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**THE LOGIC OF THE ILLOGICAL**

**By Rabbi Nissim Lagziel**

The Rogatchover Ga'on was known for his unique sharpness. He never followed the accepted customs of protocol and honor typically observed in the world-at-large. The story goes that once an author of scholarly Torah books came to see the Ga'on in request of a "haskama," an approbation, to a new sefer he had just written.

After the Rogatchover perused over the sefer for a few minutes, he took a sheet of paper and briskly started writing a "sea" of references from Gemara (both Bavli and Yerushalmi), Rashi's commentaries, and numerous other references to Tosfos.

When he finished, he handed the sheet of paper to the author, and with that, the meeting was over.

The author didn't understand what all this meant. At first, he thought that these were notes dealing with subjects covered in his treatise. However, after a brief glance, he soon realized that there was no connection between the sefer and the references the Rogatchover had listed. "What exactly did the Ga'on mean?" he pondered to himself.

Totally bewildered, he turned to one of the leading rabbanim of the time, in the hope that he could help solve this mystery.

The rav looked through the Rogatchover's notes, and then suddenly, he broke out into a grin from ear to ear and started to laugh hysterically…

“What's so funny?” the man asked in amazement.

“The common link between all these footnotes and references,” the rav replied, "is that they all deal with issues pertaining to fools, boors, and Am-ha’aretzim…!”

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This week, we read **Parshas Chukas**, a Torah portion that skips in an instant over the thirty-nine years the Jewish People wandered in the desert. As is known, the parsha opens with the mitzvah of *Parah Adumah* (red heifer) – its burning, the gathering of its ashes, and the other detailed laws connected to its preparation. While Elazar HaKohen made the first heifer on the second day of Nissan in the second year after the Jewish People left Egypt, as the Torah portion continues, the Chumash skips to the fortieth year and tells about a number of sad events. The passing of the prophetess Miriam, the disappearance of the famous well that supplied water to the Jewish People (something that led to the sin of the waters of Meriva), the passing of Aharon HaKohen, and the Divine edict upon Moshe Rabbeinu that he would not enter the Holy Land – indeed a very a difficult parsha…

However, as the Torah portion concludes, we hear the Song of the Well (for the miracles that saved Israel from Moav) and the unbelievable victory over Sichon, king of the Amorites, and Ohg, king of Bashan, giving the parsha a sweeter ending.

It is known that the mitzvos of the Torah are divided into three categories: *mishpatim* (logical mitzvos), *eidus* (commemorative mitzvos that can be explained even though they would not necessarily have been deduced logically), and *chukim* (mitzvos beyond all logic). There are numerous **chukim** in the Torah – the prohibitions against eating pig meat, cooking meat and milk together, wearing sha’atnez – these are only a few from a long list of **chukim**. However, there is something unique to the burning of the red heifer, and due to this uniqueness, it – and it alone – is called “***chukas ha'Torah***”!

It would seem that the Torah should have called the mitzvah of burning the red heifer *“chukas ha'parah”* (the statute of the heifer) or *“chukas ha'tahara”* (the statute of ritual purity). Why specifically did this mitzvah earn the title of *“chukas ha'Torah”* -- the statute of the Torah. Are there no other *chukim* in the Torah?

Furthermore, the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 19:3) states that Shlomo HaMelech, "the wisest of all men," said of himself that he had investigated and understood the logic and reason behind every mitzvah of the Torah, except for…*Parah Adumah*, regarding which it is said, "I said, 'I will become wise,' but it was far from me." (Koheles 7:23)

What is the great difficulty with this mitzvah? Why is it less understood than the prohibition against sowing mixed species in a vineyard or cross-breeding animals?

Chassidus explains that there are two levels of beyond intellect in the world, two ways for a person to lack the ability to understand. There are things that are *above intellect* and there are things that *defy intellect*.

Most of the *chukim* of the Torah are above the level of our human intellect, which is (generally) limited and unable to attain the logic and intellect of G-d Himself. It's not that these mitzvos have no basis in logic, it’s only that their logic is holy, sublime, and beyond all rational understanding, and we simply are not on a lofty enough mental and intellectual level to comprehend them.

In other words, not to offend anyone, but we are simply not as smart as we think ourselves to be! There are, however, individuals who do poses that kind of knowledge and sensitivity to appreciate the spiritual and lofty logic that stands behind these mitzvos, Shlomo HaMelech for example.

But the *chok* of Parah Adumah belongs to the second category. We are unable to comprehend the mitzvah of the red heifer with our intellect not because we can't reach it, but because it is incomprehensible by its very definition. It defies and contradicts all logic!

There is a blaring paradox here: On the one hand, the heifer purifies those who come in contact with the severest form of impurity, a dead human corpse. Yet, at the same time, it defiles “all those dealing with it!” The heifer is called and characterized as a sacrifice, yet it was offered outside the Temple court, outside the Beis HaMikdash itself, and even outside the boundaries of Yerushalayim.

What’s going on here? Does the Parah Adumah purify or defile? Is it outside or inside?

It's not that we're unintelligent, just not smart enough. Shlomo HaMelech was “the wisest of all men,” and even he couldn't understand! Why? Because there's nothing to understand; it can't be understood!

This is not a mitzvah defined in terms of intellect; quite the opposite is true. This mitzvah shatters and contradicts all limits of intellect.

This supra-rational nature of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is evident in yet in another aspect.

It is closely connected to the True and Complete Redemption, as we see in the words of the Rambam (Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Parah Adumah 3:4), stating that the *tenth* red heifer in history "will be made by the Melech HaMoshiach; may he speedily be revealed. Amen, so may it be G-d's will."

Why was it relevant for the Rambam to note that Melech HaMoshiach would be the one to prepare the tenth Parah Adumah? What makes this mitzvah different from all the other commandments of the Torah, all of which will be completely restored in the time of the Redemption? Has it also been said about Melech HaMoshiach that he would compute the years of shmitta and yovel?

It is especially perplexing since the actual process of the Parah Adumah *cannot* be done by Moshiach, who isn't a Kohen. It will be done under his *leadership,* but so will all the restored Mitzvos.

In the world of Torah, the number “ten” symbolizes completion (Ibn Ezra Shemos 3:15), and in fact, the *complete* fulfillment of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah will only be in the Future to Come. The reason for this is quite simple: While the nine red heifers prepared since Moshe Rabbeinu to this day did their job and purified tens of thousands of Jews defiled from contact with a corpse, there was still a missing element…

These heifers only dealt with the *consequences* of death – the impurity, but not the *cause*. Death still existed and still exists in the world.

In contrast, the True and Complete Redemption will be the fulfillment of purity from the concept of death itself. Thus, the reason for impurity will pass from the world, as is said, "He has removed death forever" (Yeshayahu 25:8), and all the deceased will be revived to eternal life. Therefore, the existence of any form of impurity in the world will then be completely nullified – "And the spirit of contamination I will remove from the earth" (Zecharia 13:2).

Many of us have a difficult time accepting and understanding this. It seems to us illogical and impossible. "How could this possibly be?" "This is a direct contradiction with…, and clashes with…"

However, the solution to things opposing the limitations of human intellect is firmly established in the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. It reminds us that the Torah, a most-deep and logical work, was given by the creator of logic Himself - Hashem. His creation does not bind Him, and the innate paradoxes of Parah Adumah exhibit that.

So let's learn, here and now, a practical lesson from the Parah Adumah:

Even if we experience hardships in "wrapping our minds" around various aspects of the Redemption and they seem to us illogical, we must put our logic aside and accept the absolute truth found in Torah that according to all the signs of Chazal and the Rebbe's prophecy, Moshiach's complete revelation is imminent.

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**To Conclude with a Story:**

We will conclude with a story told to the Tzemach Tzedek by his maternal grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, teaching us a valuable lesson about how much we should believe in the words of a tzaddik:

Once, on a frozen winter day, I traveled to Mezeritch. When we arrived at an inn, the wagon driver lifted me out of the wagon because my legs had frozen, and he brought me inside. The innkeeper was an elderly and pious Jew, and he rubbed my legs with snow and liquor until I had regained my strength.

"How many years have you lived here?" I asked the older man.

"More than fifty years," he replied.

"Do they have a minyan here?"

"No, I travel from here to the nearby city for the High Holidays to daven in the shul there."

"Is it proper for a Jew such as yourself to daven all the time without a minyan? Why don't you live in the city?"

"From where will I make a living?" the elderly Jew inquired.

"If G-d can provide for the other Jews in the city, why can't He give *parnassah* to you as well?"

In the course of the conversation, it became clear that the man speaking to the elderly innkeeper was a student of the great Maggid of Mezeritch.

When the elderly Jew heard this, he vanished from sight…

About half-an-hour later, I saw several wagons standing near the inn filled with various chattels and belongings.

"What's this all about?" I asked the man.

"You commanded me to live in the city…we're moving!"

If a simple and elderly Jew who never learned much Chassidus, yet heard a suggestion made by a student of the leader of the generation, and acted upon it without a moment's hesitation, surely, we, who heard, saw, and were commanded by the *Nasi Hador* himself should do the same with even more exceptional fortitude!

Good Shabbos!

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