

INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUT DEFENSIBLE



YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Chukas

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Contamination & Purification

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The Parah Adumah & Its Relevance to Moshe

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Moshe Aharon, & Miriam – Overseers of the Jewish People

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The Significance of Every Aspect of the Parah Adumah

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The Lack of Eulogies for Miriam

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Indiscriminate Kindness Transitions Into Worthiness

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1. When *Moshe* drew water from the rock in the 40th year it was not only for the people but even for the livestock.
2. *Midrash*: G-d providing water even for 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 40th 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. *Shelah 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*. 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 40th year when the water ceased to flow & then was reinstated, providing sufficient water for the livestock shows G-d's concern for their possessions.

An Enigma Elicits Universal Derision

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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 & 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 statutes 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.

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Approbation Seen As Condemnation

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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

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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 Torah Commentary Series: *Chukas*



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Preserving Kiddush Hashem

Torah: Before *Korach* and his community was about to be destroyed, *Hashem* informed *Moshe* that He was going to destroy the entire *Klal Yisroel*. *Moshe* said to *Hashem*, "Since You know the intent of every man, why should everyone perish for the sins of the one who sinned?" *Hashem* responded that He would only destroy those who sinned against Him. Thus, only *Korach* and his followers were destroyed. The question is – why did *Hashem* initially consider eliminating the entire Jewish people when He knew that only *Korach* and his community were contesting *Moshe's* authority?

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: There is an explanation of what *Moshe* had said to *Hashem*. If a group of people rises up against their king and attempts to usurp his authority, the reason that he destroys the entire community is because he does not know who was involved in the rebellion. You, *Hashem*, You know who is usurping Your authority, You should destroy them and not the entire

Jewish people. It seems from the *Torah* that if it were not for *Moshe's* intervention and plea, *Hashem* would have destroyed all of the Jewish people. How do we understand this? If they are not guilty why do they deserve to be destroyed? After acquiescing to *Moshe's* plea, the land opened its mouth and swallowed-up *Korach* and his entire community.

Mishna: The mouth of the earth that swallowed *Korach* and his followers was created at the end of the Sixth Day of Creation during the twilight period. It was formed specifically to bring Divine retribution upon *Korach* and his entire community. This miracle was intended to convey to the Jewish people that *Moshe's* word is the Word of *Hashem*. Having witnessed this tragic event, one would think that the Jewish people who survived would have proclaimed *Moshe* as the communicator of the Word of *Hashem*. However, the *Torah* tells us differently.

The next day the Jewish people approached *Moshe* and *Aaron* with a complaint saying, "You killed the people of *Hashem*. You were too harsh with them." After witnessing such a revealed and indisputable miracle demonstrating the Attribute of Justice, how could the Jews react in such a manner? As a result of their insolence, *Hashem* caused a plague to come upon them and over 14,000 people perished. How do we understand this?

Although the Jewish people themselves did not attempt to usurp *Moshe's* authority there was nevertheless a degree of culpability on a communal level. When *Korach* and his followers openly confronted *Moshe* with a disgraceful accusation (contesting his word, which is synonymous with the Word of *Hashem*) the entire Jewish people remained silent. If they had truly understood and appreciated *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the Jews would not have tolerated *Korach's* attack. The fact that they remained silent was an indication that the Jewish people themselves were not entirely convinced of the authenticity of the *Torah*.

The silence of the Jewish people in this situation was a desecration of *Hashem's* name (*Chilul Hashem*). The liability of *Chilul Hashem* is so severe that one can only be atoned when he dies. This is the reason why *Hashem* initially was going to destroy the entire Jewish people. However, *Moshe* came to their defense and *Hashem* acquiesced to *Moshe's* request.

When the Jews accused *Moshe* of being too harsh with *Korach* and his community, *Hashem* brought a plague upon them. This accusation against *Moshe* revisited the issue of *Chilul Hashem*. Their complaint against *Moshe* was a clear indication that they did not fully grasp the gravity of the wrongdoing of *Korach* and his cohorts. Therefore they were struck with a devastating plague. *Moshe* could not intervene on behalf of *Klal Yisroel* to stop the plague. If this is the case, then how did it come to an end?

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: After the death of *Korach* and his followers, the Jewish people believed that the incense offering had the ability to kill those who burned it. The Jews believed that the reason why *Korach* and his group were killed was because there was something lethal in the incense offering that they brought. When *Moshe* was in heaven at the time he was receiving the *Torah*, the Angel of Death gave him a gift, which was the secret of how to stop a plague – the

burning of the incense. *Moshe* therefore told *Aaron* to go immediately into the midst of the camp and burn the incense, thus causing the plague to cease.

Observing this, the Jewish people understood that the incense was not at all lethal but that it was in fact one of the most exalted types of offerings. Through this action, *Moshe* brought about a sanctification of *Hashem's* name (*Kiddush Hashem*) by having *Aaron* burn the incense in the midst of the camp to demonstrate its value. Fourteen thousand people died as a result of the plague because of *Chilul Hashem* and only after the burning of the incense did it come to an end because of witnessing *Kiddush Hashem*.

Our Relevance to the Infinite

The *Torah* introduces the Laws of the *Parah Adumah* (the Red Heifer) with, "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..." The *Parah Adumah* is an essential element in the removal of spiritual contamination caused by coming in contact with human remains (*tumaas mais*). Whenever the *Torah* presents a Statute it makes a particular reference such as "This is the Statute of the *Pesach* (Pascal Lamb)."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: If the *Torah* is going to present the particular laws dealing with spiritual contamination and its removal, shouldn't it have referred to the process as, "This is the Statute of spiritual contamination or purity..."? So why does the *Torah* say "This is the Statute of the *Torah*..."? Evidently the Statute of the *Parah Adumah* is somehow related to the *Torah* in its entirety. How do we understand this?

Ohr HaChaim elucidates this difficulty with a fundamental principle. The *Halacha* is that 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 which emanates from the remains of a non-Jew is not as pervasive as that of a Jew. For example, the remains of a non-Jew only contaminate upon contact. Whereas, the remains of the Jew not only contaminate upon contact but also through being exposed under the same roof or enclosure (*ohel*).

Ohr HaChaim: The reason for this difference between the contamination that emanates from a Jew and that which emanates from a non-Jew is because the dimension of their souls (*neshamas*) is fundamentally different. Before the Sinai experience when the Jews received the *Torah* and became “G-d’s chosen people,” there was no spiritual difference between the family of *Yaakov* (the Jews) and the nations of the world. All people were bound only by the Seven Laws of Noah. When we became G-d’s people, the Holy Nation, we became bound to *Hashem*. As it is stated in the *Zohar*, “The Jewish people, the *Torah*, and *Hashem* are one,” meaning that the Jews are intertwined with *Hashem* through the *Torah* that unites them.

Ohr HaChaim: There are many nether forces in this world which seek to be nurtured by holiness and therefore attach themselves to the Jewish people whose holiness emanates from their linkage to G-d. When the *Torah* states, “This is the Statute of the *Torah*...” it wants to reveal the basis for the Jew’s susceptibility to contamination which is a result of our receiving the *Torah* at Sinai. Because we became the holy people at Sinai though the giving of the *Torah* we thus became subject to spiritual contamination. However, if we had not accepted the *Torah* at Sinai, we would not have any susceptibility to contamination just as the non-Jew.

The Statute dealing with the *Parah Adumah* (Red Heifer) is the most incomprehensible of all of the Statutes of the *Torah*. Even King Solomon who was the wisest man who ever lived could not fathom it. As he says (*Koheles* 7:23), “It is distant from me...” Why should this Statute be more difficult to understand than all of the others? The answer is – just as it is not possible to comprehend the depth and the breadth of the *Torah* in its entirety because it is the encapsulation of the infinite wisdom of *Hashem*, so too, it is impossible to understand the Statute of the *Parah Adumah* because it is rooted in our spiritual dimension which is linked to the infinite (*Hashem*).

Gemara in Tractate *Chaggigah*: One is not permitted to speculate about what existed prior to existence because it is beyond the human capacity of comprehension. Identically, this is true with the spiritual mechanics of the *Parah Adumah*. Just as *Hashem* is beyond our grasp and comprehension so is the *Parah Adumah* which addresses the spiritual make-up of the Jewish people. We see that although there are concepts that are beyond our understanding and frame of reference we can still have relevance to them.

Ramchal in *The Way of G-d*, the Jew can become part of an infinite system when he attaches himself to *Hashem*, although the human being himself is finite. The fact that we have relevance to spiritual contamination on the most intense level is an indication that we are connected to the infinite as a result of the *Torah*.

Appreciating Miriam

Gemara in Tractate *Taanis*: The Jewish people had three special caretakers – *Moshe*, *Aaron*, and *Miriam*. The Jewish people were the recipients of three special gifts – the wellspring, the Clouds of Glory, and the Mann. The wellspring was in the merit of *Miriam*. The Clouds of Glory were in the merit of *Aaron* and the Mann was in the merit of *Moshe*.

Gemara quoting a verse in *Zacharia*: “I removed the three shepherds in one month.” This verse indicates that *Moshe*, *Aaron*, and *Miriam* all passed away in the same month. The fact is that each of them passed away in different months. The *Gemara* states that this is not the case because *Miriam* passed away in the month of *Nissan*, *Aaron* in *Av*, and *Moshe* in *Adar*. How does the *Gemara* resolve the seeming contradiction between the verse and fact?

Gemara: When *Miriam* passed away the wellspring ceased to flow and it was only reinstated in the merit of *Moshe*. After *Aaron* passed away the Clouds of Glory were dispersed and were also quickly reinstated in the merit of *Moshe*. Since the Jewish people had what was taken from them replaced quickly, albeit in the merit of *Moshe*, they did not sense the loss of *Miriam* and *Aaron* who were their benefactors for close to forty years. It was not until *Moshe Rabbeinu* passed away and all of these gifts ceased to be that the Jewish people internalized the loss of the “three special shepherds of Israel.” Although the Jewish people understood that each of the miracles from which they derived continuous benefit was in the merit of each of these individuals, nevertheless, they had not internalized the reality of the loss until *Moshe* passed away.

Torah: “*Vayavou b’nai Yisroel kol haaida midbar tzin* (The Children of Israel, the whole assembly, arrived at the Zin Desert...)”

Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh: If the *Torah* tells us that the “*B’nai Yisroel* (The Children of Israel) arrived at the

desert,” why is it necessary to say “the whole assembly”? It seems to be totally superfluous. It is understood that if the “Children of Israel” arrived it means the “whole assembly.” The *Torah* uses a number of appellations when referring to the Jewish people. For example, there are times when the Jewish people are referred to as “*am* (people),” which is an indication that at that moment they are ordinary or at a failing spiritual level. However when the *Torah* uses the appellation of “*B’nai Yisroel* (Children of Israel),” it is to indicate that they are at a special spiritual level.

Ohr HaChaim: When the *Torah* states “*B’nai Yisroel*... The entire assembly” it is to indicate that when they arrived at the Desert of Zin all of the Jews were at the special level of “*B’nai Yisroel*.” The *Torah* tells us that when the *B’nai Yisroel* arrived at the Desert of Zin, *Miriam* passed away and they had no water to drink because the wellspring ceased to exist. Their predicament caused them to complain vehemently against *Moshe* and *Aaron*.

It is important to understand who these people were. The *Torah* reveals to us that at this moment they were all within the classification of “*B’nai Yisroel*.” Despite their advanced spiritual level, they understood that they were not sufficiently worthy for the wellspring to continue. This understanding caused them to fully comprehend and appreciate who *Miriam* was. One could ask – if in fact the wellspring was reinstated in the merit of *Moshe*, why was it necessary to have any interruption to the flow of water?

With the *Ohr HaChaim*’s explanation it is understood that it only occurred so that the people would appreciate the special level of *Miriam*. It was solely in her merit (unrelated to them or *Moshe*) that they were provided with this miracle of water. It is interesting to note that *Moshe*’s failing through the hitting of the rock (rather than speaking to it) only came about as a result of the cessation of the wellspring.

If *Hashem* had not caused the wellspring to stop flowing, *Moshe* would not have failed. Although *Hashem* was fully aware that *Moshe* would fail and consequently be denied the right to enter into the Land, He nevertheless caused the wellspring to cease in order for the Jewish people to recognize and understand *Miriam*’s dimension of spirituality. From this we are able to learn the great value of recognizing the specialness of a *tzaddik*.

The Significance of Performing a Mitzvah in a More Perfect Manner

Torah: After *Miriam* passed away the water ceased to flow and *Moshe* was told by *Hashem* to speak to the rock to give forth its water. However, rather than speaking to it *Moshe* struck the rock.

Sforno: If *Moshe* had spoken to the rock, he would have brought about a revealed miracle that would have been at a higher level than if he struck it. However since *Moshe* struck the rock he did not bring about the *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of G-d’s Name) that would have resulted from his speaking to it. As a result of this failing, *Moshe* and *Aaron* had to pass away before the Jews entered the Land of Israel. As much as *Moshe* pleaded with *Hashem* for forgiveness, *Hashem* did not listen to his pleas because he had the opportunity to Sanctify G-d’s Name and he did not. Seemingly, if *Moshe* would have spoken to the Rock and brought about a *Kiddush Hashem*, he would have been able to enter into the Land.

Early Commentators: Had *Moshe* entered into the Land, the *Bais HaMikdash* (The Temple) would have been built immediately and the world would have come to its level of perfection. If *Moshe* had spoken to the rock and the Jews would have witnessed it giving forth its water, then that experience would have elevated them to a spiritual level making them worthy to enter the Land of Israel. However, since *Moshe* did not bring about that *Kiddush Hashem*, the Jews did not experience what was needed for their spiritual perfection. Thus, *Moshe* could not cross into the Land because the Jews were not ready to live within a perfect existence.

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: The manner in which *Avraham* Our Patriarch hosted the visiting angels determined the manner in which *Hashem* accommodated the needs of the Jewish people in the desert.

Talmud: Any act of hospitality which *Avraham* performed himself resulted in a miracle coming directly from *Hashem* without any human intervention. However, any act of hospitality that was brought about through an intermediary, *Hashem* allowed the corresponding miracle to come only through an intermediary.

Gemara: Since *Avraham* offered the bread himself, the Jewish people received the Mann (Manna) in the desert.

Because of the shade of the tree that was offered by *Avraham* to protect his guests, we merited the Clouds of Glory which protected the Jews in the desert for forty years. However since *Avraham* offered the water to the angels through an intermediary (to wash their feet) the Jews received the water through *Moshe Rabbeinu* who had to extract the water from the rock. If *Avraham* had performed the *Mitzvah* of hosting guests in a more perfect way, (by providing water for the angels himself), the opportunity for *Moshe* to strike the rock would not have existed.

We see from *Avraham's* participation in the *Mitzvah* of hospitality that the consequences of not performing a *Mitzvah* in the most perfect manner possible have far reaching effects (although *Avraham* was not culpable for this). Seemingly, if the water had been provided to the Jewish people directly without the need for *Moshe's* participation as an intermediary, *Moshe* would have not failed. Thus, the world would have been brought to a level of perfection and the purpose of existence would have been fulfilled.

With this understanding, we should examine the way in which we perform *Mitzvos*. Do we strive to perform *Mitzvos* in the most perfect way? Meaning, do we understand the far-reaching value of this level of performance? Or is this something not even taken into consideration? We do not understand or realize to what degree our *Mitzvah* performance impacts on other people (e.g. through example) nor do we understand the intrinsic spiritual energy that is brought into the world by performing a *Mitzvah* on a more perfect level.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers): There were ten generations from *Adam* to *Noach* and ten generations from *Noach* to *Avraham*.

Mishna: *Avraham* was worthy of receiving all the merit of the ten generations from *Noach* to *Avraham*. How is this possible? One would think that we receive reward based on what we personally accomplish.

Rabbeinu Yona, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*: The world needs a certain degree of perfection and this perfection can only be brought about through the performance of the *Mitzvos*. *Avraham* was the only individual in his time to introduce the reality of *Hashem* as the Omnipotent power and Creator of the world. All of mankind rejected *Avraham's* position and did not participate to any degree in the spiritual perfection of the world (serving *Hashem*) because they were pagans.

Thus *Avraham*, through his espousing of monotheism, brought about the level of perfection that was meant to be achieved by the members of the ten generations from *Noach* to *Avraham*.

Unfortunately, in our times the vast majority of the Jewish people are not committed to the observance of *Mitzvos* and the study of *Torah*. Nevertheless their participation is needed for the world to become perfected and this is not happening. Therefore a Jew whose life is committed to *Torah* and *Mitzvos* on a qualitative level has unlimited merit because he brings about a level of perfection to existence at a time when so many others are not. We should therefore try to perform *Mitzvos* in a more perfect manner and we will be able to affect the world as a whole and bring about the ultimate redemption.

Obstacles, Blessing or Curse?

The Jewish people were meant to enter the Land of Israel after a forty-year period of wandering. In the final year before the Jews entered into the land, they experienced numerous difficulties. At the beginning of the fortieth year *Miriam* passed away and the wellspring ceased to flow. The Jews immediately began to complain to *Moshe* that they would die in the desert if they did not have water to drink. As a result of this confrontation, *Moshe* struck the rock rather than speaking to it, thus causing him to forfeit the right to enter into the Land.

Soon after this, *Aaron* passed away; the Clouds of Glory were dispersed and reinstated in the merit of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. After the passing of *Aaron*, the Jews began to complain about the Mann (Manna) saying, "...our soul is disgusted with this insubstantial food." It is a wonder that after forty years of wandering in the desert and being sustained by the Mann that the Jewish people started to complain about it on the brink of their arrival to the Promised Land. As a result of their ungrateful behavior, *Hashem* sent the serpents to bite the Jews and many perished.

Torah: The Amorites planned to ambush the Jewish people as they traveled through a mountain pass; however, *Hashem* brought about a miracle that destroyed those who were waiting in ambush.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: The Amorites were hiding in caves along side the road that the Jews were going to take. *Hashem* caused the mountains to come together

and the protrusions on one side crushed the Amorites in the caves. The body parts of the Amorites were washed away by the water that cascaded through the mountain. As the Jews passed the location between the mountains they saw rising up in the wellspring many body parts of human remains. They realized that *Hashem* had performed a miracle by destroying their enemy and averting the destruction of the Jewish people.

The Jews sang songs of praise to *Hashem* for this miracle. After this incident, the Jews engaged in the worship of *Baal Paor*, which was idolatry, and they cohabited with the Moabite women. Once again the Wrath of *Hashem* came upon the Jews and resulted in many casualties. This entire chain of events from the passing of *Miriam* to the incident of the *Baal Paor* took place during the fortieth year after many years of wandering when the Jews were about to enter into the Promised Land. The question is – why did the Jews face such difficult tests at this point when they were about to enter the Land of Israel?

Gemara: The end of the winter is the coldest part of the winter and the conclusion of summer is the hottest part of the summer. The Commentators explain that G-d created existence in a manner that whenever a transition is about to take place the move from one state of affairs to another is always the most intense due to the resistance of change. This is the reason why the night is darkest before the dawn. Therefore they explain this is the reason why the bondage of Egypt had to intensify after *Moshe* came to redeem the Jewish people.

The transition from bondage to redemption caused the intensification of hardship to resist the imminent redemption. The Jewish people were about to enter into the Land of Israel where they were going to reach a new dimension of spirituality. In this location the Jews were meant to fulfill the *Torah* in its entirety and thus achieve an advanced level of spirituality.

Because of this change that was about to take place, *Satan* created an overwhelming level of resistance – not to allow this to occur. The desert location was the preparatory stage for this transition into the Promised Land. It is true that whenever we are about to reach a spiritual milestone, we will always incur difficulties as a result of the transitional process to another level.

Despite the level of clarity which the Jews had in the desert, nevertheless, they were subjected to many distractions and temptation due to the transition which

was about to occur. If the generation that had the greatest level of clarity (the generation of the desert) experienced stumbling blocks and distractions prior to achieving a new spiritual milestone, how much more so are we susceptible? *Chazal* tell us that all beginnings come with great difficulty, especially when they have the potential to lead us along a spiritual path. The fact is that if we do experience obstacles in our ascent to spirituality, then it is an indication that we are about to undergo positive change that is worthwhile achieving.

Truth can only be Perceived Through Humility

Torah: *Bilaam* was the prophet of the nations of the world and his level of prophecy was at the level of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Despite the fact that *Hashem* communicated with *Bilaam* at the same level as *Moshe*, *Bilaam* was nevertheless a person who could only be controlled by *Hashem's* saying "No." One would think that a person who prophesizes at such a level would have the clarity that would cause him to be a pious and righteous person. How is it possible that *Bilaam*, despite his understanding of *Hashem* and what He wants from him, could be so evil and corrupted?

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: "A person who has the three characteristics: *Ayin Tovah* (Good Eye), *Ruach Nemucha* (Humble Spirit), and *Nefesh Shefelah* (Minimal physical needs) is considered to be a student of *Avraham Avinu*." If a person has *Ayin Tovah*, he is truly happy when he sees his fellow human being experience good fortune. A person who has *Ruach Nemucha* is humble and not self-absorbed. And a person who has *Nefesh Shefelah* is satisfied with even the most minimal physical requirements. If one has these three characteristics, then he is considered a disciple of *Avraham*.

Mishna: On the other hand, "A person who has the three characteristics of *Ayin Raah* (Evil Eye), *Ruach Gevoha* (Inflated Spirit), and *Nefesh Rechava* (Insatiable Desire) is considered to be a student of *Bilaam* the evil one." If a person is pained by another's good fortune and he is arrogant, haughty, and brazen and has an insatiable appetite for materialism, he is considered a disciple of *Bilaam*. For example, the *Torah* states that *Bilaam* said to *Balak*, "Even if you give me a house filled with gold and silver it would not be enough..." Although *Bilaam* was a commoner, he believed that he should have had the wealth of a king.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: *Avraham Avinu* was the only human being to recognize *Hashem* completely on his own. As the *Torah* tells us, that *Avraham* referred to *Hashem* as, “*Adon-ai* (Master).” How was it possible for *Avraham* to recognize G-d’s Presence in existence despite the world’s devotion to paganism? The three most humble people that ever lived were – *Avraham*, *Moshe*, and *Dovid HaMelech* (King *David*).

Avraham had a quality of humility, which could not be found in anyone else in existence. He was not self-absorbed to any degree and his focus was completely out of himself. He never considered “the I” or “the Me.” The only way a person can perceive truth is if he focuses outwardly rather than inwardly on his own needs. If a person is self-absorbed with himself then that person’s only agenda is to satisfy his needs to the exclusion of all else.

Hashem, the Creator and Master of the Universe spoke directly to *Bilaam*; however, because he was so consumed with his own agenda and ego, *Bilaam* could not internalize truth to any degree. He was arrogant, brazen, and pursued hedonism despite his understanding of *Hashem* because all that mattered was

satisfying himself. Ego can cause one to be oblivious to the realities of life. A person who is self-absorbed can be exposed and privy to the greatest source of wisdom and spirituality and still remain totally unaffected.

A doctor once told a story about a heart patient of his who was advised not to travel to a location more than half an hour from a hospital. Despite the concern of the doctor, the patient insisted on going on a cruise that would take him far from any medical facility. He told the doctor, “I want to go on this cruise and I take full responsibility if I die on the ship!” How is it possible for a person to behave so irresponsibly at the risk of losing his life? How could a cruise that lasts only a few days have greater value than living several more years?

The answer is – if the “I” and the “Me” are important, then nothing matters at that moment other than satisfying one’s own needs. It was because of *Avraham Avinu*’s humility that he was able to perceive *Hashem* and the truth despite the fact that he existed in a pagan world. Contrastingly, it was because of *Bilaam*’s insatiable ego that he could not perceive truth despite his open relationship with *Hashem*.



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