), ואיך נאמר שהי' נבואתו במדרגת משה שזיכך את חומרו כ"כ עד שלא הי' גופו חוצץ כנ"ל.

38

עוד קשה להבין, מה הי' הק"ד של בלעם לקלל את ישראל, וכי סבור הי' שהשי"ת יסכים לזה. ועוד הלא הקב"ה צוה אותו להדיח "לא תאור את העם כי צרוך הוא", ואעפ"כ הלך בלעם לקללם, איך חשב שיוכל לקללם כנגד דעת הקב"ה?

39

והמהרי"ל דיקקין הקדים לבאר מה לאיחא בגמ' (יבמות מט:) "כל הנביאים

5) כזה ביאר גם בספר באר מים חיים על התורה בפרשה זו, וחביא ראי' לזה מהא דאיתא בגמ' (מגילה ד:): שישאשחו חמלך שלח אצל חולדה הנביאה ולא אל ירמיהו הנביא מפני שהנשים רחמניות הן, ולכאורה מאי נימ מזה שחייא רחמנית, הלא שלחו לשאול בתורת נבואה, ועיי' שהנביא מתרגם את חננאל לפי תכונת נפשו וכנייל, עיי' שהארך בכ"ז.

וביאר המהרי"ל דיקקין דס"ד של בלעם הרשע הי' שיצרך השי"ת את ישראל דרך "מחזה", והמחזה תלוי בנפש המקבל, וכפי פתרון הנביא שמשגיג את הנבואה לפי תכונת נפשו<sup>5</sup>, כן באמת מתקיים הנבואה. וראי' שכן הוא, דהא קיי"ל (ברכות נה:): ש"ל כל החלומות הולכין אחר הפה", וחלום הוא א' מס' בנבואה (שם נ:), א"כ כ"ש דבנבואה כן הוא דלפי פתרון הנביא יתקיים הנבואה. וזהו הענין בבלעם, שחשב שהנבואה מתקיים כפי הפתרון השייך לנפש שלו, לנפשו הממועצה במדות רעות, נפש רחצה ועין רעה, ובכן מתקיים לרעה על ישראל. אבל הקב"ה חשבה לטובה והנבואה נראה לבלעם דרך אספקלריא המאירה, כדי שהפתרון יהי ברור וזאת ולא יסבול שום פתרון אחר. וזהו מה שנאמר בספרי "אבל באה"ע קס, ומנו בלעם", שבבחינה זו שראה באספקלריא המאירה היתה הנבואה במדרגת משה, אבל ודאי שלא הי' בלעם עומד במדרגת משה כלל, אלא רשע הי' ורשע נשאר גם אחר הנבואה<sup>6</sup>, והשגת הנבואה באופן נעלה זה הי' רק מפני טובת בניי, כנ"ל.

43

ועבשיו מוכן מה שנאמר בגמ' הו"ל דמשה כתב ספרו ופרשת בלעם, והקשינו דהלא גם פרשת בלעם חלק מן התורה היא, וביאר בספר ה"ל דכלל התורה כתב משה רבינו כפי השגתו, ואף מה שנאמר לשאר הנביאים כמו האבות הק' שלא השיגו את נבואתם במדרגת ה"ל, אבל כשנאמר ונבואתם למשה רבינו נאמר לו באספקלריא המאירה, ולכן השיג זה הרבה יותר ממה שהשיגו האבות כשראו אותה נבואה מחילה<sup>7</sup>. וזו היא הכוונה שמשה כתב ספרו, היינו שכתב כפי מדרגת נבואתו, שהקב"ה דיבר עמו פה אל פה, משא"כ נבואת בלעם שגם לבלעם נראה הנבואה דרך אספקלריא המאירה ולא חידש משה רבינו בלום, רק הי' כמעתיק בעלמא, וע"כ לא נחשב פרשת בלעם כחלק מספרו של משה.

44

We propose that the singular *hukah* here is not merely in the performance of the ritual but rather in the mind-defying mystery of death itself, whose defiling effects the watery ashes seek to counter. Death, the Torah tells us, has a contaminating effect; contact with it disqualifies us from entering the Temple and from participating in other matters of holiness. Death is a mocking fate which awaits us all, a trauma of human helplessness which disturbs our existential serenity. It is an absurdity which undoes all of man's rational planning, his dreams and hopes. We wonder, why should the foremost of God's creations have an awareness of his mortality and, therefore, live in constant dread and distress in face of its inevitability?

46

*Tumat-met* shares with other *tumot* the characteristic of dealing with a dead organism. But *tumat-met* involves something more horrible, namely, human death. Death is an unpleasant experience when encountered in the zoological kingdom, but it involves no more than the cessation of functioning of an organism. With *tumat-met*, however, a spiritual personality has been terminated, a self-conscious individuality who was possessed of visions, hopes, joys, despair, and grief, a being who anticipated the future, remembered the past, and shaped the present. We are dealing with a human personality who had the capacity to build and destroy worlds.

In a word, human death is a most tragic event. Man, endowed with time-awareness, knows that his existence is transient. Even as he relates to God, he knows that death will terminate his earthly worship.

45

Each person is a microcosm, an *olam katan*, an individuality with dignity, an original with worthiness. "A single man was created to proclaim the greatness of God, for man mints many coins with one die, and they are all like one another; but God has stamped every man with the die of Adam, yet not one of them is like his fellow" (Sanh. 38a). Man's singular humanity establishes his status, not the class or society of which he is part.

47

All ritual defilements have one common denominator, namely, being exposed to experiences which are depressing, ugly, and life-negating, all of which are emotionally and aesthetically jarring: bodily secretions (Lev. 15—*zav, zavah*), diseases involving bodily erosion (Lev. 14—leprosy), decaying dead organisms (Lev. 11:24—*sheretz, nevelah*), a human corpse (Num. 19). These are the sources of ritual uncleanness. Experiences with terminated life and organic decomposition affect us adversely and generate unwholesome feelings which conflict with the life-affirming emphasis of holiness. Our Sages taught, "one may not worship in sadness [melancholia] . . . but only in rejoicing with the *mitzvah* [with an optimistic frame of mind]" (Ber. 31a).<sup>9</sup>

48

The most significant difference between *tumat-met* and other *tumot* is in the method of purification which the Torah prescribes. The former requires *haza'ah* (sprinkling the watery ashes of the *Parah Adumah*) as well as *tevillah* in a *mikveh* (immersion in a gathering of water in accordance with the specifications of the halakhah). Other *tumot*, however, are cleansed solely through *tevillah* and require no *haza'ah*.<sup>14</sup>

This distinction in purification is emphasized in the Torah: "He who touches the corpse of any human being shall be unclean for seven days; he shall be cleansed through *haza'ah* on the third day and the seventh day, and then shall be clean; but if he purifies himself not on the third and seventh days, he shall not be clean" (Num. 19:11).<sup>15</sup>

50

*Haza'ah* also involves water, but the situation is different. The *tamei* cannot sprinkle it upon himself; it must always be "and a clean person shall sprinkle it upon the unclean person" (Num. 19:19). He cannot liberate himself; he is dependent upon others; only a *tahor* can help him. His is a condition of dependency, and his own initiative is not enough. Both *tevillah* and *haza'ah* remove defilement and render one eligible to participate in the holiness of the Temple. In the former, it is self-liberation; in the latter, he must depend on others.

52

The ultimate purifier, *metaher*, from the defilement of *tumat-met* is God Himself. Our Sages clearly suggest that only He can lift from us the debilitating effects of contact with human death. On the verse "And one who is clean will gather up the ashes" (Num. 19:9), *y'asaf ish tahor*, the Tanchuma (B.) adds: "This refers to the Holy One." Verses are cited to support this interpretation.<sup>19</sup> It is the Almighty, represented by the *Tahor*, who is the ultimate purifier of the scourge and terror of death. The totally irrational ritual of the *Parah Adumah* suggests that human efforts to comprehend death and to lessen its dread are futile without an acceptance of a providential God. The inexorability of death as a human condition comes from Him, and only He can cleanse us. We cannot achieve it by ourselves.

54

The chapter of *Parah Adumah* is a bridge spanning events that happened thirty-eight years apart, from the rebellion of Korah (chaps. 16-18) to the arrival at the wilderness of Zin (chap. 20). It is a somber reflection of those tragic years during which the exodus' generation, *Yotzei Mitzrayim*, was dying in the desert, making way for the generation of the desert, *dor hamidbar*, who were to enter the Holy Land. To represent the tragic death of an entire generation, the *Parah Adumah* chapter, with its message of triumph over the melancholy of death, is appropriately situated.

49

The two cleansing acts, *haza'ah* and *tevillah*, are strikingly dissimilar in the manner of their performance, and one may derive lessons from each. *Tevillah* requires that the defiled enter the water entirely, on his own initiative, bowing his head, bending his knees, and submerging in a sea, river, lake, or any other *mikveh*. He then emerges a *tahor*, cleansed. Only he can do it; if he is lazy or fearful of water, his status cannot be changed. The defiled must perform the act himself; it cannot be done for him. He defiled himself and he must cleanse himself. *Tevillah*, therefore, implies a capacity to change one's condition. It is suggestive of all forms of human initiative, creativity, and freedom, the ability of man to transform his life, to raise himself because he has free will. Man can remain defiled if he so wishes, and be reconciled to the restrictions it imposes, simply by not going to the *mikveh*. Or, if cleansing is desired, he must muster the initiative and pull himself up; it is all up to him.

51

Aesthetic ugliness yields to a corrective aesthetic cleansing. Existential ugliness, however, which is due to an awareness of one's inexorable mortality, is not effaced so readily. *Tevillah*, becoming a new person, does not remove this dread; death continues to frighten. How, then, can we come to terms with our morbid forebodings and overcome its life-negating effects? An additional method, *haza'ah*, besides the palliative *tevillah*, is needed.

The real cleanser of the morbid state induced by threatening death is God Himself. We have faith that He compassionately cares about us and that we will not be abandoned. We accept, both intellectually and emotionally, a sense of surety that the human soul, the real "I" in the human personality, is immortal, and that death is a transition, not a termination. These considerations assuage the terrors of death; it is no longer nihilistically destructive.

53

We cannot defeat death, but we can alleviate its effects upon us, both medically and psychologically, to limit its frequency and terror. Longevity can be extended through human initiative, as symbolized by *tevillah*. Earthly immortality, however, will continue to elude us, and only with God's help can we cleanse ourselves of morbidity and go on with our life's work. This is the symbolic message of *haza'ah*. *Tumat-met*, therefore, requires a double procedure of purification. The ultimate enigma, *Zot hukat hatorah*, is *adam ki yamut*, man's mortality.

55

4. *Parah Adumah* (Num. 19). The painful period when an entire generation died is, like the *Parah Adumah* ritual itself, a *hukah*, a Divine decree beyond human comprehension. The symbol of this mournful period is the *Parah Adumah*, which removes defilements derived from human death. It represents a triumph over death, an affirmation of life, and qualifies one to resume participation in matters of *kedushah*. As explained earlier, God is the ultimate purifier (*metaher*) who helps us overcome the depression of morbidity. *Parah Adumah* is an appropriate transition between the period of rejection and death, and the resumption of Divine communication when they arrived in Midbar Zin, in the fortieth year of their wanderings.