

# TUMAH AND TAHARAH DEFY OUR UNDERSTANDING

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Chukas

### Tumah and Taharah Defy Our Understanding

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 731, Shkia - 7:02: Mincha 7:00 A Problem? Good Shabbos!*

The whole ceremony of Parah Adumah [Red Heifer] is the quintessential chok [mitzvah-decree with no apparent reason]. Rashi cites the Medrash that the Satan and the nations of the world mock Israel concerning this commandment - taunting us to explain its rationale.

The Parah Adumah contains within itself the greatest of paradoxes. Ashes of the Parah Adumah mixed with water have purifying powers. They are the only mode by which a person who has come in contact with a dead corpse (tumas mes) may become pure again. And yet the halacha is that the people who prepare the Parah Adumah, that sprinkle its waters, and that have anything to do with it become tameh (spiritually impure) themselves.

The Rambam writes at the end of Hilchos Mikvaos: It is a clear matter that the laws of impurity and purity are Divine decrees (gezeiros hakasuv hem) and we cannot understand their rationale. They are in the category of Jewish law known as chukim. Likewise, the fact that immersion in a mikveh removes tumah is a chok, because tumah is not dirt that can be removed by water.

The Shemen HaTov addresses the paradox of the Parah Adumah. The Parah Adumah comes to purify from death impurity (tumas mes). When did death begin? It started at the beginning of time with the sin of Man's eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Why did Adam eat from the Tree of Knowledge? Everything was available to him in the Garden of Eden. The Torah says that the motivation was so that "you will be G-d like, knowing the difference between Good and Evil" [Bereishis 3:5]. He ate from the Tree of Knowledge because he wanted to know everything and to understand everything. He wanted to become intellectually equivalent to G-d.

The way to correct the sin that brought death to the world is by teaching man that to reverse the effects of death; he must undergo a procedure about which he understands NOTHING. Rather than

understanding everything, by eating from the forbidden tree, Man ruined everything. The correction of that sin is to nullify ones understanding, to engage in a process which defies understanding. Even Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon], the wisest of men did not understand it: "I said I would make myself wise, but its interpretation is far from me." [Koheles 7:23]. This is the tikun [correction] for the sin of partaking of the forbidden fruit, which was supposedly to give man G-dlike understanding and knowledge.

The Gemara in Shabbos [31a] expounds the pasuk in Yeshaya [33:6]: "V'haya Emunas Itecha Chosen Yeshuos Chochmas V'Daas (yiras Hashem hi otzaro)" [the faith of your times will be the strength of your salvations, wisdom and knowledge, (fear of Hashem that is man's treasure)]. The Gemara says that each of those six words represents one of the six orders of the Mishneh. Emunas = Seder Zeraim (because farmers who plant need faith that Hashem will help their crop grow); Itecha = Seder Moed, having to do with time; Chosen = Seder Nashim; Yeshuos = Seder Nezikin; Cochmas = Seder Kodshim; and V'Daas = Seder Taharos.

The reason why Daas [knowledge] represents Seder Taharos is because Seder Taharos requires nullification of one's Daas. It requires one to put his own understanding (sechel) on the shelf, so to speak, and say I will study it anyway even though it is beyond my comprehension.

The reason for this is because the first man sought to know everything. That is impossible. Certain things are beyond our comprehension. Thus, tikun of that sin are the laws of tumah and taharah, which require a person to nullify his understanding and subjugate his power of reasoning to that of a Higher Power (sechel Elyon).

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