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Chukat | Spiritual Purity - Conducive for Torah Study





MESILOT Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son **Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

פרשת חוקת | אנגלית

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Parshat Chukat - From Tears to Growth: A Journey of Reflection



From Tears to Growth: A Journey of Reflection

Eli rubbed his eyes and stifled a yawn. It was nine o'clock at night — late by any standard.

He reached for his "Bedtime Shema" booklet and began reciting it with deep concentration.

When he reached the confession section, his eyes caught a small passage:

"One must confess with a whole heart, reciting the transgressions committed that very day. Through confession, the forces of impurity are separated from the soul, allowing it to ascend to the upper worlds."

Seeking to fulfill this instruction, Eli closed his eyes and reflected upon his day:

After Shacharit, he had donned his Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin and

read an inspiring tale in a weekly pamphlet:1

In the town of Anipoli lived the righteous Rabbi Zusha, who was destined from Heaven to endure poverty and hardship. Despite his suffering, he was always filled with immense joy, believing that 'joy is a spiritual fire that burns away all impurities.'

Nearby lived a wealthy and distinguished Jew who, despite his material comfort, was always sad and depressed, which is a most undesirable state to be in since 'sadness is the doorway to all sins.'

He was curious about the source of Rabbi Zusha's happiness and decided to ask him. At midnight, he approached Rabbi Zusha's house and posed his question.

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Rabbi Zusha warmly replied, "Let me explain by of example. Remember the wedding held recently by the wealthiest man in town? When unexpectedly received invitation. I was overwhelmed with joy. I arrived early, and the host warmly welcomed me, seated me honorably, provided delicious food, and gave me a generous gift. Following this positive experience, I returned home filled with gratitude and happiness.

In contrast, from the moment you heard about the wedding, you felt entitled to an invitation, and when it was delayed, you became anxious and bitter.

Once you finally received the invitation, you felt insulted that vou were only further down on the invitation list.

You initially refused to attend, but later decided to go anyway. Arriving late, you sat alone and felt humiliated and angry that you weren't properly honored, and you returned home bitter and upset.

This is the difference between us — you believe everything is owed to you, so you're always unhappy. I believe nothing is owed to me, so I'm always happy."

Upon hearing this story, Eli tearfully decided from that day forward to be joyful and grateful for every aspect of his life.

Then at breakfast, he thanked G-d for his portion with deep intention, and later, passing by a kollel for retirees, he had helped complete a minyan, and while there, he opened a book titled 'Reb Asher' and read of the righteous rabbi's relentless war on laziness — a lesson on striving for excellence in even the simplest tasks, like preparing a salad, which could become heavenly if done for Heaven's sake.

That evening at Ma'ariv, the rabbi spoke passionately about guarding one's eyes and said that in this merit, one will merit to behold G-d's divine revelation. night's teachings, struggles, and the anecdotes that were shared stirred Eli's soul.

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As he returned home, his wife shared with him troubles and complaints that shattered his heart, and he vowed to work more on maintaining peace in his home.

Defeated and pained, Eli found himself back in the present, in the midst of reciting the confession section once more, overwhelmed by conflicting feelings, insights, and resolutions: to be truly happy, to act with swiftness, to guard his eyes, and as well to cherish peace — all those resolutions faded away as quickly as they arose. A small puddle of tears gathered at the table, and from them, this booklet was born, together with the following reflections.

The Red Heifer

On the 15th of Nissan in the year 2448 to creation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt, and six months later, on the 11th of Tishrei, they were commanded to build the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

They enthusiastically began gathering the materials needed for its construction, and within two days, they collected everything required and set about building the Mishkan and its vessels.

About six months later, on the 23rd of Adar, the dedication of the Mishkan began, and for seven days, Moses performed the Mishkan services, dressed in white garments.

Then, on the 1st of Nissan of the second year after the Exodus, the Mishkan was erected, as recorded at the end of Parshat Pekudei (the final section of the Book of Shemot (40:17)):

"And it came to pass in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, that the Tabernacle was set up."

The Gemara (Gittin 60a) teaches that Rabbi Levi said on the day the Mishkan was erected, the Jewish people needed eight rulings to be decided in order to carry out the Mishkan service. Therefore, on that very day, the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave Moses eight sections of Torah

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law, and Moses wrote each section on a separate scroll.

Rabbi Levi then lists these eight subjects of Torah law, one of them being the passage dealing with the Red Heifer (Parah Adumah).

To explain this Mitzvah:

A large portion of Torah law deals with matters of ritual purity, and one of these areas is the laws of impurity contracted from a dead body:

Anyone who has become ritually impure through contact with a corpse is prohibited from entering the Holy Temple, and they are also forbidden to eat consecrated foods;² Furthermore, if the person is a kohen, he may not eat terumah or ma'aser and all the other foods that must be eaten in ritual purity.

In order to be purified from this state of impurity, an individual

must undergo a purification process involving the sprinkling of ashes from the Red Heifer.

The Torah teaches that to purify a person who has become impure by contact with a corpse; one must take a red heifer, burn it, and then mix its ashes with spring water in a vessel.³ The mixture must be sprinkled upon the impure individual twice: once on the third day to his purification count and once on the seventh day.

The mitzvah of the Red Heifer is not a logical commandment but a 'Chok' — meaning it has no explanation that the human mind can fully grasp.

As the Torah states: "This is the statute ('Chukat,' plural for 'chok') of the Torah which the L-rd has commanded, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and they shall bring you a red heifer without blemish, in which there is no defect, and upon

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- 2. There are several 'consecrated' foods that every Jew may eat.
- **3.** "Living water" is a term for spring water; spring water emerges from the earth, moves, and continuously flows, and thus is called "living."

Parshat Chukat - The Secret Was (Almost) Never Revealed

which no yoke has been placed" (Bamidbar 19:2).

One of the most remarkable aspects of this commandment is the "fusion of opposites" that it involves: the very same act both renders the pure person to be impure and purifies the impure one, all at the same time.⁴

A portion of the Jewish people was at the time in a state of impurity by contact with a corpse, and they needed to be

purified by means of the Red Heifer ashes so they could offer the Pesach sacrifice in time.

Accordingly, on the day after the commandment was given — on the 2nd of Nissan — the first Red Heifer was burned, and its ashes were used to purify those who were impure from contact with the dead.

Thus, on the 14th of Nissan, the Jewish people were able to offer the Pesach sacrifice.

The Secret Was (Almost) Never Revealed

In total, only nine Red Heifers were burned from the time this mitzvah was given until the destruction of the Second Temple.

As Rambam writes:5

"A total of nine Red Heifers were prepared from the time we were commanded with this mitzvah until the destruction of the Second Temple. The first was

prepared by Moses, the second by Ezra, and seven more from Ezra's time until the destruction of the Temple. The tenth will be prepared by the King Messiah — may he be revealed speedily in our days, Amen, so may it be His will."

Thus, over the centuries, presumably, millions of Jews were sprinkled with the ashes of the several Red Heifers.

4. One who carries the ashes of the Red Heifer becomes impure with a degree of impurity. Therefore, when the priest

sprinkles from the ashes to purify one who is impure, he himself becomes impure.

5. Hilchot Parah Adumah 3:4

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Yet despite the continuous study of its laws and the constant use of its ashes, its secret and its rationale have remained unknown since time immemorial.

As a brief aside:

6

Even though Parah Adumah is a 'Chok', Moses merited understanding its secret. As the Midrash relates:

Rabbi Yosi bar Rabbi Chanina said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, told Moses: "To you, I shall reveal the reason for the Red Heifer, but to everyone else, it shall remain a 'Chok'."

Six months passed from the time G-d revealed the secret of the Red Heifer to Moses, and G-d revealed that same secret to another individual named Korach.

The 'Yismach Moshe,' Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, writes the following:⁷ "Korach attained a very lofty level by understanding the rationale for the Red Heifer, and he therefore desired to be like Moses.

Having grasped the rationale of the Red Heifer, he felt emboldened and had the audacity to challenge Moses.

This teaches us a great moral lesson: even the greatest person can stumble and fall through pride."

Nearly two thousand years later, G-d revealed the secret of the Red Heifer to two more righteous individuals: Rabbi Eliezer the Great and his student, Rabbi Akiva.⁸

But as stated, generally speaking, the mystery of the Red Heifer has never been revealed.

Nevertheless, we do find in the Midrash that to the final generation — the generation that will merit redemption — G-d will reveal this mystery.⁹

- 6. Bamidbar Rabbah (19:6).
- 7. 'Yismach Moshe,' Parshat Korach.
- 8. "Shem HaEchad Eliezer" (Aleph), printed at the beginning of Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer.

Parshat Chukat - The Mystery of the Final Generation's Redemption

We must understand: What will be unique about the final generation that sets it apart from all of its predecessors?

Why does this generation specifically merit receiving and

internalizing this immense illumination — the mystery of the Red Heifer?

Before we answer this question, let us introduce an important concept.

The Mystery of the Final Generation's Redemption

When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created Adam, He placed him in the Garden of Eden and 'walked' with him throughout the garden and showed him a tree called the 'Tree of Life.'

We cannot fathom what exactly that tree looked like, but we can appreciate that it was something profoundly spiritual and sublime, and through it, Divine light and vitality flowed into the world.

The Men of the Great Assembly described the Tree of Life thus: 10

"The tree was enormous; its height reached the heavens, and it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its foliage was beautiful, and it produced abundant fruit, providing sustenance for all. Beasts of the field took shade under it, birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it" (Daniel 4:8–9).

9. To quote the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah, 19:6):

"And they shall take to you a red heifer"
(Bamidbar 19:2) — Rabbi Yosi bar Rabbi
Hanina said: The Holy One, Blessed be
He, said to Moses: "I will reveal to you
the reason for the red heifer, but for the
others, it will be a statute."

And it is written: "And it shall come to pass on that day..." (Zechariah 14:6); matters that are hidden from you in this world are destined to be revealed in the world to come.

10. As it says in the Gemara (Bava Batra 15), The Men of the Great Assembly wrote: Ezekiel, Trei Asar, Daniel, and Esther.

Parshat Chukat - The Mystery of the Final Generation's Redemption

The Zohar states that the Tree of Life included the mystery of the Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton, which is composed of four letters: ' (Yud), ה עילאה (the upper Hei), ו (Vav), ה תתאה (the lower Hei):

8

The Vav corresponds to the trunk of the tree; the Yud corresponds to its fruit; the lower Hei corresponds to the tree's roots; and the upper Hei corresponds to its branches.

Adam and Eve chose to settle in this magical place where the very air was of a different kind, and breathing it filled them with lofty feelings of holiness, and where they were bathed by a refined and pristine Divine light.

Adam's soul was indescribably great — beyond anything we can

comprehend; even his body was utterly refined and pure, free of forbidden desires and untainted by negative character traits.

Adam did not possess an evil inclination, and by virtue of his stature, he was able to grasp the secret of the Red Heifer.¹²

Opposite Adam and Chava stood the Serpent in the garden, filled with dread at the sight of the uplifting atmosphere.

It lost no time and quickly sprang into action, and Adam and Chava ate from the Tree of Knowledge — and by doing so, they inflicted a vast and terrible blemish upon the Tree of Life.

The Torah does not describe this blemish explicitly, but the Men of the Great Assembly revealed more

- 11. Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 69, 111b).
- **12.** As Rabbi Naftali from Rophshitz writes (Zera Kodesh Parshat Chukat):

Our Sages expounded in Bamidbar Rabbah (19:3) that regarding the red heifer, Solomon said: "I said I would understand, but it is distant" (Ecclesiastes 7:23).

That which has been hidden from us—the reasoning for the red heifer—is due to the fact that the light created on the first day is concealed, as the sages say (Chagigah 12b) that Adam beheld it and saw from one end of the world to the other and through that the hidden light the secret of the red heifer can be attained.

Parshat Chukat - The Mystery of the Final Generation's Redemption

details about it, as it says in the book of Daniel (4:10–12):

"A holy guardian angel descended from Heaven and proclaimed mightily: 'Chop down the tree and cut off its branches, strip away its foliage and scatter its fruit; let the beasts flee from beneath it and the birds from its branches. However, do leave the tree stump with its roots in the ground."

Through Adam and Chava's grave sin, the trunk of the tree was damaged ("chop down the tree") — corresponding to the letter Vav; its fruit was dispersed ("scatter its fruit") — corresponding to the letter Yud; its branches were cut off ("cut off its branches") — corresponding to the upper letter Hei; and only the roots, corresponding to the lower Hei, remained in the ground ("leave the stump with its roots.").

The sin of the Tree of Knowledge wrought two primary damages:

All four letters of the Divine Name Havayah were tarnished and harmed, and the three letters יהו (Yud–Hei–Vav) became separated from the final letter Hei.

When Adam and Chava realized the enormity of their wrongdoing, they felt intense shame and hid among the trees of the garden.

A wind began to blow, and G-d revealed Himself to Adam: "And the L-rd G-d called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?"" (Bereshit 3:9).

The Hebrew word אַיָכָה ("Where are you?") can also be read as אֵיךְּ ה"How (could you separate) the letter Hei?" — in other words: Why did you detach the final Hei from the three earlier letters of Yud–Hei–Vay?

After Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, G-d was concerned that he might also eat from the Tree of Life, and therefore, He expelled Adam from the Garden of Eden and blocked its entrance with the "fiery ever-turning sword," as it is written:

"He drove out Adam, and stationed at the east of the

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Garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life" (Ibid. 3:24).

Adam and Chava stood outside, longing to return to Gan Eden, but G-d placed as a guard at its entrance the "fiery ever-turning sword," which "turns" from one mode of action to another — from good to evil, from mercy to judgment, from peace to battle.

Ever since that time on, we have lost and cannot attain or overcome the "flame of the ever-turning sword."

Yet we have been promised

that the final generation, the generation that is to be redeemed, will indeed overcome this sword and eat once again from the Tree of Life.

Once again, we must understand: What is so drastically different in the final generation that no previous generation beforehand had? Why will they be privileged to receive and contain within themselves the illumination of the Tree of Life, a light that no one beforehand was privileged to behold?

But before we answer these questions, we must introduce yet another concept.

The Divine Purpose in Our Worldly Struggles

We bring here an excerpt from a talk by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of blessed memory:

Our Sages have revealed¹³ that the reason the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world is because He desired that the Jewish people make for Him a dwelling place in these lower realms.

G-d desired that the Jewish people sanctify this very physical, dim world, refining it so that it can serve as a fitting abode for His glory.

Even though G-d lacks no angelic hosts and seraphim on High, nevertheless G-d's desire is specifically to dwell here, in this

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lowly world, among the earthly, material beings who inhabit it.

As the Baal HaTanya taught ('Ohr HaTorah,' Bamidbar vol. 3, p. 597), the root of this Divine "desire" is in the root and source of all divine intellect and above it.

By way of illustration, consider someone powerfully driven by a desire; no matter how persuasively he's told that it's not worth doing, it won't help; the nature of desire is beyond a person's ordinary faculties. Sometimes, the person himself can't even explain why he feels such a desire — only that he does.

The only way to control and influence desire is through deep contemplation, by which one can rise above and reach the root and source of one's intellect and effect change.

The same is true (albeit providing a huge leap from human to Divine) when it comes to G-d's desire. The Al-mighty wants a dwelling place in the lower realms. Even if we can't grasp why He wants it (for we cannot, so to speak, penetrate

the root of His infinite wisdom), it makes no difference.

One does not and cannot debate as to why a "desire" exists; we need only to do our utmost to actualize G-d's desire.

Indeed, G-d derives a special delight when these "lowliest" of creations bring His Presence down into this world, uplifting spiritual energy from below to above, thus eliciting spiritual blessing from above to down below.

A great joy is aroused within G-d specifically when, in this physical and lowly "World of Action," which is fraught with challenges and spiritual struggles, He is built a beautiful "dwelling."

No matter how holy and pure the celestial angels may be, their Divine service is nothing compared to that accomplished by the Jewish people in this world. After all, angels have no evil inclination and don't have to exert themselves in the service of G-d — and so there's no special merit in what they do.

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But the Jewish people, here in this earthly realm, possess a strong and potent evil inclination and face countless difficulties and obstacles in serving G-d. When they overcome everything and sacrifice themselves to carry out His will, it brings G-d immeasurable satisfaction.

To further expand on this point:

It so arose in G-d's will to create a nation whose bond with Him would be authentic and eternal — and from all nations, He chose the nation of Israel.

He did not merely choose them as a collective; He chose each and every Jewish individual. Every Jew has a powerful bond with G-d, akin to what people call being "bound by blood." Every Jew is beloved by Him literally as an only child to a father or mother, as it says in the Torah: "You are children to the L-rd your G-d" (Devarim 14:1).

By virtue of His love for His beloved children, G-d desires to give them perfect goodness, true delight — and so He gave them the gift of challenges. Through

prevailing over these challenges, they develop and prepare the vessels within their souls to receive His divine light deservedly, not as a "handout."

This poses a challenge to each and every Jew:

Within each Jew lies a dimension of goodness hidden deep in his heart, but it's covered in layers of "darkness, cloud, and fog."

A person must realize that at the beginning of his journey toward G-d, he must pass through stages of darkness, confusions in serving G-d, and all sorts of difficulties, and only after enduring these trials can one merit that the great Divine light be revealed to them.

Some people, however, flee the moment they see challenges. Yet one who truly wants closeness to G-d never flees but stands firm against every and any challenge until he finally reaches the hidden light that is found in the most secluded corners of the soul, and it emerges in response to a person's steadfastness against these tests.

Parshat Chukat - The Importance of Immersing in a Mikveh

In this world, we must endure a lot of pain and suffering; a soul that has not passed through the worldly trials of hardship cannot receive the same intensity of divine illumination. Only these who bears someone obstacles, delays, and difficulties with great patience will behold all of the gates in Heaven open before him and be shown the path that ascends to the House of G-d.

Even a holy soul, such as that of a sage of the Mishnaic era, if it does not spend a few years in this world and go through humiliation, elevating and being involved with lowliness, it will not merit divine illumination.

Let us restate the principle:

Every time a person wants to

attain some spiritual enlightenment in this world, it is accompanied by many challenges and obstacles because divine light is often shrouded in many coverings. Likewise, when a person studies the Torah, it's often very difficult to grasp its meaning and to plumb its depths, for they are hidden and concealed.

But each and every time that a person refines himself — removing one more negative trait, letting go of one more worldly desire — G-d removes one more layer of covering from upon the Torah he studies, and eventually, the person merits to behold the Torah light without a veil, just as it exists in the heavens.

We will add yet another point.

The Importance of Immersing in a Mikveh

We now bring an excerpt from Chelev HaAretz (vol. 5, p. 3):

It's well known that all entities strive to return to their source. As our Sages convey this in the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 53:15): "Throw a staff into the air, and it will fall back and stand on its root [the thicker base]."

So, too, the divine soul within each of us constantly yearns to return to its source and cling to G-d in a wondrous and steadfast bond — just as it was united with

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Him before descending into this lowly world.

Indeed, G-d granted the soul this possibility even while it is "imprisoned" and confined in a body.

However, when a person sins, a barrier arises, separating him from the Shechinah, as the verse says: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d" (Yeshayahu 59:2), and the soul loses that potential, as though bound in iron chains within the body.

Worse still, at the moment one sins, he attaches himself to the forces of impurity and negativity, and they seize hold of him, draining his strength and preventing him from attaching to the Divine.

That's why every Jew, at the day's end — before going to sleep — needs to recite a confession over the sins committed that day so that the forces of impurity will detach from his soul and he can regain renewed strength.

But even more importantly, a Jew must do his utmost to remain pure of all defilement.

Let us elaborate:

Our sages explain that there are five types of impurity that prevent the Shechinah from resting upon a person, and one must safeguard and avoid them to the best of their ability:

- 1. Spiritual impurity The spirit of impurity that dwells on the hands, removed only by ritual washing.
- 2. Physical impurity Impurity exiting the body, such as various impure emissions or leprosy, G-d forbid.
- 3. Intermediate level of impurity Through contact with carcasses or impure creatures or impurity through contact with a corpse. In these cases, one becomes impure by merely touching an object, although no tangible impurity actually adheres to his body hence, it's considered "intermediate."
- 4. The "fourth leg" of the impurity from which one ought

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to purify himself is that which is dirty and repulsive.

The Torah says, "Your camp must be holy" (Devarim 23:15), and uncleanliness is most improper when standing before G-d.

5. Finally, the harshest of all is the impurity imparted by sin.

Our Sages have taught that sin creates a barrier between a person and his Creator, and as long as the sin persists in the person's soul, he is deemed "impure." This is in a similar vein to how the Torah regards forbidden relationships and non-kosher foods as "defiled," and much in the same way, any sin taints the soul.

Regarding this fifth type of impurity, one is purified by sincerely returning to G-d with all his heart.

This causes all impurities to depart from the soul, removing any

barriers standing between him and his Creator, as the verse says, "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you will be cleansed from all your defilements, and from all your idols I will purify you" (Yechezkel 36:25).

Likewise, King David says: "Purify me from my sins" (Tehillim 51:4).

In addition to repentance, one who wants to properly purify himself of spiritual defilement is advised to do his best to immerse in a mikveh every day.

Rabbeinu Tam wrote in Sefer HaYashar (Sha'ar 13) that "Purity of the body renews purity in the soul." Thus, when one's body is pure, it draws further purity of the soul, which, in turn, leads the way to the completeness of the soul.

See further in Chelev Ha'aretz, for more discussion on this important topic.

The Greatness of the "Generation of Upheavals"

Moses lived a lifespan of 120 years, filled with many

righteous deeds and great holiness.

Parshat Chukat - The Greatness of the "Generation of Upheavals"

On his last day on Earth, the 7th of Adar, 2488, he taught the people of Israel four Torah sections: Nitzavim, Vayeilech, Ha'azinu, and V'Zot HaBerachah.

In Parshat Ha'azinu, Moses said:

"And the L-rd saw and was angered, provoked by His sons and His daughters. And He said, 'I will hide My face from them, and I will see what will be their end, for they are a generation of upheavals, children in whom there is no faith" (Devarim 32:19–20).

On its surface, the verses describe how the people of Israel sinned and provoked G-d time and again, and He decided, therefore, to hide His face from them — leaving them to fend for themselves, G-d forbid.

Yet the famed Rabbi Klonimus Kalman interprets this verse in Ma'or VaShemesh with a novel explanation: The people sinned repeatedly, provoking G-d to anger, but G-d "said" (וֹיאמֶר) - which can understood as in the verse "אָמִרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלְבִי" ("I said in my heart"; Kohelet 2:1), - that even though it might arise in My heart to hide My face from them, I cannot do so; because I "see their ultimate end" — I look forward to the final generation, a generation of upheavals in which the familiar reality is turned upside down.

As the Gemara (Sotah 49b) describes this era leading to the days of future redemption:

"Insolence will abound.¹⁴ Costs will soar, even if vines yield abundant grapes, the wine will be pricey. The kingdom will turn to heresy; no one will accept rebuke. The study hall will turn into licentiousness; the Galilee will be laid waste.

Wisdom of the scribes will decay; those who fear sin will be

14. As Rabbi Pinchas from Koritz wrote ('Imrei Pinchas HaShalem,' Vol. 1, page 363):

"In these generations, the impure powers of pride grow immensely, as the Gemara

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despised; truth will be lacking. Youths will shame the elderly; the old will stand before the young. A son will disgrace his father; a daughter will rise up against her mother; a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own house;

the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog; a son will feel no shame before his father."

Yet, despite all of these terrible upheavals, the Jewish people will continue to serve the Creator with all their might, 15 and G-d will not be able to truly hide His face from his people of Israel.

(Sotah 49b) says: "In the era leading to the days of future redemption, insolence will abound." The reason for this is that these generations are lowly and far removed from their source, just as heels are distant from the head, and this causes overwhelming pride to ensue.

This is because arrogance stems from a lack of understanding and shame before G-d, who fills all worlds, and the more one is distanced from Him through sins and transgressions, the more brazen and proud-hearted one becomes.

15. On his final day in this world, Moses spoke to the Children of Israel about the 'generation of upheavals,' yet in fact, he was acquainted with them decades earlier and acquired a great lesson in humility from them.

As the Rebbe Rayatz once related (Likkutei Dibburim – Volume 1–2, page 144):

"And Moses was exceedingly humble from all the men upon the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3) — Moses saw the Book of

Record of Adam and saw that there would come a generation preceding the coming of the Messiah that would have no spiritual attainment at all; their spiritual attainments would not be considered significant at all, especially in comparison with Moses', and they would not serve G-d with a broad mind and heart, but merely with practical observance of the commandments.

He saw that their divine service would be accompanied by great self-sacrifice, with many obstacles and delays in both body and soul, amid a multitude of concealments and veils, and they would withstand many impediments and fulfill the commandments with wholehearted dedication and overcome all tests.

He beheld the highest spiritual source of their self-sacrifice, from the innermost aspect of the infinite light of G-d, and it caused him great humility; he felt that they were much greater than himself.

It was because of them, by virtue of that final generation, that he merited perfect humility.

Parshat Chukat - The Enduring Struggle of the Final Generation

In fact, all of the preceding generations are saved on the merit of that final generation as we shall expand further.

The Enduring Struggle of the Final Generation

In the year 2238 to Creation, Yaakov and his sons left the Land of Israel and descended down to Egypt, and from that point began the Egyptian exile.

For the first 120 years of the people's Jewish sojourn Egypt, they enjoyed autonomy and equal rights. But then. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt died, and his son Melul seized the throne, and from that moment, the persecution began.

The Egyptians embittered the lives of the Jewish people, oppressing them mercilessly, and their torture and cruelty exceeded anything the human mind could imagine.

result of this As а enslavement, the souls of the Jewish people were crushed, and little by little, they began to lose their inner light and vitality, and in its place, there arose bitter feelings of loss and self-loathing.

The Jewish people continued spiraling downward tremendous speed, and the terrible abyss — the Fiftieth Gate of impurity-loomed on horizon, and should they be trapped in the jaws of the Fiftieth Gate, they would be entirely lost; there would be no hope.

Then the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself to Moses and placed all of reality, patterns of nature, and laws of governance and existence into Moses's hands.

Moses began his mission, inflicting many plagues upon the subduing Egyptians, impurity, and releasing Jewish people from their midst.

Fifty days later, they merited to stand at Mount Sinai, where they attained purification, and all the contamination that had clung to them since time immemorial had left them, and the divine Shechinah rested upon them entirely.

Parshat Chukat - The Enduring Struggle of the Final Generation

Even after the Revelation at Sinai ended, their greatness did not cease; Moses remained their guide, and through his merit, they rose to spiritual heights never before known.

As the verse testifies: "He was King in Yeshurun when the heads of the people gathered, together, the tribes of Israel" (Devarim 33:5), "King" here refers to Moses, and the Torah attests that Moses raised everyone of his generation to the level of "heads" — that entire generation stood on a level comparable to a "head" compared with the rest of the body, subsequent generations to come.

From that moment onward, the generations began to decline.

We call each successive generation 'dor,' for the word dor (דור) can be understood as derived from the term "to keep rolling downward," indicating that from Moses's generation onward, souls keep descending further, drifting farther from their "head." 16

And yet, despite the spiritual decline, the fundamental rules of the spiritual battle never changed. In every era, the struggle was against the forty-nine gates of impurity, and war has been waged with the divine power that is entrusted to each and every Jew.

But in our generation — a generation of upheaval — we have discovered, to our surprise, that the rules of war have changed; the battle is now waged against the final, fiftieth gate of impurity, 17 and this is why the struggle is so difficult.

As Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kahan writes:¹⁸

"In our times, the spiritual darkness and trials are enormous and nearly overwhelming. It may seem that we have nowhere from

^{16. &#}x27;Likutei Orot', page 133.

^{17.} Several books have expounded thus upon the words of the 'Ohr Hachaim' (Exodus 3:8).

^{18. &#}x27;Divrei Emunah' (Yamim Nora'im vol. 2, p. 192).

Parshat Chukat - The Enduring Struggle of the Final Generation

which to draw inspiration and holiness. The forces of evil grow stronger day by day, and our resolve and endurance have nearly collapsed.

Many people move about their day heavily and uninspired. While they may live comfortably — woe to such a life without purpose and meaning. 19

This, then, is the meaning of the verse 'And the L-rd saw' (Devarim 32:19–20) — G-d sees what these forces of evil have caused; 'and was angered' at these impure powers and weakens them. And how did this turnaround come about? 'By the provocation of His sons and daughters.'

The Jewish people are a "part of G-d above," and they truly want to be good.

Sometimes, they realize what state they're in, feel pain in their hearts, and grow angry at themselves for having fallen into such sins and lowliness. This is 'the provocation of His sons and daughters' — the anger they feel toward themselves, and by this, an awakening is triggered Above: 'And the L-rd saw and was angered' — G-d becomes angry at the forces of evil that have caused all these falls and declines.

The verse continues to describe our last generation:

19. This modern-day lack of focus is expressed in halachic application as well:

When a person decides to finish eating or drinking and then desires to resume eating or drinking again, he must recite a blessing from anew, for by detaching oneself from the blessing that was recited, another blessing is now necessary (regarding the blessing of Hamotzi, there are differences, as detailed in section 179 of the Shulchan Aruch).

In our generation, when minds have become weakened, this ruling has

changed. In Piskei Teshuvot (Vol. 2 – page 559), Rabbi Eliyashiv is quoted saying that in our days, when the clarity of the mind has been diminished, we no longer possess the decisiveness of mind that would warrant making a blessing once again, thus, even if one decides not to eat more than a certain amount, or that his eating or drinking has ceased and is no longer interested to eat or drink anymore, one nevertheless does not recite the blessing again when he changes his mind

and decides to continue his meal.

Parshat Chukat - The Mystery of the Red Heifer

'And He said: I will hide My face from them' — this is the hiddenness of the Divine countenance in our times when we do not see or hear anything; we have a difficult time getting awakening or strength.

But we must know that: 'I will see what their end shall be' — this concealment is because G-d wants to see if we will still hold fast to divine service despite the crushing weight of hardships, darkness, and trials.

Such is the unique role of the Jewish people in the final generation: even amid great concealment of the Divine countenance and intense darkness, to adhere to G-d, and Heaven forbid to ever abandon His service.

'For they are a generation of upheavals' — we belong to a generation that transforms the attribute of judgment into mercy, something no previous generation was able to do.

Specifically in this generation, when concealment is so great and our state so low, we keep striving in G-d's service, and it is we who merit to transform judgment into mercy and thereby hasten the final redemption."

We now return to our earlier questions.

The Mystery of the Red Heifer

In this week's Parshah, Chukat, we are commanded regarding the mitzvah of the Red Heifer. Thus, the Torah states: "This is the statute (chukat) of the Torah which the L-rd has commanded, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and they shall bring to you a red heifer without

blemish, in which there is no defect, and upon which no yoke has been placed" (Bamidbar 19:2).

We find in the Midrash²⁰ that the Red Heifer connects to all of the different periods of exile:

'A red heifer' — refers to the kingdom of Babylonia;

Parshat Chukat - The Hidden Purpose of Exile

'Without blemish' — refers to the kingdom of Media;

'In which there is no defect'
— refers to the kingdom of
Greece;

'Upon which no yoke has been placed' — refers to the kingdom of Edom, for the yoke of Heaven has never come upon it, and it inflicted great evils upon the people of Israel."

As we know, every mitzvah teaches us lessons and morals. The Midrash implies here that the Red Heifer is directly tied to the four exiles, and only after the

Jewish people go through all these exiles can they grasp the inner reason for the Red Heifer.

The Red Heifer contains such an immense and lofty light that we must first prepare suitable "vessels" throughout the entire duration of exile in order to be able to withhold it within our souls.

The same is true and applies to the 'Tree of Life': for us to internalize it, our souls must undergo the preparation of all the exiles.

Let us elaborate upon this a bit further.

The Hidden Purpose of Exile

Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh once said the following in a lecture:²¹

"The mystery of the travails of the Jewish people's exiles parallels the light that G-d desires to bring into the world.

Whoever traces the course of these progressive exiles can

observe the 'shifting of the guards' and see how G-d 'rolls up' one light to make way for the incoming darkness — 'until the day breathes, and the shadows flee' (Shir HaShirim 2:17) — ultimately shining upon us that hidden light reserved for the righteous in the future time of redemption.

Parshat Chukat - The Hidden Purpose of Exile

Broadly, there were three stages from the world's creation until our times:

The turmoil of the world's first twenty generations, from Adam to Avraham, can be seen as a 'first exile.' The purpose and meaning of those wayward generations — "for all those generations they angered and provoked G-d" (Avot 5:2) — was the divine service of our holy forefathers.

Regarding this exalted divine service, our Sages have declared that all the deeds of the Patriarchs are merely like a 'fragrance' and scent of what was to come at Mount Sinai²² — the spiritual illuminations they experienced lacked concrete vessels.

It was a holiness that did not truly take hold in the physical substance of the world but only in its spiritual dimension.

Chassidic teachings explain that this was because the Divine revelation given to the Patriarchs was only the level of Sha-dai, a manifestation of G-d that does not overthrow the world's concealment but rather highlights the Divine illumination that is buried within nature, sustaining it while it remains hidden.

The next link to the chain of descent was foretold from the start: Avraham himself heard G-d's tidings, "They will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years" (Bereshit 15:13).

With seventy souls, the people descended Jewish where they Egypt, were refined and purified until they merited the revelation of the highest name of G-d, Tetragrammaton — G-d's name as He is beyond revelation in the realm of creation.

During the time of the Patriarchs, holiness could not rest upon the physical and material matter; it remained hovering above - so to speak.

Similarly, our sages have said that following the destruction of Parshat Chukat - The Hidden Purpose of Exile

the second Temple, the "four cubits of Halachah" are G-d's dwelling place in this world. It is within these clearly defined laws that He dwells, and anyone who seeks G-d can separate himself from the surrounding world and enter that "place of Your dwelling" (Shemot 15:17).

But even if the bond between G-d and the creation is thus strengthened, the union is not yet complete. While in the realm of Torah, the Divine light indeed resides and manifests, it is not so in the surrounding world — those matters that are permitted but not explicitly part of the mitzyot.

As long as we are content that holiness will remain confined to the bounds of the Torah, it means we have not fully identified ourselves with it. We have not submitted to G-d by nullifying our ego.

This inner fracture characterizes our last and final exile, the longest and deepest of them all, which is so because the hidden light within its darkness is greater than any that preceded it.

To reveal G-d's light that resides in every deed, every word, and every thought, we have the precept to "Sanctify yourself with what is permitted to you," thus displaying that there is no division, no "separate domain" in this world.

The manner in which G-d conducts the universe is such that whenever He wishes to unveil a new light the world has never known, there must be a preparatory stage of darkness and contraction.

The harshest and most lengthy hardships of this last exile express and connote the fact that G-d is removing the last and most stubborn layer of impurity of the world and is instead bringing down a fresh divine light from the primordial heavens.

And when this light is revealed, we will merit to taste from the Tree of Life and comprehend the secret of the Red Heifer.

Parshat Chukat - Summary and Practical Conclusions

Summary and Practical Conclusions

The Al-mighty desired to create a people who would be intimately connected to Him — with a genuine and eternal bond — and out of all the nations, He specifically chose the Children of Israel.

His choice was not merely with regard to the nation as a whole but also concerning each and every Jew. Every Jew possesses a tremendous connection with the Holy One, Blessed be He. Every Jew is dearly beloved before G-d, just as an only child is beloved by his father and mother, as it is stated: "You are children to the L-rd your G-d."

In line with His boundless love for His beloved children, G-d desires to grant them perfect goodness and true delight, and therefore, He bestowed upon them the gift of challenge. By facing and overcoming challenges, they develop and refine the vessels of their souls to receive His radiant light — not as an undeserved gift, but through just reward.

2. Within every Jew, there is a hidden spark of goodness deep in his heart, yet it is often covered by a "cloud and mist of darkness." A person must know that at the beginning of his approach to G-d's service, he must

pass through varying stages of spiritual darkness, various setbacks, and confusions in the service of G-d, and only after overcoming all of these will the great light of G-d and His Torah be revealed to him.

3. Every spiritual enlightenment and understanding that a person seeks to attain in this world is accompanied by many difficulties and obstacles, for the Divine light is most often clothed and concealed by many coverings.

Likewise, when a person studies the Torah, it involves great effort and difficulty to grasp its many meanings and delve into its depths because they are greatly hidden and veiled.

Every time a person refines himself—removing yet another negative trait and casting off another worldly desire (whether it be the desire for idle speech, for food, for wealth, and the like) — the Holy One, Blessed be He, removes yet another layer of covering from the Torah he is studying until finally he will merit that the Torah will be revealed and shine before him as it is written in the heavens, without any concealment.

4. The G-dly soul continuously yearns to return to its source and to cleave to G-d in an exalted and sublime

Parshat Chukat - Summary and Practical Conclusions

attachment, just as it was originally united with Him before descending into this lowly world.

However, due to man's sins, partitions and barriers are formed that separate the person from the divine presence, just as the prophet of consolation declares: "Your iniquities have separated you from your G-d," and consequently, the potential that lies within the soul is lost — and indeed, it is as though it is bound in iron chains within the body.

Moreover, at the very moment when a person sins, he connects with the impure and evil external forces, and they seize upon him, draining his strength and preventing him from illuminating with the precious, radiant, and yearning attachment to the pleasant light of the Most High.

Therefore, every Jew must, at the end of the day, before sleep, confess the sins he committed that day so that the forces of impurity will be separated from his soul, and he may then receive renewed strength.

5. Confession and repentance are not sufficient; a Jew must strive with all his might to be pure from all impurities.

To elaborate:

Our Sages explain that there are several types of impurity that hinder the descent of the Shechinah upon a person, and one must guard oneself and avoid them as much as possible.

One who wishes to purify himself from all impurities should endeavor to immerse in a mikveh every day, and by immersing oneself in the mikveh, one cleanses his body, and the purity of the body will result in the purity of the soul.

As our teacher, Rabbeinu Tam, of blessed memory, wrote in 'Sefer HaYashar': "The purity of the body renews the purity of the soul." When a person's body is pure, it leads to the purity of the soul, which in turn paves the way to achieving completeness of the soul and attachment to the divine.

Shabbat Shalom!



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|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| New York | 8:12 pm | 9:20 pm | 9:42 pm |
| Miami | 7:58 pm | 8:55 pm | 9:28 pm |
| Los Angeles | 7:51 pm | 8:52 pm | 9:20 pm |
| Montreal | 8:28 pm | 9:42 pm | 9:57 pm |
| Toronto | 8:44 pm | 9:55 pm | 10:14 pm |
| London | 9:01 pm | 10:31 pm | 10:31 pm |
| Jerusalem | 7:33 pm | 8:24 pm | 9:19 pm |
| Tel Aviv | 7:31 pm | 8:21 pm | 9:17 pm |
| Haifa | 7:32 pm | 8:26 pm | 9:21 pm |
| Be'er Sheva | 7:28 pm | 8:22 pm | 9:17 pm |
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