

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה וידבר גו' זאת חוקת התורה ה'תשכ"ה

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THE STATUTE OF THE TORAH

AND G-D SPOKE TO MOSES AND SAID: 'THIS IS THE STATUTE OF THE TORAH... A RED HEIFER SHOULD BE TAKEN...'. Rabbi Shneur Zalman tells us that the reason why the 'Red Heifer' is called the Statute of the Torah is because it expresses the central theme of the Torah. This is 'advance' and 'return'. In spiritual life this means moving upwards, advancing towards the Divine, and then 'return', returning to the world.

The advance is the fact of burning the Red Heifer, which expresses reaching beyond the physical realm. The return is expressed in the procedure of putting the ash of the burnt Red Heifer in a vessel and pouring water onto it. This 'downward' movement expresses return to the world.

How does this explanation of the words 'the statute of the Torah' relate to another well-known explanation, that the law of the Red Heifer is a 'Statute', something which cannot be understood rationally? For it purifies the impure, when its ashes mixed with water are sprinkled on a person who has been in contact with the dead; yet it also defiles the pure, in that the people who prepare the ashes of the Red Heifer themselves become impure and need to immerse in a Mikveh. Further, it is prepared 'outside the three camps'², unlike all other sacred offerings which are prepared inside the Sanctuary or Temple precinct.

Rashi states that 'Satan and the nations of the world' mock the Jewish people about this law, and hence it is called a Statute, a Divine decree which cannot be

¹ Maamar Zot Chukat HaTorah 5725, published in Dvar Malchus Chukat 5776. The Hebrew text was not edited by the Rebbe.

² In the desert, there was the camp of the Sanctuary at the centre, then of the Levites which ringed it in three groups on three sides, and then the outermost perimeter of the Israelites, arranged in four groups of three tribes each, surrounding the Sanctuary on all four sides. The Red Heifer had to be taken beyond that perimeter to be slaughtered and burnt. See Numbers 19:1-8.

questioned. Further, even among other Mitzvot which are called Statutes, the law of the Red Heifer stands out. For those Mitzvot, such as Kashrut, can be partly explained, but not so the law of the Red Heifer.

The Midrash states that even King Solomon could not understand the meaning of the Red Heifer. It is said that it was revealed only to Moses. But even in his case, it was not so simple. The Midrash tells us that he was shocked when he heard about the laws of impurity from the dead, as it applies to the Cohanim (who must avoid being defiled in this way). He asked G-d what happens if a Cohen becomes impure from the dead? G-d did not reply. Later Moses learnt the law of the Red Heifer. How can this purify them? he asked, in disbelief. G-d said: 'It is a decree, which no-one can understand..'³

If the law of Red Heifer is so obscure, in which way can it be described as representing the entire Torah? To answer this let us consider another aspect of the Red Heifer.

We have seen that it is called the Statute of the Torah. The term 'Statute' *Chok* relates to the word *chakikah*, 'engraving'. This refers to the very root of Torah. One level of text is 'writing', ink on parchment, in which the letters can easily be erased, and they also hide the brightness of the parchment. A higher level is engraving in which the letters are part of the stone. Yet even here, the letters can be filled in with ink, and their unique quality, and the brightness of the stone on which they are engraved, can be hidden. Yet higher is 'engraving which passes right through the stone, from one side to the other', which is what the Sages tell us about the Tablets of the Law. This cannot be filled in by anything, and since the letters are so totally part of the stone they do not hide it at all.

The Rebbe RaShaB⁴ explains that the level of 'ink on parchment' is like that of Atzilut, in which the 'letters' are like the 'vessels' of the Sefirot. The engraved letters are higher, in the realms of Keter. Higher still is the level in which the engraving passes right through the stone, like that of the Infinite beyond Keter.

The discourse tells us that this expresses the exalted nature of the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer, the Statute of the Torah. It relates to the highest level: the engraving which passes entirely through the stone, expressing the Infinite beyond the downchaining of the Worlds.

These different levels of 'text' also apply within each individual. The writing on the parchment is like the Intellect. This relates to 'rational' Mitzvot which can be understood, and also those called 'testimonies'⁵. The level of engraving on a precious stone is like the essence of the Soul, beyond Intellect, relating to those Mitzvot which are considered Statutes, like Kashrut, which on the one hand are

³ Kohelet Rabbati 8:5.

⁴ Rabbi Shalom Dovber Schneersohn (1860-1920), fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe.

⁵ 'Rational Mitzvot' are those like not to steal, not to murder, which all nations are likely to have as laws.

'Testimonies' are laws like Pesach, which testify to our Exodus from Egypt, and which can be understood on that level. As stated earlier, 'Statutes' are the Mitzvot which have no easy explanation.

beyond Reason but on the other can be given some kind of rationale. Even higher is the kind of engraving which passes through the entire precious stone, and does not obscure it at all. This is the level of Red Heifer, which is completely beyond Intellect.

This highest level is the most profound dimension of the Jew. Our goal in life is that this level of bond with Divine, which completely transcends intellect, should permeate all aspects of our being. This is why the Red Heifer was burnt right outside the Camp. Because that level of bond with G-d connects with every level, even that which is totally 'outside'.

This explains why the Red Heifer, called the Statute of the Torah, is described as expressing in general what the Torah is really about. For our goal is to bond with G-d beyond all rationality, which is termed 'advance', and also then to 'return', to draw that level of the Divine into every aspect of life, revealing the boundless infinity of G-dliness in all the Mitzvot, and in the realities and limitations of this practical world.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care