

INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUT DEFENSIBLE

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Chukas-Balak

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Qualifications of the Parah Adumah

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Sustaining the Neshama and the Guf

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Rational Laws, Testaments, and Statutes

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The Juxtaposition of Miriam's Death & Parah Adumah

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The Parah Adumah

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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.

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.

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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. 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-Balak



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The Secret of the Red Heifer

The Parsha begins with the law of the *parah adumah* (the red heifer): “Zos chukas ha’Torah...This is the statute of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded...”

Rashi citing the Midrash: “Satan and the nations of the world approached the Jewish people with a claim, ‘What is this commandment? What is its rationale?’ G-d responded, ‘This is My Statute, you have no right to question its validity.’” A “*chok*” is a law that cannot be understood within the realm of rational thinking. It is beyond the grasp of the human mind.

Chazal: The ultimate *chok* (Statute) is that of the *parah adumah* because it is the most difficult to understand.

King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, regarding the statute of *parah adumah*: “It is distant from me.” Meaning, he was able, through his unique level of wisdom, to come upon the rationale for every *chok* contained within the Torah with the exception of the

parah adumah. Why is the *chok* of *parah adumah*, which is the only procedure for the removal of the spiritual contamination of the dead, specifically the most difficult Statute to understand and beyond human grasp? There is a correlation between the law of *parah adumah* and the Sin of the Golden Calf.

Rashi citing Rav Moshe HaDarshon in *Parshas Chukas*: This relationship can be explained with a parable. The young child of one of the maidservants had soiled the palace of the king. The king commanded the mother of the child to clean up after her child. Identically the *parah*, the cow, which is the mother of the calf, was designated by G-d to cleanse the spiritual contamination that was brought about by its calf – the *Eigel HaZahav* (Golden Calf).

Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah*: At the time of the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality when they had unequivocally proclaimed, “*Naaseh V’Nishma* –

thus causing them to revert back to the spiritual state that was equivalent to that of *Adam* before the sin. At that moment death no longer had relevance to them. Had the Jewish people not failed with the Golden Calf they would have lived eternally. However because they sinned with idolatry, they reverted back to being mortal beings, who are subject to death. Why did the declaration of “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” cause them to become immortal?

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: When the Jewish people had declared “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” G-d had said, “Who revealed this secret to My children – that they have used the expression of the angels who serve Me?” The Jewish people at Sinai had ascended to the level of angels. An angel, because of its level of clarity is completely and singularly focused on doing the Will of G-d without question. By declaring “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” the Jewish people had assumed the posture of the angel because they accepted upon themselves the *Torah* without knowing the extent of obligation.

Just as an angel has no relevance to death, identically the Jewish people had ascended at Sinai to that same level. G-d had commanded *Adam* not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, saying “for on the day that you will eat from it, you will surely die.” Why then did *Adam* eat from the Tree? It is only because he rationalized, that he allowed himself to partake of its fruit. Although his justification in his own mind was correct, nevertheless he failed because it was contrary to the Will of G-d. *Adam* was not able to negate himself to the point of full submission to His Maker.

The failing of *Adam* was corrected at Sinai, when the Jewish people negated themselves by declaring “*Naaseh V’Nishma*.” They had expressed themselves as angels. It was a total submission to G-d. When one negates himself to that level, one has no relevance to death – just as *Adam* was meant to be before the sin.

The only contamination that cannot be removed through emersion in a *mikvah*, is the contamination of the dead. The only procedure that can remove this most extreme level of contamination is the sprinkling of the *parah adumah*. This is because *parah adumah* represents the ultimate *chok*. This is the only Statute that even the wisest man to ever live, King Solomon, was not able to come upon its rationale. It is beyond the human intellect.

Therefore it is fitting that the only way that the contamination of the dead, which was precipitated into existence a result of man not willing to negate his intellect, should only be removed through a ritual involving the *parah adumah* which is beyond the intellect of man. It is the ultimate negation of rational thinking. It is only within this context of complete self-negation that one can attain purity from the contamination of the dead and be reinstated to a state that has a semblance to *Adam* before the sin. The *parah adumah*, to a degree has a commonality with the declaration of “*Naaseh V’Nishma*.”

Putting Things in Proper Perspective

Torah: “They journeyed from *Kadesh* and the Children of Israel arrived – the entire assembly – at Mount Hor. *Hashem* said to *Moshe* and *Aaron* at Mount Hor by the border of the land of *Edom*, saying, ‘*Aaron* shall be gathered to his people (pass away), for he shall not enter the Land..’” Why does the *Torah* associate the location of the border of the land of *Edom* with the passing of *Aaron*?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “From here we see that because they had attached themselves and had become close to *Esav* the evil one, their actions were breached and thus they had lost this *tzaddik* (*Aaron*). When one attaches/associates himself with a *rasha* (evil), his status is undermined.” As a result of being in the proximity of the land of *Edom* we do not see that the Jewish people were influenced negatively to any degree. There is no indication of any spiritual failing as a result of this association. What then is basis for the loss of the *tzaddik*, *Aaron*? What atonement was necessary at this moment, which caused *Aaron*’s demise?

Initially, the Jewish people wanted to pass through the land of *Edom* in order to enter into Canaan. *Moshe* sent agents to the king of *Edom* to ask permission to allow them passage through their land. They had said to the king of *Edom*, “So said your brother Israel: You know all of the hardship that has befallen us...Let us pass through your land...” The king of *Edom* replied, “You shall not pass through me– lest I come against you with the sword!”

Midrash: The King of *Edom* replied in this threatening manner because he had understood that *Moshe* was communicating to him that the Jewish people were

redeemed from Egypt as a result of their prayers to G-d – which is the power that emanates from their mouths. *Moshe* was telling the king of *Edom* that the power of speech, which the Jew possesses (prayer and *Torah*) is a result of the blessing received from their forefather *Yitzchak* when he had said, “The voice is the voice of *Yaakov*...” The response of the Edomites was, “We too have a blessing from our forefather, *Yitzchak*, ‘By the sword you shall live.’”

Subsequently, *Moshe* chose to circumvent the land of *Edom* and not pass through it. *Moshe* had expressed his request to the king of *Edom* in a manner which indicated that there is a level of relationship between the Jewish people and the Edomites. He referred to the Jewish people as the “brother” of *Esav*. By identifying themselves in this manner the Jewish people were attached and associated with *Esav*, the evil one.

If one were to observe an evil person succeeding in his life, one could be in a position to envy that individual. However, the true reality of the material blessing in the life of this evil person is classified as *rasha v'tov lo* (an evil person who experiences good fortune). The verse states regarding the success of the evil, “G-d compensates His enemies in order to destroy them.” The good fortune of the *rasha* is in essence a depletion of his spiritual merits in the world to come.

Mishna in *Pirkei Avos*: The reward for a *mitzvah* in the physical realm is not possible. This is because the consequence of *mitzvah* has eternal value. Something of unlimited reward cannot be paid in a limited/physical existence. Therefore, it is not possible to receive reward even for the most minute *mitzvah* in this world. A *rasha* who performs a good deed in his lifetime is deserving of compensation/reward. However, because he has no interest in the world to come/spiritual realm, G-d must compensate him in the limited and material world. In essence he is only receiving an infinitesimal amount of what he truly deserves. But, because he has no interest in spirituality, this limited compensation is acceptable to him.

However, the value of the limited reward that is exchanged for something of infinite value manifests itself as overwhelming material blessing. What is perceived as blessing is in essence the ultimate curse and it is something that should not be envied. When G-d compensates the *rasha* He is in fact bring about his ultimate destruction. The *rasha* who experiences good

fortune is experiencing the Attribute of Justice (*Midas HaDin*). The Attribute of Mercy would have dictated that the *rasha* should not be compensated in this world – despite his preference of the material over the spiritual. However, because his classification is evil his reward is meted out under the auspices of the Attribute of Justice.

The predicament of the Edomites in the physical existence was to succeed materially and have superiority in the world. This itself is a manifestation of the Attribute of Justice. When the Jewish people attached and associated themselves to the Edomites, they became subject to the same Attribute of Justice. However, the Attribute of Justice manifested itself differently regarding the Jewish people. Because the classification of the Jewish people was not G-d forbid, evil, the Attribute of Justice impacted upon them in the most exacting manner – causing them to be subject to scrutiny. There is no record that is perfect. Thus, the Jewish people’s actions/record were breached causing the *tzaddik Aaron* to be taken from their midst. We are now able to understand the words of *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of our Fathers*) in a different light.

Mishna: “Distance yourself from a bad neighbor; do not attach yourself to an evil person; and do not despair from tragedy.”

Chazal: If one attaches himself to the *rasha* by establishing a relationship with him for the sake of personal benefit, ultimately the individual will be share in the downfall of the *rasha*. However, with our understanding of connecting oneself to the *rasha*, we can understand that when one subjects himself to the Attribute, which the *rasha* himself is experiencing, he will be subject to the Attribute of Justice Itself. Although this Attribute is manifested regarding the *rasha* as material blessing; however, regarding the Jew it will manifest itself as tragedy. If one is able to put this principle of *rasha v'tov lo* in perspective – rather than envying the material success of the those who transgress the *Torah* one would be abhorred by their predicament.

G-d Behind the Scenes

Torah: “Then Israel sang this song: Come up, O well, announce it!” The Jewish people sang a song of praise to G-d after they had seen the wellspring flowing through the mountains. They had seen human remains washing through the mountains and flowing before

their eyes. It was only then that they realized that G-d had performed a great miracle for them.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: The Emorites had planned to destroy the Jewish people as they were going to pass through the mountains. They had taken positions atop the mountains in caves and were going to hurl boulders upon the Jewish people as they passed below them. Before the Jewish people were going to pass through, G-d brought the mountains that were located on both sides of the valley together and caused the Emorites who were hiding in the caves to be crushed by the protruding rocks that were extending from the corresponding mountain on the other side. G-d then returned the mountains to their original positions and the wellspring flowed through the caves revealing the miracle that had transpired.

Midrash: After G-d had performed the miracle, He had said, "Let My children recognize the miracle that I have performed for them. They should understand that had I not done so, they would have been destroyed." There are many beneficial occurrences that take place in our lives of which we are not aware. It is only when G-d chooses to reveal these events, that we are able to recognize that we are the beneficiaries of His kindness. In their song of praise to G-d, the Jewish people had said, "A gift from the Desert..."

Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim*: One merits the *Torah* as a gift from G-d, only if one "makes himself ownerless like the desert." Meaning, if one assumes the posture and characteristic of a desert by negating himself and selflessly dedicates his priorities to G-d/observance of the *Torah*, He will give the *Torah* to him as a gift. Just as a desert is desolate and has no need or identity, one must negate his own interests and submit himself to *Torah*.

The Jewish people in the desert believed that their existence was mostly attributed to their own initiative and responsible lifestyle. It was only when they realized that G-d had performed a miracle for them, by destroying the Emorites, that they understood that had He not interceded, they would have been destroyed. Thus, unless G-d is continuously involved in their existence, they could not survive. They understood that their initiative and effort was unrelated to their degree of success. This was a humbling and illuminating realization. One only needs to take the initiative because of the failing of *Adam*.

Ramchal in *Path of the Just*: After *Adam* ate from the Tree of Knowledge, G-d had said, "It is by the sweat of your brow that you shall eat bread." Thus, one's initiative is only required because of this curse. However, the initiative has no relevance to one's actual success.

One's financial allocation for the year is determined on *Rosh Hashanah*. In essence, G-d is the Provider. After being the beneficiaries of the miracle of the wellspring, the Jewish people had reached a level of negation to assume the posture of the desert. They were able to internalize the fact that G-d is the Provider. Thus they had expressed themselves unequivocally stating that their initiative was unrelated to their success. Consequently their primary focus must be to the acquisition of *Torah* (a gift from the desert). If one is not privy to revealed miracles then how could he come to this vital realization that G-d is the Provider and his initiative is only an exercise to activate the blessing? It is only by engaging and delving in *Torah* study that one could have an appreciation of G-d.

Chazal: There is an innate enlightenment in *Torah* that gives a Jew a sense of his own spirituality and ultimately G-d Himself.

One Should Not Trivialize Even the Most Deficient Mitzvah

Torah: *Bilaam*, the evil one, wanted to curse the Jewish people. However, despite his desire and efforts G-d did not allow him to do so. Ultimately rather than cursing them, *Bilaam* blessed them. One of the many attempts that *Bilaam* had made was that he told *Balak* to build a number of altars and bring sacrifices to G-d. *Bilaam* had thought that perhaps in the merit of *Balak's* offerings, he would be allowed to curse the Jewish people. *Balak's* intent was not to acknowledge, serve and revere G-d but rather it was a means to bring a curse upon the Jewish people.

Gemara in Tractate *Nazir*: "It is worthwhile to engage in *Torah* and *mitzvos* even if it is without a pure intent (*shelo l'shma*). This is because if one engages in a *mitzvah* *shelo l'shma* it will lead him to perform it with a pure intent (*l'shma*). In the merit of the 42 offerings which were brought by *Balak*, the evil one, he merited that Ruth the Moabite should be his descendant (although he had done the *mitzvah* without a pure intent)..." Ruth the Moabite was the grandmother of King *David* from whom *Moshiach* will descend.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* citing a verse: “You should bring desolation upon the land...” The *Gemara* tells us that one should not read the word in the verse as “*shamos* – desolation” but rather it should be read as “*sheimos* – names.” From here, we learn “*shma k’gorim*” that the name that one possesses indicates one’s potential and destiny. The *Gemara* continues: “The reason Ruth (*Rus*) was given such a name was because she was destined to have a grandson who would sate G-d with song and praise (*merave HaKadosh Baruchu b’shiros v’tishbachos*).” Within the name “Ruth” lies the spiritual potential of King *David* who would author *Tehillim*.

It is interesting to note that as a consequence of *Balak* bringing the 42 offerings, although it was with a sinister intent (*shelo l’shma*), he merited to be the forbearer of Ruth, who was the forbearer of King *David* – establishing the *Davidic* line through which *Moshiach* will descend. We see that even a *mitzvah* that is performed at the most deficient level is able to generate merit/blessing that has phenomenal far-reaching ramifications. King *David* would have come into being regardless of *Balak*’s actions; however, the issue is through whom will he come into existence.

The *Gemara* states a principle that “merit comes to those who are meritorious and tragedy comes through those who are undeserving.” *Balak* is considered meritorious because of the 42 offerings that he had brought. We are not able to determine to what degree *Balak* is deserving of reward for being responsible for the chain of events, which evolved because of his actions.

Mishna in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: One has the obligation to return a lost article of his own father before returning the lost article of a stranger because one must be beholden to his parent for bringing him into existence. Without the parent fathering the child, all opportunity that presents itself in the life would have not been. The *Mishna* continues to say that one has the obligation to return the lost article of his spiritual mentor (*rabo*) before returning that of his father. This is because one must be more beholden to his rebbe/mentor for giving him a share in the world to come, which is eternal. If such far-reaching merit came upon one who performed a *mitzvah* with a sinister intent, how much merit will one have when one performs a *mitzvah* with a pure intent? Consequently, one should not underestimate/

minimize the seemingly most trivial *mitzvah* because its value cannot be appreciated or imagined.

Seeing is Believing

Torah: *Bilaam* arose early in the morning and hitched his own donkey to curse the Jewish people. “The donkey saw the angel of *Hashem* standing on the road with his sword drawn...*Bilaam*’s anger flared and he struck the donkey with his staff...Then *Hashem* opened *Bilaam*’s eyes and he saw the angel of *Hashem* standing on the road...” The verse states, “*Hashem* opened *Bilaam*’s eyes and he saw...”

Midrash: “Was *Bilaam* blind? He certainly was not. From here, we learn that even the eye that can see will only see that which is allowed by G-d. *Bilaam* did not see the angel because G-d did not allow him.” One would think that the human eye was created to be able to perceive and notice that which exists in the physical realm. When the prophet experiences a prophetic vision it is visualized by the mind’s eye and not his physical eyes. However, the *Torah* tells us that G-d “opened *Bilaam*’s eyes” indicating that one sees only what G-d wants him to see even regarding perceiving an angel which is a spiritual entity. What one is not meant to see will remain hidden.

Chazal: Before *Avraham* was circumcised he was called “*Avram*” (without the letter “*hey*”). The name “*Avram*” (with the letter “*hey*” deleted) is numerically equivalent of 243, indicating that before he was circumcised he did not have full control over all 248 parts of his body, which is the totality of man. He did not have full control over five aspects of his physicality – his two eyes, two ears, and his male organ. After his circumcision, G-d added the letter “*hey*” to his name and he became *Avraham* (which is numerically 248). His total physicality became sanctified/spiritualized and was thus under his full control. Although he was a spiritual being prior to this transformation, *Avraham*’s eyes had a degree of relevance to the physical. After the circumcision, his eyes only noticed that which had relevance to spirituality.

When *Avraham* was on the way to the *Akeidah* (Binding of *Yitzchak*) with his son *Yitzchak*, *Yishmael* and *Eliezer*, his servant, accompanied them. When *Avraham* approached the mountain (the location of the *Akeidah*), he saw a cloud suspended over it from

afar. He asked the two lads who accompanied him if they noticed anything above the mountain. Their response was in the negative. When he asked his son *Yitzchak* the question, he responded that he saw a cloud. This was a clear indication to *Avraham* that *Yishmael* and *Eliezer* were not sufficiently spiritualized to have relevance to that location. Thus, he left them behind.

It is known that the *Chofetz Chaim* had trained himself in the area of *lashon ha'rah* (evil speech) to such a degree that if he were to begin hearing something that had any semblance of negativity, his ability to hear would shut down. One would think that when one hears whatever can be heard, he has no choice but to hear it. However, the *Chofetz Chaim* was able, through the spiritualization of his senses, to gain control over his physicality.

King *David* in *Tehillim (Psalms)*: "(G-d) Open my eyes through Your *Torah*." One would normally understand the words of King *David* as an expression that connotes gaining understanding through the *Torah*. However, the words of King *David* go beyond this simple understanding. One is exposed to many things but is only able to perceive/experience them within a limited context. The one who is able to see and perceive realities of existence, which others cannot, does so because of the spiritualization that comes through the *Torah* itself. Through the study of *Torah* one's grasp and even one's vision assumes another level – thus exposing the individual to what G-d wants him to see or protecting him from that which G-d does not want him to see.

The city of Vilna in the 19th Century was the main hub for the Jewish enlightenment movement, which sought to undermine traditional *Torah* Judaism. Simultaneously, Vilna was known as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania." The most prestigious *Torah* institutions and renowned *Torah* sages were located in Vilna. Depending on one's orientation and mindset, it was possible to experience Vilna on two levels that have no relevance to one another. One could return from his visit to Vilna and speak about the Yiddish theater and the Jewish cultural centers that had overtaken and dispelled any remnant of "primitive" Judaism. Conversely, one could return after experiencing Vilna as a changed person. He could become more spiritualized after being exposed to the world's most spiritual and well-known *Torah* sages. The eye perceives and sees that which is consistent with the person's level.

Torah: *Hagar* and her son *Yishmael* were driven from the home of *Avraham*, our Patriarch. They were in the wilderness without food or water. "G-d heard the beseeching of the lad and G-d opened her eyes (*Hagar*) and she saw a wellspring." The *Torah* does not tell us that G-d performed a miracle to create a wellspring where there was none. Rather, He only opened her eyes to see and notice something that was already there. She merited having her eyes opened because G-d heard the supplications of *Yishmael*.

Every day in the morning blessings: "... (G-d) opens the eyes of the blind."

Tur: One should recite this blessing upon opening one's eyes in the morning. We can say, based on the *Midrash*, that this blessing goes beyond acknowledging G-d for giving one the physical ability to see. Rather, He opens our eyes to see that which others cannot.

Recognizing Good Fortune for What it Truly Is (from *Korach*)

Torah: After the mutiny of *Korach* and the destruction of his community G-d designated the *Levyim* for their particular tasks in the *Mishkan*. "And I– Behold! I have taken your brethren the Levites from amongst the Children of Israel; to you they are given as a gift, to perform the service of the Tent of the Meeting."

Ramban regarding the verse, "...as a gift, to perform the service..": "G-d had given the service of the Priesthood as a gift. One could think that performing the service of the Priesthood is similar to the service of a mortal king, in which the servant has no choice but to perform his burdensome task. Thus, the *Torah* tells us that the service of G-d is a gift that brings glory and splendor to the one who was chosen. Unlike the service of a mortal king where the objective has no relevance to the glory of the individual."

Baal HaTurim: The gift of performing the service of the Priesthood, "One who gives a gift could do so either because he was compelled to do so or because he wished to give the gift wholeheartedly. G-d gave the Priesthood so that it should be a gift. He was not compelled to do so." When the *Torah* refers to the vestments of the Priest it states that they are for the sake of bringing "glory and splendor" to him so that he can be seen by the Jewish people in a special light.

The service of G-d is not a burden, rather it is a gift that glorifies the subject who serves the Master. The only nation that qualified for the receiving of the *Torah* was the Jewish people. The nations of the world had failed. One could think that G-d was thus compelled to give the *Torah* to the Jewish people because they were the only ones who remained qualified. To this, the *Torah* tells us that G-d chose the Jewish people to serve Him as a gift. He was not compelled– they were truly deserving of His gift.

The blessing that precedes the *Shema* concludes: “... He chose His nation Israel with love.” This connotes that G-d did not simply choose the Jewish people by default, but rather it was because of His love for them. They were truly qualified. It is important for one to understand and appreciate that one’s obligation to serve G-d is the ultimate privilege and not a burden. G-d chose the Jewish people to serve Him– giving them the opportunity to be glorified through His service.

King *David* was consumed with his love for G-d and continuously throughout *Psalms* expresses his sense of privilege for being able to perform the *mitzvos*. As he states: “Fortunate are those who dwell in His house...” Similarly every morning we recite after the introductory morning blessings, “We are fortunate how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot, and how beautiful our heritage!” It is not enough for one to merely say these words, but rather, one must truly appreciate what he is expressing.

The Jew is commanded to be engaged in *Torah* study every waking moment. One could perceive this as a burden with no respite. In addition, the recitation of the first paragraph of the *Shema* is the acceptance of the yoke of heaven. This could connote and further indicate that in fact *mitzvos* are a burden. Just as a “yoke” rests heavily upon the animal to control it, so too do the *mitzvos* rest upon the Jew.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin *z’tl*: A yoke is not a burden to the animal, rather it causes the animal only to be able to see a straight line before itself without being distracted by what is off to its side. The yoke secures the animal’s head so that it is not able to turn it in either direction. Similarly, when one accepts the yoke of heaven, it causes him to be focused on performing

the Will of G-d and not be distracted by anything that does not pertain to His Will. It is only in this way that one will appreciate and understand the true value and privilege of doing His Will. Thus, the yoke is a means for one to recognize that he is a beneficiary of the ultimate gift, which is the service of G-d.



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