

# INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUT DEFENSIBLE

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Chukas Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### An Enigma Elicits Universal Derision

1. The law of the Red Heifer is classified as a statute.
2. It is a law that can not be understood within a rational context.
3. An example of this would be dietary laws and the prohibition to wear a combination of wool and linen.
4. Every level of spiritual contamination is relieved when immersing oneself in a *mikvah*.
5. To be relieved of the contamination of the dead one must undergo the ritual of the Red Heifer.
6. The Red Heifer with all its details and application is referred to as the (ultimate) statute.
7. *Rashi*: "It is my decree you are not permitted to reflect upon it.
8. Satan and the Nations deride The Jewish People by saying, "What is this all about?"
9. King Solomon, the wisest of all men, says although he understands all statutes, the statute of the Red Heifer is beyond him.
10. It is inherently enigmatic: it purifies the contaminated and contaminates the pure.
11. There are other statues that have a semblance of this and we are aggrieved because of this.
12. The derision is not rooted in the statutory nature of the law, but rather the contradictory factor.

### Indiscriminate Kindness Transitions Into Worthiness

1. When *Moshe* drew water from the rock in the fortieth year it was not only for the people but even for the livestock.
2. *Midrash*: G-d, providing water even for the livestock, indicates that he is concerned for the possessions of the Jews.
3. The water ceased to flow in the fortieth year when *Miriam* passed away.
4. Until the fortieth year the wellspring gave forth sufficient water even for the livestock indicating that G-d is concerned for the possessions of the Jews.
5. If this is so, why is G-d's consideration only displayed in the fortieth year?
6. *Shalah Hakadosh*: The Exodus From Egypt was due to G-d's indiscriminate kindness.
7. The Jews in Egypt were not worthy of redemption because they were pagans.
8. G-d employed his attribute of *Chesed* (indiscriminate kindness). The emergence of a Jewish People was the equivalent of creation.
9. A new existence was about to begin.
10. Psalms: The world was built on *Chesed*.
11. G-d had no reason to create existence other than His attribute of *Chesed*.
12. When the Jews left Egypt, all amenities to exist were provided including water for their livestock.
13. However, the fortieth year when the water ceased to flow and then was reinstated, providing sufficient water for the livestock – shows G-d's concern for their possessions.

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Approbation Seen As Condemnation

1. *Miriam* was not eulogized when she passed away.
2. *Kli Yakar*: G-d caused the wellspring to cease so that they should understand that the wellspring was in her merit.
3. The water ceasing to flow was G-d's eulogy to *Miriam*.
4. How did they not appreciate who *Miriam* was?
5. *Miriam*, a Prophetess, was a midwife who defied Pharaoh & sang the Song of the Sea with the women.
6. When she spoke critically of *Moshe* she became a leper.
7. A leper, after recovering, remains outside of all the camps for seven days.
8. *Midrash*: The Divine Presence, Hashem, the Clouds of Glory, 600,000 men above the age of 20 – waited 7 days for *Miriam* to return.
9. The Jewish People's perception of G-d's dictate was to disgrace *Miriam*.
10. If G-d did not want to disgrace her – they would have traveled, unaware of *Miriam*'s predicament.
11. G-d, by withholding the water, revealed that the wellspring was in her merit; their perception of *Miriam* was jaundiced.
12. Though embarrassed, nevertheless she is the model for all to understand the severity of negative speech.
13. It is a positive commandment to remember what G-d had done to *Miriam*.

### Associations Determine Standards Of Evaluation

1. When the Jewish People approached the Edomite border G-d said to *Moshe*, "Your brother Aaron will pass away."
2. *Rashi*: "When The Jews attached themselves to *Esav*, the evil one, their actions were breached."
3. If the association with Edomite precipitated sinful behavior it is understandable.
4. There is no mention of sin; Jews were not minimized– why should Aaron die?
5. G-d rewards the evil in this world for their good deeds so they should go into the oblivion when they pass on.
6. The domain of the Nations is the physical world; the world to come is the domain of the Jew.
7. The Edomites, the counterforce to the Jew, were blessed by their forefather, *Yitzchok*, to have great wealth.
8. In essence, their empowered material state is the application of the attribute of Justice.
9. When the attribute of Justice is in place, the evaluation of deeds is exacting to the degree of perfection.
10. The devout are not sufficiently righteous.
11. When the Jewish People were in the proximity of *Esav*, the evil, they were in the area of the attribute of Justice – causing their actions to be breached.

**Weekly Video:** Incomprehensible But Defensible



## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Chukas



# INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUT DEFENSIBLE

### The Red Heifer, A Demonstration of Faith

*“Zos chukas haTorah...This is the statute of the Torah...”*

*Rashi:* “Satan and the nations of the world ridiculed the Jewish people and aggrieved them by saying, ‘What is the meaning of this commandment? What is its rationale?’ G-d states, ‘This is My Decree and my Statute, you have no right to question its veracity.’”

A “statute (*chok*)” is a law that cannot be comprehended within the realm of rational thinking. It is not subject to human intellectual analysis.

The Jewish people nevertheless accepted all the statutes of the *Torah* despite the fact that they cannot be appreciated within the context of their innate value. The mere fact that statutes are G-d’s dictate is sufficient for the Jew to accept.

*Chazal:* The ultimate statute is the red heifer; it is the most difficult to comprehend. An example of a statute is dietary laws, which species are permitted and which

are not. The laws pertaining to ritual slaughter and the prohibition of cooking milk and meat together are also examples of statutes.

*Midrash:* “There are four laws that are found in the *Torah* where the evil inclination attempts to aggrieve to Jewish people. In every one of these areas, the word ‘statute’ is mentioned. The four laws are: the prohibition to marry the wife of one’s brother (after being widowed or divorced), the combination of wool and linen (*shatnez*), the goat that was consecrated in the Temple and thrown down the mountainside on *Yom Kippur* (to atone for all of the sins of the Jewish people), and the red heifer.

The wife of one’s brother is considered by the *Torah* an incestuous relationship. However, the *Torah* states that if one’s brother should die childless, then there is a *mitzvah* to marry the wife of the deceased brother (to perpetuate his memory). The *Torah* states, “You should heed My Statutes and My Laws.”

Regarding the combination of wool and linen, the *Torah* tells us it is forbidden to wear; however, if one wears a four cornered garment that is made of linen, one is obligated to tie fringes (*tzitzis*) upon its corners although they are made of wool. The *Torah* once again states, "My Statutes you should heed."

Regarding the goat that is thrown down the mountainside on *Yom Kippur*, the *Torah* tells us that the one who takes the goat into the desert for this ritual becomes contaminated. However, it brings about spiritual atonement and purity for the Jewish people. It states, "This shall be a Statute for you forever."

Regarding the red heifer, all those who were involved in its process become contaminated while the one who is contaminated becomes pure through its sprinkling. As it is stated, "This is the Statute of the *Torah*."

King Solomon who was the wisest man to ever live said regarding the statute of the red heifer, "It is distant from me." Although he was able to come upon the rationale for every statute that is mentioned within the *Torah* through his relatively unlimited level of wisdom, the red heifer was beyond his ability.

The nations of the world do not ridicule the Jew for adhering to the statutes because they are not understandable; rather, it is because they possess an inner contradiction regarding their representation.

If the ritual of the red heifer is intended to bring about spiritual purity from the most intense level of impurity (contamination of the dead), how is it possible that the same ritual causes the ones who administer it to become contaminated?

If one's brother's wife is forbidden to him because it is considered to be an incestuous relationship that is inherently spiritually lethal, how can it become permitted and even a *mitzvah* when the brother dies childless?

Despite these irreconcilable contradictions that are based on rational evaluation, the Jew accepts the statutes because they are the will of G-d.

*Gemara*: A *Tzeduki* (heretic) observed *Rava* engrossed in his *Torah* study to such a degree that he was not aware that his hand was wedged under his heel, causing it to bleed. The heretic said to *Rava*, "You impulsive people! Just as in the past your mouth spoke before your ears listened, you are behaving in a similar impulsive manner, not thinking about the consequences of your behavior."

*Rava* responded, "The Jewish people accepted G-d's *Torah* with a pure and trusting heart. One who loves another assumes that the one he loves would not burden him with more than he can assume. Therefore, we accepted His *Torah* unequivocally because of our faith and trust in Him."

If one has full trust in G-d, then regardless of the seeming contradictions that exist on a rational level, one will not have difficulty accepting His will.

G-d promised *Avraham* our Patriarch that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in heaven and that his son shall be the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. When G-d told him to bring his only beloved son *Yitzchak* who was born to him in his old age as a burnt offering, *Avraham* did not question G-d for a moment.

Although it was something that was not possible to reconcile within the human realm, *Avraham* carried out the will of G-d without question because he was fully negated to G-d.

Since the Jewish people descend from *Avraham*, they possess an inherent trust in G-d to be able to adhere to the will of G-d despite the irreconcilable contradictions.

## **Appreciating the Special Merit of Miriam**

"The Children of Israel, the whole assembly, arrived at the *Tzin* Desert..."

*Rashi*: The entire generation that G-d had decreed to die in the desert had passed on. "The whole assembly" refers to those who were less than the age of twenty at the time of the decree regarding the sin of the spies.

After they arrived in the *Tzin* Desert, *Miriam* passed away and there was no water for the Jewish people.

*Rashi*: From here we learn that the wellspring that provided water for the Jewish people in the desert for forty years was in the merit of *Miriam*.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: When are the Jewish people referred to as "The Children of Israel (*Bnei Yisrael*)?" It is when they are at a level of being straight (*yesharim*) and devoutly righteous (*tzaddikim*).

When they are not at this special spiritual level, the *Torah* refers to them as "*am* (people)." In certain instances the *Torah* refers to them as "the People, Children of Israel

(*Am Bnei Yisrael*.) This is when the majority of them are truly righteous, but a minority is failing in their spirituality.

When the *Torah* states “The Children of Israel, the whole assembly, arrived at the *Tzin Desert*,” it reveals that at this time the entire Jewish people were truly straight and devoutly righteous.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: Why is it important for the *Torah* to reveal at this juncture the spiritual status of the Jewish people? It is to inform us that despite their special spiritual status, their merit was not sufficient to cause the miracle of water to continue. Therefore, after the passing of *Miriam*, the water ceased. This is to give us an appreciation of the special level of *Miriam*.

After the water ceased, the people began to quarrel with *Moshe* in a disrespectful manner, saying, “If only we had perished as our brethren perished before *Hashem*! Why have you brought the congregation of *Hashem* to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals...?”

If the *Torah* quantifies the entire Jewish people as being truly special and devoutly righteous, why did they not have sufficient faith in G-d that they would be provided water? Why did they quarrel with *Moshe* and *Aaron*?

Regardless of their level of disrespect to *Moshe* and lack of faith, G-d did not punish the Jewish people. Why is this so?

We find that when the Jewish people left Egypt to go into the desert, the prophet extols their faith in G-d. “I (G-d) will always remember on your behalf the kindness of your youth that you followed Me into an unplanted desert.” (*Yirmiyahu*)

At that time the Jewish people were not yet confronted with the hardships of the desert, but rather their trust in G-d allowed them to go into the wilderness because they believed that G-d would provide for them.

However, after *Miriam* passed away and the water ceased, they found themselves in an untenable situation in which their survival was in question. Would G-d intervene or not? Since the water was given to them by G-d, would He reinstate it?

There was no element in their midst such as the rabble who initially instigated many of the issues that came about in the desert. It was their own sense of insecurity and lack of faith that caused them to quarrel with *Moshe* and *Aaron*. G-d did not have a claim against

them because He understood that their predicament was so overwhelming and was not considered to be a basis for punishment.

*Mishna*: If one becomes severely impoverished, it is something that can destabilize him. It is considered to be so severe that the individual could deteriorate to the point of being incompetent.

Similarly, G-d had no claim against the Jewish people when they quarreled with *Moshe* because G-d had provided them water and then withdrew it, indicating that they had no hope. This is even more extreme than the one who succumbs to his lack of material.

*Gemara*: After *Rav* (the leading *Torah* sage of the generation) passed away, his disciples were returning from the cemetery when a question arose regarding the laws of *zimun* (reciting the blessing after the meal as a group of a minimum of three men). When they realized that they did not know how to answer the question, they again tore their garments in mourning.

Since their teacher *Rav* was not present to elucidate all their uncertainties, they understood and appreciated their loss to a greater degree at that moment than they did previously.

When *Miriam* was alive, the Jewish people understood that G-d provided the water for them; however, they did not appreciate that it was solely in the merit of *Miriam*. After she passed away the water ceased immediately to allow them to appreciate her dimension of being. It was only due to her that they were provided with water.

*Gemara*: “I removed the three shepherds in one month.” (*Zecharya*) This verse indicates that *Moshe*, *Aaron*, and *Miriam* all passed away in the same month.

However, the *Gemara* tells us that this was not so. *Miriam* passed away in the month of *Nissan*, *Aaron* in the month of *Av*, and *Moshe* in the month of *Adar*.

The *Gemara* explains that the wellspring was initially in the merit of *Miriam* and the Clouds of Glory were in the merit of *Aaron*. After their passing they ceased and were immediately reinstated in the merit of *Moshe*.

It was not until *Moshe* passed away, when all of these gifts ceased, that the Jewish people were able to internalize and appreciate the loss of the “three



shepherds of Israel.” It was the equivalent of losing all of them in one month.

It is clear from the *Gemara* that since the miracles were immediately reinstated, the Jewish people could not fully appreciate in whose merit they were initially provided the Clouds of Glory or the water. It was not until *Moshe* passed away that they were able to fully appreciate the loss of *Miriam* just as the disciples of *Rav* were only able to appreciate his loss when they were not able to elucidate their uncertainty.

## G-d's Involvement in Creation

The only way one can be purified from the contamination of the dead is to undergo the ritual of the Red Heifer. In the course of this process, the one who was contaminated becomes pure and the one who was initially pure becomes contaminated.

*Midrash*: “Is it possible that something that is pure could emanate from something that is contaminated? There is only One (G-d) who could bring this forth.” (*Iyov*) Where do we find that something pure came from something contaminated?

*Avraham* our Patriarch, who was pure, was the son of *Terach* who was evil and an idolater. *Chizkiyahu* the king of Judah, who was pure, was the son of *Achaz* the evil one. The Jewish people come from the nations of the world who are contaminated. The world to come, which is the ultimate in spiritual purity, emanates from the physical world, which is mundane and impure.

Through utilizing the material as a medium to fulfill the objective of existence, which is the *Torah*, man merits a special dimension of spirituality, which is the world to come. Who decreed this to be? Who commanded this to be so? Only G-d, the Blessed One is able to issue such a decree.”

*Maharal of Prague*: The reason G-d chose Egypt as the location of bondage for the Jewish people was because it was the nation that was the most devoid of spirituality. *Yechezkel* the prophet compares the Egyptian people to the donkey (*chamor*). “Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys (*chamorim*).”

The word *chamor* is derived from the word *chomer*, which means material and physical, devoid of spirituality. Among the seventy nations of the world, the Egyptian people were the most devoid of

spirituality. Because a spiritual vacuum existed in Egypt the Egyptian people sunk to the lowest depths of depravity such as incest, adultery, witchcraft, and pagan worship.

In order to bring about the greatest level of spiritual growth and advancement, it must be in a setting that is extremely removed from spirituality. It must be totally physical.

Just as G-d extracts light from darkness, so too He extracted the Jewish people from Egypt to become His Holy Nation at *Sinai*. In order for the Jewish people to develop a potential for the greatest level of spiritual growth, to be worthy of receiving the *Torah*, they had to be in Egypt for 210 years. This is based on the principle stated by *Iyov* that G-d extracts purity from contamination.

G-d brought about existence *ex nihilo*. Prior to Creation, nothing existed. Only G-d the Omnipotent One is able to create something from nothing.

There are two terms that are found at the time of Creation in the *Torah* – “creation” and “formation.” “Creation” is the bringing about something from nothing. “Formation” is the term that refers to combining existing elements to form a new entity.

To extract something pure from the impure is something that only the Creator, G-d Himself, can do since it is similar to the act of Creation and not formation.

*Avraham* emanating from *Terach* is the equivalent of Creation because what he possessed was not rooted in his genealogy from his father *Terach*.

In the portion of *Bereishis*, the *Torah* states regarding creation, “*B’hee-baram* – When He Created them...” *Chazal* tells us that the letters of contained within the word *B’hee-bar-am* are the same letters in the name *Avraham*.

*Maharal of Prague*: When G-d changed *Avram*’s name to *Avraham* by adding the letter “*hey*”, a spiritual metamorphosis had taken place within his being that was the equivalent of a new creation that did not exist prior to that moment.

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they were the equivalent to the beginning of a new creation. They became a spiritually pure people that had no relevance

to Egypt. Only G-d Himself, the Creator, is able to bring about such a profound result.

*Gemara*: The one who is truly holy will not decompose in the grave. However, the moment before the resurrection of the dead, everything will turn to dust, including the devoutly righteous ones who did not decompose. It is only after everything turns to dust, then it will be recreated.

*Ramchal*: We find this process in nature. When one plants a seed in the ground, before it begins to sprout, it must decompose to an almost non-existent state. Only then will it develop and come into being. This process resembles the act of Creation that was ex nihilo.

We say in the morning service, "...and in His goodness renews daily perpetually the work of creation." Existence is not something that that was created in the past but rather, it is an ongoing process of Creation. Just as G-d initially willed existence to come into being, so too does He continuously will it to be as a result of His infinite goodness. Existence is an ongoing replication of the process of ex nihilo.

We say in the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer), "He sustains the living with kindness, resuscitates the dead with abundant mercy, supports the fallen, heals the sick..." One would think that the mention of the resuscitation of the dead should be after mentioning healing the sick and supporting the fallen. Why is it mentioned immediately after "sustaining life with kindness?"

It is because every moment G-d wills existence, which is the equivalent of the process of the initial Creation of ex nihilo. The continuum of life is the equivalent a continual act of resurrection. If so, then the act of the resuscitation of the dead in essence is the equivalent of G-d sustaining life with kindness. Just as one continues to live because G-d wills it to be so, identically G-d wills the one who has passed on to live again.

This is also within the realm of the principle mentioned by Iyov, purity emanating from the contaminated. The first of the thirteen Tenets of Jewish belief (authored by *Rambam* is, "I believe with absolute faith that the Creator Blessed be He Creates (in the present), and directs all that was created, and He alone makes and will make everything."

## The Unique Spirituality of the Jew

"This is the Statute of the *Torah*, which *Hashem* has commanded, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take to you a completely red cow..."

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: If the *Torah* is going to present the laws that pertain to spiritual contamination and purity, should it not have referred to the process as, "This is the statute of spiritual contamination or purity..."? Why does the *Torah* state, "This is the Statute of the *Torah*?" Evidently, the Statute of the red heifer is related to the *Torah* itself.

King Solomon who was the wisest man to ever live, said regarding the statute of the red heifer, "It is distant from me." Although he was able to come upon the rationale for every statute through his unique level of wisdom, the red heifer was beyond his ability. Why did this statute remain concealed from him?

*Midrash*: The verse states, "Take to you." *Reb Yosi Ben Reb Chanina* said, 'G-d said to *Moshe*, 'I will reveal to you the understanding of the red heifer (*parah adumah*); for the others it will remain a statute that cannot be fathomed.

The ritual of the red heifer is the only way one can be relieved from the contamination of the dead. Regarding every other form of contamination, it may be removed through immersion in a ritual bath. The rationale for the statute of the red heifer was only revealed to *Moshe* as the *Midrash* explains, "Take to you."

"Now you command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination..." The pure olive oil needed for kindling the *Menorah* represents the Oral Law which elucidates the Written Law.

Just as the statute of the Red Heifer had special relevance to *Moshe* because it has a special linkage with the *Torah* itself, so too does the pure olive oil needed for the *Menorah* have relevance to *Moshe* because of its representation of *Torah*. Since *Moshe* was the one who was chosen by G-d to transmit the *Torah* to the Jewish people, he has a unique relationship and relevance to the *Torah* itself.

*Pirkei Avos*: "*Moshe* received the *Torah* at *Sinai* and passed it on..."

“You should remember the *Torah* of *Moshe* My servant.” (*Malachi*) It is only through *Moshe* that the Jewish people received the *Torah*. The rationale of the statute of the red heifer, which has relevance to the *Torah*, was revealed to *Moshe* since he was the person who has the most relevance to the *Torah*.

“This is the Statute of the *Torah*.” The basis of the spiritual purity and contamination of the Jew is the *Torah* itself. Only a Jew is susceptible to any type of spiritual contamination.

If a non-Jew comes in contact with the remains of a human being, he will not become contaminated. In addition, the spiritual contamination that emanates from the remains of a non-Jew is not as pervasive as that of a Jew. The remains of a non-Jew only contaminate upon contact, whereas, the remains of a Jew not only contaminate upon contact but also through exposure from being under the same roof or enclosure (*ohel*).

*Ohr HaChaim*: There is a fundamental difference between the soul of the Jew and the non-Jew. It is only because the Jewish people became the holy people of G-d because they accepted the *Torah* that they have relevance to the most intense level of spiritual contamination (through the dead) and the process of removing it through the red heifer. The Jewish people only became G-d’s holy people at *Sinai* because they negated themselves fully to G-d.

Upon accepting the *Torah* at *Sinai*, the Jewish people said, “*Naaseh v’nishma* - we will do and we will listen.” The Jewish people unequivocally accepted the *Torah* without understanding the extent of their obligation because of their faith in G-d.

It is because of this unique level of faith that is not found in any other nation of the world that the Jewish people are able to cleave to G-d. Through the negation of self, the Jew continuously maintains his relationship with G-d by adhering to the dictates of the *Torah*.

The Jew is susceptible to the most intense level of spiritual contamination because he accepted the *Torah* by demonstrating his ability to negate himself. Therefore, in order to remove the contamination that came about through the negation of self (by accepting the *Torah*), the Jew needs to undergo the process of the red heifer which is an unfathomable statute. The observance of the statute is itself a negation of self. The Jew has relevance to this because of his trust in G-d.

Why did G-d reveal the rationale of the statute of the red heifer to *Moshe*? The Jewish people needed to negate themselves; however, *Moshe* who was the most humble person who ever walked the face of the earth was already fully negated.

*Moshe* had relevance to *Torah* because of his level of humility. Therefore, he did not need to have the statute of the red heifer remain concealed from him. In contrast, the Jewish people needed to come to the level of self-negation at *Sinai*. In order for the red heifer to be effective, it must remain concealed from them. It represents the characteristic that made the Jewish people worthy of receiving the *Torah* at *Sinai*.



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