

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS CHUKAS**

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS CHUKAS**

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**Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who,
more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us
for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption**

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Chukas* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to

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help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Chukas is about Moses denied entry into the Promised Land. According to the Midrash, with the coming of Moshiach, Moses will arise and take his generation of Jews into the Promised Land. Moses' greatest wish and desire was to see that happen!

ESSAY ONE

THE MOTHER OF ALL EXISTENCE

**When G-d gave us the Torah, He gave us the capacity to
bring eternal life to the world.**

**The physical dimension of life would exist in tandem with
the spiritual.**

**As a result of the sin of the golden calf failing we will not
be able to restore eternal life until the Messianic Age when
the world will be totally rid of all the negative influences.**

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ESSAY ONE

THE MOTHER OF ALL EXISTENCE

The Ultimate Enigma

This week's parsha introduces a mitzvah/commandment that is described by the Torah as the ultimate enigma. This is the ritual of the *Parah Adumah*-the Red Heifer. This ritual involved a person who had come in contact with a dead body who is thereby rendered *tamei*. This word, which defies translation, describes the diminished spiritual state of this individual. To "purify" oneself, the Torah commands us to take a completely red cow, slaughter it, burn it, mix the ashes with spring water and sprinkling this mixture on the affected person on the third and seventh day after their defilement.

In describing this ritual, the parsha begins with the words: "This is the statute of the Torah." The Hebrew word for statute is *Chukah* or *Chok* which our Sages state connotes a commandment for which there is no rational explanation.

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Generally speaking, the 613 Biblical Mitzvos have been divided into three categories: *Mishpatim*, *Eidos* and *Chukim*.

Mishpatim are the rational commandments. Had the Torah not been given we would have anticipated these Mitzvos. Included in this category are the commandments against theft and murder.

Eidos are the testimonial commandments that are dedicated to remembering historical events or ideals. Observing the Shabbos is a reminder of G-d's creating the world, Passover is a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt and a Mezuzah is a reminder of G-d's constant protection of our home, etc. And though we might not have thought of these Mitzvos ourselves, once they were given to us they made sense. They are quite logical and reasonable.

Chukim are the trans-rational commandments for which no reason is given and we cannot rationalize. And of all the commandments that are in this category, the one that stands out as being the most enigmatic is the focus of this week's parsha: the ritual of the Parah Adumah. Thus the parsha begins: "This is the statute of the Torah," to underscore that this is the ultimate irrational commandment.

Rashi, the principal Bible commentator, encapsulates all of the above in his opening comment:

“Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, “What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?” Therefore, the Torah uses the term “statute.” I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it.

Mother Cleaning up Her Child's Mess

Yet, Rashi, in a subsequent comment, seems to contradict himself when he offers a rather rational explanation for this Mitzvah in the name of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan:

This can be compared to the child of a maidservant who soiled the king's palace. They said, “Let his mother come and clean up the mess.” Similarly, let the cow come and atone for the calf.

In other words, the Red Heifer (the “mother”) was atonement for the sin of the golden calf (the “child”).

This explanation would appear to place this ritual in the category of *Eidos*/a testimony. The mother cow that is used in this ritual reminds us of the sin of the golden calf, and that it comes as atonement for it just as a mother cleans up her child's mess.

Why then is this mitzvah characterized as the ultimate enigma when it conveys a very reasonable symbolic message?

The Enigma of Teshuvah

Rabbi Dovber, the Magid of Mezritch (the successor to the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement) explains that it is not the Red Cow itself that is the enigma. Rather the enigma is the whole concept that the person can find atonement through the Red Cow and the process of Teshuvah. One would have expected that the person who sins has severed his ties with his very G-dly source of life. If a person were to fatally injure himself, would mere remorse for his action bring him back to life? A transgression is a self-inflicted fatal injury. And yet, G-d has provided for the process of Teshuvah (usually translated as repentance, but more accurately as "return").

This, the Maggid explains, is what our Sages meant when they stated that Teshuvah preceded the creation of the world. The world itself that is governed by the rules of nature were preceded by a higher force; the power of overriding the natural system of cause and effect.

Thus, the great Kabbalist, the Arizal, states that Teshuvah is the "supernal mother." Just as a mother precedes and is the source of the life of her child, so too Teshuvah precedes and indeed sustains and nurtures the world. Teshuvah is the mother of existence.

The analogy of a mother for Teshuvah explains Rashi's comparison of the Red Heifer to the mother who cleans her

soiled child. It represents the power of Teshuvah—the mother of all existence—to remove the stain of transgression from the child.

And it is this power of Teshuvah, that is highlighted and represented by the Red Cow, that is the real enigma. The power of Teshuvah is indeed one that transcends the bounds of logic and nature.

Why Single Out the Red Heifer?

One may still raise the question. The story of the Red Heifer is not the only time the Torah refers to Teshuvah. Indeed, a good portion of the Book of Leviticus is about sacrifices that atone for our sins. What is so unique about this specific sacrifice? Why is this indirect reference to Teshuvah—i.e., the Red Cow that represents the mother who cleans the mess of her children—the one that is characterized as the ultimate enigma of Torah?

The sin of the golden calf was not just one of the most—if not the most—serious violation of G-d's commandments. It was a total reversal of the entire process of bringing life to the world.

In the very first day of creation of Adam and Eve, they dealt a crushing blow to life by listening to the seditious

advice of the serpent and partaking of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, our Sages tell us, impurity and death departed from our world. That situation lasted only until the Jews worshipped the golden calf. That transgression reversed the life sustaining revelation of Sinai. The golden calf debacle was more than just a colossal failing; the entire Sinai phenomenon was undercut by this negatively transformative experience.

Reversing the Reversal

To elaborate: When G-d gave us the Torah, He gave us the capacity to bring eternal life to the world. The physical dimension of life would exist in tandem with the spiritual. As a result of the sin of the golden calf failing we will not be able to restore eternal life until the Messianic Age when the world will be totally rid of all the negative influences.

It is no wonder that the numerical value of the word Moshiach is the same as the word serpent (*nachash*). Only in the Messianic Age we will be totally cleansed of every trace of the impurity introduced by the original *nachash*/serpent.

And while we have to wait for Moshiach to reverse the negativity of the golden calf, that process began with the

introduction of the Red Heifer ritual. That introduced not just the power of Teshuvah, but the power of Teshuvah to bring about the complete reversal of the reversal caused by the golden calf.

When we were told that the ritual of the Parah Adumah is like the mother that can clean up the mess of the children, we discovered that we can connect to a primordial “mother” power that transcends, and can therefore mend, even our damaged connection to G-d, through Torah.

The Four Responses to Sin

Our Sages tell us that there are four responses to sin:

“Wisdom says, ‘let the person who sinned be pursued by his own sin.’”

Wisdom and logic dictate that negative behavior begets negative results.

“Prophecy says, ‘Let the sinner die.’”

Prophecy is the ultimate manifestation of one’s spirituality. The laws of spirituality dictate that when we degrade ourselves and sever our connections to the spiritual realms, we are in effect severing our life line. Physical life is nurtured by its spiritual source.

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“Torah says, ‘Let the sinner bring a sacrifice and he will be atoned for.’”

Torah knowledge, which transcends even the spiritual sources of life, provides the sinner with a mitigating “defense” by suggesting that it is the animal in us that causes us to sin. Thus, the animal sacrifice is Torah’s way of reducing the severity of the transgression.

“The Holy one Blessed is He says, ‘Let him do Teshuvah and he will be atoned for.’”

Teshuvah the Rebbe explains, thus transcends our connection to G-d through Torah. Teshuvah not only gives and restores life, it even removes every trace of impurity that a sacrifice cannot.

To do Teshuvah is to connect to the G-dly energy that preceded and transcended creation, just as Moshiach, our Sages say, transcends and precedes creation.

We can now understand why the Red Heifer is the ultimate enigma of Torah. Its message of Teshuvah and its reversal of the golden calf decline represent the enigmatic G-dly energy of the pre-creation past and of the Messianic Age future.

ESSAY TWO

RESTORING NORMALCY

The word *tamei* can be understood as a mindset that alerts the person to the true nature of life and to the utter absurdity and enigma of death.

It is a stark reminder that while G-d creates everything normal, we were given the capacity to either preserve the normal status of the world or corrupt it—albeit temporarily.

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ESSAY TWO

RESTORING NORMALCY

Moses Dilemma

Whenever we want to describe a practice of Judaism that defies rational comprehension, the law of the "Red Heifer" (*Parah Adumah*)—highlighted in this week's *parsha*—is invoked.

Whenever a person would come in contact with a dead body, the Torah required undergoing a purification rite that involved sprinkling the ashes of a Red Heifer on that person. Otherwise this individual could not enter the Bais Hamikdash, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

So enigmatic was this ritual that even King Solomon, "the wisest of men," was baffled by it. And when Moses heard directly from G-d about the laws of impurity generated by death, he turned pale, and expressed his inability to fathom how one could be purified.

To understand Moses' dilemma, we should first try to understand why a person who comes in contact with the dead is called *tamei*. What does the word *tamei* actually mean?

Mistranslation

Most people translate it—or, more precisely, mistranslate it—as “unclean.” A somewhat more accurate translation would be “ritually impure.” In truth, there is no English parallel to the word *tamei*, so one cannot really translate the word into English, or any other language.

Rather the word *tamei* must be explained by delving into what the Torah, specifically the mystical literature, has to say about life and death. Indeed, this unique approach requires of us to shift our way of thinking about the very nature of life and death.

Most people asked about life and death would say that death is natural and inevitable. Everything that lives must also die. It is axiomatic that life is transient, while death is permanent.

Death is Fundamentally Temporary

Judaism believes that the opposite is true.

When Adam and Eve were created, prior to partaking of the forbidden fruit, they were to live forever. In other words the natural state of the world—the way it was created by G-d—was for life to continue indefinitely. Only by contravening G-d’s commandment not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge did death become a part of our reality.

When the Jews received the Torah at Sinai, death disappeared, only to be reintroduced by the creation of the Golden Calf.

It is also a fundamental belief in Judaism (one of the Thirteen Principle of Faith established by Maimonides) that after Moshiach comes; the dead will arise and come back to life. According to most Jewish theologians and Kabbalists, we will then live on forever.

Hence, both in the original state of existence as well as in its ultimate form, life is permanent. Death is the aberration and is only allowed to exist so that we appreciate the true value of life. Death gives us the awareness that our actions make a difference, and we should do as much good as we can while we are here. But, ultimately all of the accumulative good will once again restore the status of life to its original and intrinsic position.

In short, the natural state of existence is to live. Death, introduced to the world when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, is the most unnatural state of affairs and is the real enigma.

***Tamei* alerts us to the True Definition of Life**

To return to the word and concept of *tamei*. To become *tamei* is not a sin and does not suggest that the person

who is *tamei* has transgressed or is evil or unclean. The word *tamei* can be understood as a mindset that alerts the person to the true nature of life and to the utter absurdity and enigma of death. It is a stark reminder that while G-d creates everything normal, we were given the capacity to either preserve the normal status of the world or corrupt it—albeit temporarily.

We can now understand why Moses could not comprehend how one can become purified from his contact with death. Since death is in essence the most unnatural state of affairs, it is so absurd and irrational, how can one deal with it?

Thinking Out of the Box

To which G-d replied with the equally enigmatic and apparently irrational (or: super-rational) ritual of the Red Heifer. To deal with a “normal” problem, one can propose a “normal” solution. To deal with an unconventional deviation from normalcy, one must “think outside of the box,” and do something unconventional that borders on the incredulous.

Our existence in exile has been likened to the experience of being *tamei*. We take the ills of society as the norm and the good experiences as the aberration. We take death (actual or figurative) as natural, and life (physical or spiritual) as

the exception. We have become cynical, skeptical and pessimistic.

The only solution to this problem is an unconventional approach to life and life affirming thoughts, speech and behavior. As Maimonides writes, a stick that was bent out of shape cannot be bent back into shape by simply bending it back to its original shape. One must bend it in the opposite direction, and only then can it be straightened.

Sane by being Insane

This Sunday, the Third of Tammuz, is the we were denied—temporarily—the privilege to see Jewry's greatest leader, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and to hear his inspiring words. More than any other leader, the Rebbe has alerted us to the imminence of the arrival of Moshiach and the return of the world to its normal state.

The Rebbe has taught us that the way to restore sanity to the world is for us counter the unnatural exile mentality, in general, and particularly the absolutely irrational hatred and evil, with commensurate actions of goodness that transcend our own bounds. While evil has to be fought without respite, we must also introduce unconventional and unpredictable life-affirming goodness and holiness into the world.

Practical Advice

In practical terms, this means:

(a) We must reorient the way we think about life and goodness in general. We must see life, goodness and the ultimate Redemption through Moshiach as the most natural state of affairs.

(b) Even before our mindsets can change, we must speak in positive tones about the good in us and others, and affirm, at least verbally, the preeminence of good and the ultimate unfolding of the Messianic drama. Positive speech itself has the capacity to engender positive feelings.

(c) And most importantly, we must change the way we behave. And while our hearts and minds may not be up to speed in terms of our Jewish observance, we must make the leap that is symbolized by the irrational nature of the Red Heifer. By going beyond our own bounds, we can elicit a force that will transform the world and bring it back to normal.

ESSAY THREE

AARON AND THE CLOUDS OF GLORY

How do we prevent assimilation?

**How can we remain impervious to all of the alien
influences of the outside world?**

It is through genuine Jewish unity.

**When we recognize that we are essentially one people,
because we share a common soul, background and destiny,
we can withstand any physical or spiritual assault against
us.**

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ESSAY THREE

AARON AND THE CLOUDS OF GLORY

Everyone Grieved for Aaron

When Aaron, Moses brother passed away, the Torah informs us in this week's Parsha that "the entire house of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days."

Rashi, the principle Bible commentator explains that the emphasis on "the entire house of Israel" is to teach us that, literally, everybody grieved for his passing. The reason for this was due to the fact that Aaron was constantly pursuing peace between husband and wife. Everybody, men and women, appreciated his contribution to them and were keenly aware of the void that now existed in their lives.

It is interesting to note that as a result of his passing, the Clouds of Glory that surrounded the Jewish people in the desert disappeared. Our sages tell us that the Manna from heaven was given to them in the merit of Moses, the water was provided for them in the merit of Miriam, but the Clouds of Glory were given to the Jewish people in the merit of Aaron.

The Three Gifts in the Merit of Moses, Aaron and Miriam

Why did G-d associate the Manna with Moses, the water with Miriam and the Clouds of Glory with Aaron?

One explanation is that Manna was the food from heaven that sustained them. This is precisely what the Torah is: Spiritual nourishment that descended from heaven through the efforts of Moses. The connection between Moses and Torah is so profound that the prophet refers to the Torah as "Moses' Torah."

Indeed, our Sages state that the Torah was given specifically to the generation that was nurtured by the Manna. Torah and Manna are two sides of the same coin; ultimate spiritual sustenance.

Water is what enables the distribution of the food we ingest throughout the body.

Similarly, it is the righteous Jewish woman, epitomized by Miriam, who guarantees that the spiritual nourishment that we ingest has its intended effect. The woman is endowed with the spiritual capacity to take the theoretical teachings of the Torah and translate them into practice.

The Matriarchs took the values of the Patriarchs and concretized them.

But, "food" and "water" are not enough for the Jewish nation. They had to be surrounded by the Clouds of Glory

for two main purposes. The first is to prevent harmful outside influences to enter into their camp that would compromise the purity of Torah. The second objective of the clouds was to unify the nation.

Two Related Objectives of the Clouds of Glory

Upon deeper reflection, the two objectives of the Clouds of Glory complement one another. How do we prevent assimilation? How can the Jewish people remain impervious to all of the alien influences of the outside world? It is through genuine Jewish unity. When all Jews recognize that they are essentially one people, because they share a common soul, background and destiny, they acquire the ability to withstand any assault against them, either physical or spiritual.

This then is the contribution of Aaron, the one who understood the true unifying character of the Jewish soul and devoted his life to actualizing that unity within the Jewish community.

The Twelfth Day of Tammuz

This Shabbos, the 12th of Tammuz, is the anniversary of the release of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe from Soviet imprisonment. One of his major contributions to the Jewish

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nation was his insistence of the absolute unity of our people and the need to accentuate unconditional Ahavas Yisroel-Love of Israel between all Jews.

The Previous Rebbe's efforts at reaching "in" to every Jew to discover his/her inner Jewish soul that makes us all one, was continued and expanded by his successor, the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Through his efforts, Judaism was introduced to millions of Jews in a non-judgmental way, permeated with unmitigated love and acceptance. These efforts drew their inspiration from Aaron.

And just as the Jewish people experienced this incredible unity as a precursor to their entry into the Promised Land, so too, it is crucial that as we await the coming of Moshiach who will once more return all of the Jewish people to the Promised Land, that we follow in the footsteps of Aaron, who: "Loved peace, pursued peace, loved every creature and brought them close to the Torah." (Avos 1:12)

ESSAY FOUR

A PLAY ON WORDS

Even the “third class copper” Jew who was bitten by the serpent, the symbol of the evil inclination within us, is not beyond hope.

Just harness your weaknesses for something higher and more sublime, and even that copper snake will cure you from your spiritual malady.

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ESSAY FOUR

A PLAY ON WORDS

A Non-Kosher Logo

Many medical organizations employ the symbol of a snake as their logo. This practice can be traced back to this week's Torah portion of Chukas, which recounts how the Jewish people infuriated G-d by their contemptuous speech. They were duly punished, bitten by snakes. When the Jews finally realized their mistake, Moses pleaded to G-d on their behalf. G-d's "prescription" was for Moses to make snakes and place them up high on a pole. Moses then proceeded to make copper snakes and placed it on a pole. Whoever would look at the snake would live.

Our Talmudic Sages ask rhetorically:

"Does a serpent kill or give life?"

However, our rabbis answer their own question:

As long as the Israelites looked heavenward and subjugated their heart to their heavenly Father, they would be cured. If not they would die.

There is an obvious question here. If the copper serpent did not cure them, what purpose was served in Moses constructing the copper servant? Why did the Jews have to look at it, if the real intent of G-d was that they direct their hearts to G-d?

A Play on Words?

To answer these questions it is necessary to also understand why Moses made the serpent out of copper. Rashi explains that the word in Hebrew for serpent (*Nachash*) and the word for copper (*Nechoshes*) are similar. Moses, therefore, decided to make the serpent out of the similar sounding copper.

It is hard to imagine that Moses would do something purely for a play-on-words effect. Obviously, the choice of copper had a direct bearing on the objective Moses had in making this copper snake.

Three Levels of Spiritual Health

When the Tabernacle was built, there were three primary metals used in its construction: gold, silver and copper. Chassidic literature explains that they were representative of three levels of spiritual health.

Gold represented someone who was spiritually pure and sophisticated.

Silver represented the average person, while copper represented the lowest class individual whose moral and spiritual status left much to be desired.

By commanding us to construct G-d's sanctuary out of all these three components, the Torah teaches us the dual lesson that no one is beyond the need for the effort in building a Sanctuary and no one is beyond being helped by this construction.

Indeed, the very word for copper (*Nechoshes*) which contains the letters of the word *Nachash* (Serpent) is an allusion to Moshiach, which numerically is the equivalent of the word *Nachash* (358). Moshiach (the ultimate Jewish leader and role model) is capable of reaching even the lowliest class of Jew, one who has been bitten by the *Nachash*, the serpent.

Harnessing the Internal Serpent

By placing the copper serpent on high, Moses was trying to impress even the “copper” Jew who was bitten by the serpent, the symbol of the evil inclination within us, is not beyond hope. Just place your spiritual weaknesses on a pedestal, i.e., just harness your weaknesses for something

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higher and more sublime, and even that copper snake will cure you from your spiritual malady.

For example, if one suffers from unbridled temptation for physical pleasure, he can take that passion and “convert” it into a passionate and fiery love for G-d, His Torah and people

If one’s spiritual progress is hampered by uncontrollable rage, he should learn how to channel, and thereby sublimate, his anger into indignation at injustice, or displeasure with one’s own negative tendencies.

If our destructive “fiery” tongue is what plagues us, we should learn to use our tongue for fiery and passionate speech on behalf of good causes.

This then is what G-d’s and Moses’ message was: When you are bitten by the *Saraf* (another word for serpent that actually means “fiery creature,”) i.e., when you are consumed with negative energy that is likened to fire (improper passion, anger, destructive speech etc.) do not despair.

One can take the very negative trait and convert it into something positive. Even the “copper Jew” can become part of the G-dly Sanctuary. Even the destructive characteristics of the *Nachash* can be turned around and lead us to Moshiach.

ESSAY FIVE

THE RATIONAL IRRATIONAL PERSON

Which is more rational?

The belief that the Jewish People's survival through thousands of years of persecution was a coincidence, or that it was due to the fact that they were chosen by G-d to carry out a special mission, and that it was our stubborn adherence to the Torah that gave us our strength to persevere?

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ESSAY FIVE

THE RATIONAL IRRATIONAL PERSON

The Vaunted Rational Mind

We like to pride ourselves as being rational. The human mind has been revered and extolled as the most powerful force in the world. Nineteenth century scholarship gave rise to the view that there is nothing the mind cannot ultimately fathom.

Religion, with its emphasis on faith, was relegated to the realm of superstition and was regarded as a relic of the past, uncivilized world.

Faith is the Most Rational Thing

Needless to say, the conception of religion as something irrational is off the mark. Which is more rational? To believe that the world – with all of its complexities – came into being by itself or that there was a Designer and Creator Who made it?

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Which is more rational: The belief that there is a system of good and evil and that doing good makes life meaningful and worthwhile, or believing that there is no meaningful purpose in existence?

Which is more rational: The belief that the Jewish People's survival through thousands of years of persecution was a coincidence, or that it was due to the fact that they were chosen by G-d to carry out a special mission, and that it was our stubborn adherence to the Torah that gave us our strength to persevere?

We can go on and on to show how "rational" it is for us to believe in G-d and the Torah, particularly in light of the many incredible prophecies that have come true. However, there is a kernel of truth in the assertion that Judaism is a non-rational religion.

The Three Dimensions of Torah

The basis for this premise is the name and theme of this week's Torah portion: *Chukas*. *Chukas* refers to the commandments of the Torah that are beyond reasoning. Unlike the *Mishpatim* (civil laws) that are rational and could have been anticipated even if the Torah had not been given, and *Eidos* (testimonies) commemorative observances such as Holidays that are reasonable and logical observances once given, the *Chukim* cannot be fathomed.

Yet it is this category of mitzvah that highlights our special relationship with G-d.

The question begs to be asked. Why does G-d ask of us to observe rituals that defy logic? Why couldn't G-d make all of His demands of us more logical?

The answer lies in the understanding of the parallel nature of the Divine and of our soul.

The Multiple Layers of our Soul

Our soul has many layers of expression. Contrary to the nineteenth century misconception, logic is not the highest and most sublime manifestation of the human condition. Beyond intellectual capabilities is the soul's capacity to transcend itself, to rise above the parameters of logic.

Similarly, G-d manifests Himself on many levels; the most profound level of G-dly light is not His intellectual faculties, but rather His very essence, which transcends logic.

When one devotes only his/her emotional and intellectual energies to G-d, it represents serving G-d on only a limited level of one's potential.

In other words, to serve G-d with intellect alone, is to leave one's most profound potential out of the service of G-d. To paraphrase: "A soul's essence is a terrible thing to waste."

Why do we Cover our Heads?

Our tradition highlights this concept by covering our heads. The head covering underscores that the head, or, our intellect, is not the highest expression of humanity.

But while a head covering can alert us to the fact that intellect is not everything, it cannot actualize the highest level of humanity within us and enable us to connect with G-d's essence. To accomplish that we must observe the commandments known as *Chukim*.

To observe a *Chok*, a supra-rational commandment, is to tap into a segment of one's being that is one's most potent and important power. To serve G-d strictly on the basis of one's comprehension of G-d and His commandments is to suppress our most important faculty, the faculty of self-transcendence.

Similarly, when we serve G-d with logic we can only access the aspect of G-d that allows it to be understood. This is a mere glimmer of G-d's essential nature. That can only be accessed by observing His commandments that transcend logic and which unleashes G-d's supra-rational and essential existence.

Beyond Knowledge

This is the very objective of all of our Mitzvot to pave the way for the Messianic Age, at which time the entire world will be receptive to the very essence of G-d and not only His more external manifestations.

This also explains why the Talmud states that Moshiach's coming is when we are distracted from it. The Alter Rebbe explains that this does not mean we should forget about Moshiach but rather we should acknowledge that Moshiach is a time when we will be able to successfully connect to G-d in ways that transcend our limited intellect.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY SIX

LOVE PEACE AND PURSUE PEACE

Aaron taught us the true definition of love and unity.

It is not just a means to an end; it is an end.

We must be proactive in pursuing it.

**Love of the other is based on an understanding of the
essential nature of the human being.**

**Aaron also taught is that pursuing peace cannot be at the
expense of the integrity of Judaism.**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY SIX

LOVE PEACE AND PURSUE PEACE

Loved by All

When Aaron died, the Torah—in this week’s parsha—describes how he was mourned by **the entire** Jewish nation.

Aaron was beloved by them because he was a man of peace. In the words of the great Sage Hillel:

“Be one of the disciples of Aaron, who loved peace and pursued peace, loved the creatures and drew them close to the Torah.”

Each one of these statements needs to be analyzed:

Loved Peace

There are people who view peace as a desirable state to be in only because it is a means to an end. As it is stated in the concluding statement of the Mishnah:

“G-d could not find a receptacle for blessing except for peace, as it is written: ‘G-d gave strength to his

nation Israel, G-d blessed them with peace.”

In other words peace is the most powerful force to generate all of G-d's blessings. When there is peace one can concentrate on all the other important things in life.

When Hillel says that Aaron “loved peace” he meant that Aaron viewed peace as an end unto itself. Peace is not only that which leads to other good things, it is itself an intrinsically good thing.

The reason for this can be found in the statement that “G-d's name is peace.” One of the characteristics of G-d is peace. And just as G-d is not only a means to an end, He is the end, so to speak, so too, His attribute of peace is not only a vehicle to other positive goals, it has intrinsic value as well.

Pursued Peace

There are many people who can appreciate the value of peace, but are passive when it comes to making peace between one person and another.

Aaron, by contrast, was not only a passive peace lover; he actively pursued avenues to get two feuding individuals together.

The Talmud relates that Aaron would find one of the two feuding parties and tell them a “white lie.” “I just met your

adversary and he told me how sorry he was for having offended you. He really thinks highly of you and would love to make up.” Aaron would then proceed to the other party to the dispute and say the same thing to him. In the end, they would make up.

From this precedent, the Talmud concludes that it is permissible to dissemble in order to preserve the peace between people. And despite the Torah’s abhorrence of lying, nevertheless, when there is a choice between a conflict continuing, which can destroy the very fabric of the feuding people’s lives, the lives of their families and of the entire community, Torah dictates that peace takes precedence.

On a deeper level it can be said, the fact that two people can be brought back together with a simple misrepresentation of their true feelings proves that deep down they were not real enemies. Aaron was thus able to capitalize on this fact to make peace between them.

Loved the Created Beings

In the classic work Tanya (Chapter 32) R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (Founder of the Chabad movement) explains that by adding the words “Loved the **created beings**,” Hillel was suggesting that Aaron loved even those people whose only apparent virtue was the fact that they were created by G-d.

Even those people Aaron loved.

When we love someone it is usually based on the overt qualities that an individual possesses. When it becomes apparent that those qualities are not as strong as one imagined them to be, or that they are canceled by other negative traits, the love will disappear. Not so, when we love someone for their essential being

Drew them Close to the Torah

Here is where Hillel adds an important caveat:

Hillel does not say “and drew the Torah close to them,” but rather “Drew them close to the Torah.”

The true sign of love to another is when you give them something authentic and complete. There are many who, in the name of love and peace, think they have to compromise the teachings of the Torah. By watering down the demands of Judaism in our dealings with other Jews, one might think that it would help them get closer to Judaism.

Hillel states that Aaron's example demonstrated that the opposite is true. While it is obvious that one cannot get someone to do everything overnight, one may not alter or compromise the demands of the Torah in order to bring someone close to it. One must present the Torah the way it is, and slowly get them to appreciate its beauty and depth.

The Path to Redemption

Our Sages taught us that the way to bring the Redemption to the entire world is by love and unity. Aaron taught us the true definition of love and unity,, that it must be appreciated as an end and not just as a means, we must be proactive in pursuing it, and that realizing it is based on an understanding of the essential nature of the human being.

But in addition to all that, Aaron's example—for which he was loved and respected—is that pursuing peace cannot be at the expense of the integrity of Judaism. This complete model of love and peace will usher in the age of true love and peace—the age of Moshiach and Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY SEVEN

SPEAK TO THE ROCK!

Jews who seem to be as “hard as a rock” should not be helped by using the “striking” method.

In the past, the hardness of Jews who grew up in an environment saturated with Jewish knowledge and warmth, derived from their rebellious spirits.

Nowadays, the hardness is a result of generations of benign neglect.

The remedy is not anger and “striking” but to address them with words that come from the heart.

This has proven to be the only effective way to reveal the inner pure waters that every Jew possesses.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY SEVEN

SPEAK TO THE ROCK!

Hitting the Rock in Anger

One of the most enigmatic passages in the Torah concerns Moses' actions that led to G-d denying him entry into the promised land.

The Jewish people were accustomed to drink water that miraculously emerged from a rock. When the righteous Miriam passed away, the rock disappeared and the Jews no longer had a supply of water. The Jews complained to Moses, who, in turn, conveyed their demands to G-d.

G-d's response to Moses was to speak to a rock and it would provide them with water. Moses, in the presence of all the Jews, struck the rock twice, whereupon the water started to flow.

At this point G-d harshly rebukes Moses, for his failure to "sanctify Me in the presence of the Jewish people."

Rashi's interpretation is that Moses failed to heed G-d's instructions to speak to the rock, Instead Moses struck it. Maimonides' interpretation is that Moses before striking

the rock got angry at the Jews. His anger was unwarranted and led to his censure by G-d.

It is hard for us to imagine that G-d would so harshly punish Moses for striking the rock rather than speaking to it. Similarly, it is difficult to comprehend why was his anger at the complaining community so objectionable to G-d?

Striking the Resistant Rock

One way of explaining this is to understand what was meant by G-d when he told Moses to speak to the rock. In an earlier episode G-d expressly told Moses to strike the rock from which water emerged. Why did G-d change His way of providing for water?

The rock is also a metaphor for their insensitive hearts. A rock is a lifeless, heavy and immobile object, hence the expression “a heart of stone.” Water, on the other hand, is refreshing and invigorating and the source of all forms of life. Water is thus a symbol for Torah, that is likewise, life sustaining.

When the Jews first experienced a problem with their water supply, it was a manifestation of a deeper spiritual problem: a lack of spiritual life. Moses was thus told by G-d that even a rock can produce water. No matter how

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hardened a Jew may be, one can always find the water within.

Unfortunately, to extract the water there might be a need to “strike the rock,” to chip away at the tough exterior. This, however, took place before the Jews received the Torah at Sinai and before they sojourned through the desert for forty years.

Moses' striking the rock at that point was illustrative of their lowly state that could not be altered without “breaking” the hardness. In modern parlance, this approach is referred to as “tough love.” To break a person's resistance to help, there are times when we have to hit the rock.”

Forty years later, when a similar “water shortage” arose, Moses had thought that it was again an indication that there was something amiss in their spiritual status. Their “rock” hardened hearts were not allowing the vibrant and refreshing waters of their soul to emerge. Here too, Moses thought there was a need to strike the rock to produce the desired result. Moses, thus, got angry at the Jews.

His anger was not - G-d forbid - an outburst of a person who had no control over his emotions, but it was a calculated technique to break their recalcitrance to get the water out. Moses judged the Jews harshly and regarded them to have not progressed since the first episode when

they complained about the water and was told by G-d to strike the rock. It was because Moses' expectation of them was so great that he was so disappointed when he realized they did not live up to it. His only recourse, he thought, was to admonish them and thereby break their hardened "shell."

Hence, Rashi's interpretation that his "sin" was the striking of the rock instead of talking to it, goes hand in hand with Maimonides' explanation that his "sin" was that he got angry. Striking the rock was the outer manifestation of anger, which strikes at the person and is intended to break their hardness.

Miscalculated

Moses, however, had miscalculated. The Jews were now on a lower level. These were not the first generation who witnessed the exodus and the experience at Sinai. These were their children. Their hardness, derived not from a rebellious spirit and resistance to holiness, but from a lack of awareness. They did not need to be broken to extract their pure waters; they had to be spoken to - a much softer approach.

When Moses regarded them as being spiritually on par with their parents, he exhibited his connection to the earlier generation. G-d thus removed him from leadership,

not as a punishment in the simple sense of the word, but as an indication that he did not belong to the new generation. Joshua his disciple would bring them into Israel.

Are we Rocks?

The lesson for our times is that Jews who seem to be as “hard as a rock” should not be helped by using the “striking” method. In the past, the hardness of Jews who grew up in an environment saturated with Jewish knowledge and warmth, derived from their rebellious spirits. Nowadays, the hardness is a result of generations of benign neglect.

The remedy is not anger and “striking” but to address them with words that come from the heart. This has proven to be the only effective way to reveal the inner pure waters that every Jew possesses.

Particularly now, as we stand poised to enter into the Messianic Age, there is a compelling need for Jews to talk to one another to produce “water,” not through anger and striking at their “rock hardened resistance.” This approach of Ahavas Yisroel is the most potent force to break all the rocks and remove all the impediments to the holiness embedded within all of us.

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Indeed, this is the function of Moshiach, to reach in to every Jew and elicit his/her inner goodness, thereby transforming the entire world into a world that “will be covered with the knowledge of G-d as the Ocean-bed is covered with water.”

ESSAY EIGHT

TOUCHED BY TRANSCENDENCE

When G-d is consistent we are in touch with and touched by an aspect of G-d that conforms to our level.

When, however, we encounter a paradox and accept it as G-d's will, we then access a "higher" and more essential aspect of G-d that transcends human comprehension.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY EIGHT

TOUCHED BY TRANSCENDENCE

The Enigma of Purity and Impurity

One of the most enigmatic areas of Jewish law is the subject of *Tumah* (usually translated as impurity) and *Taharah* (purity). One of the ways a person becomes *Tamei* (ritually impure) is by coming in contact with the dead. This week's Parsha characterizes the laws of purification from this impurity as a *Chukah*, a law that defies rational comprehension.

According to the Midrash, not only is this specific area of law beyond our understanding, but, indeed, all the laws of purity and impurity are an enigma because of their paradoxical nature. The Midrash cites the following examples:

Paradoxes

If a person develops a leprous blotch the size of a dime, he is rendered ritually impure. However, if that blotch spreads and covers his entire body, he is ritually clean!

A midwife who delivers a stillborn baby is ritually unclean because she touched a dead body, while the mother who is actually carrying the baby remains ritually pure until the child has emerged.

The people who were involved in the rite of the *Parah Adumah*-Red Cow (the ritual that purifies the person who had come in contact with the dead and his garments) must purify their garments, yet the *Parah Adumah*-Red Cow ritual itself purifies impure garment

These and other paradoxes illustrate the elusive nature of these laws of impurity. This is why these laws are distinguished from others and referred to as *Chukim*, because they derive from an aspect of G-d that transcends logic. Hence, they are not less important than the rational practices of Judaism, but, on the contrary, they reflect an aspect of G-d that transcends nature. By performing these laws, one creates a relationship with a transcendent aspect of G-d.

The Paradox of Life

Upon deeper reflection it will be apparent that all of life is an enigma, a paradox. Life is punctuated with both happiness and sorrow. Many, If not all, of life's positive experiences have negative consequences? Conversely, there is hardly a negative action or experience that does not lead

to something positive.

Take for example the person who breaks his leg and as a result cannot go on a trip. Later he discovers that the plane he was supposed to take crashed. The negative experience of breaking a leg — a real negative experience — is the indirect cause of this person staying alive.

Often evil people beget good children, while some exceptionally good parents may bear evil children.

We have all heard the frequently asked question why good people suffer while evil people prosper? If everyone would suffer equally, we would also find it difficult to grasp why G-d allows the innocent to be included. But, it is doubly hard to fathom the paradox as to why the good suffer while the evil prosper? Why is there so much inconsistency in G-d's universe?

The truth of the matter is that there is no acceptable rational answer to this question. If there was, why has every generation of great Jewish leaders repeated the question? It is obvious that no matter how many attempts we take at comprehending the paradoxical nature of the universe, we cannot really say that it makes complete sense to us.

The reason we cannot rationally understand these paradoxes is because they come from an aspect of G-d that transcends logic. Logic, after all, is also one of G-d's

creations. By definition, a creation is finite and we cannot demand that the infinite G-d be measured by a finite receptacle called logic.

Chukim: Coping Mechanism

When one confronts one of life's paradoxes, our appreciation for the transcendent aspect of G-d that is responsible for the *Chukim*-trans-rational commandments can help us deal with it. We are reminded that G-d expresses Himself most eloquently through the *Chukim*, the trans-rational commandments, because they alone reflect a level of divinity that transcends logic and nature.

By reflecting on these special commandments and the unique relationship with G-d that they forge, we can find some solace — not understanding — in life's paradoxes and enigmas. When G-d is consistent we are exposed to an aspect of G-d that “fits in” to our rational receptors. So we are in touch with and touched by an aspect of G-d that conforms to our level. When, however, we encounter a paradox and accept it as G-d's will, we then access a “higher” and more essential aspect of G-d that transcends human comprehension.

The Ultimate Paradox

The ultimate goal, however, is to have G-d express His essence to us in a way that can be appreciated by **all** our faculties, our minds included.

This will happen when Moshiach ushers in a new age concerning which the prophet says “Thank you G-d for having shown your wrath to me.” Only then will we fathom the unknowable. Only then will the paradoxes be resolved.

In truth, that is the ultimate paradox; we will understand things that are inherently above and beyond understanding!

While we are waiting, our task is threefold: do everything in our power to alleviate suffering and pain from others, realize that G-d’s ways cannot be fathomed and respectfully demand of G-d to bring an end to suffering by bringing Moshiach.

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ESSAY NINE

MR. DICHOTOMY

We must seek to translate the highest and most spiritual ideals into action.

This provides us with a taste of the World-to-Come, where eternal life will be the norm.

By introducing an element of consistency and durability in our own lives, we reveal that part of our soul that connects to our body that cannot be separated, i.e., eternal life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY NINE

MR. DICHOTOMY

A Name Says it All

A name says it all, is an expression that is more than a cliché. According to the Talmud a name captures the character of the thing that is so named. According to our mystical tradition, this applies only to a name in Hebrew, known as the Holy Tongue, because the Hebrew letters represent the spiritual life-force that G-d uses to create and animate the thing that carries a particular name.

With this introduction, let us examine the name of this week's parsha: *Chukas*. (In some years we read Chukas together with *Balak*, but we'll leave that discussion for another occasion.)

Korach and Chukas: What they have in Common

It is interesting to note that the name *Chukas* in Hebrew is somewhat similar to the name of last week's parsha: *Korach*. The Rebbe highlighted the fact that both words contain the two Hebrew letters *ches* and *kuf*. The third

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letter is where they part company. *Korach* has the letter *reish* while *Chukas* contains the letter *tav*. Hence the critical distinction between these two words, in terms of the composition of letters, is that *Korach* has a *reish* while *Chukas* has a *tav*.

What is the deeper significance of this apparently trivial piece of information?

The two letters that the two names of *Korach* and *Chukas* share are: *Ches* and *Kuf*. These two letters form the word *Chok*, which translates and is defined as a commandment that transcends our reason.

The Rebbe explains that, indeed, this parsha highlights the enigmatic commandment to use a red heifer as a form of purification. This ritual, with all of its paradoxes and anomalies, is the symbol of what it is to rise above conventional logic in one's relationship with G-d. By following these trans-rational Mitzvot, we rise to a level of G-dly awareness that transcends the normative G-dly energies. In short, *Chukas* symbolizes the art of transcendence.

Korach and Transcendence?!

How does the idea of transcendence connect to the preceding parsha of *Korach*?

The Rebbe explains that *Korach*, the rebel who tried to wrest power from Moses and Aaron, was no ordinary person. As discussed in a preceding essay, *Korach* was an extremely spiritual and exalted individual. His problem was that his lofty ideas and heightened spiritual position was disconnected from the real world. *Korach*, whose name means separation, attempted to enshrine the separation that G-d created between the upper spheres and the lower spheres.

When G-d created the world, He also created —one day two of creation—a separation between the “upper” and the “lower.” G-d’s intention, however, was that this separation be eliminated and the synthesis between the spiritual and physical, transcendent and lowly physical reality, be achieved. Sinai, was the experience that brought about this “corporate merger.”

Rich but Impoverished

But *Korach* resisted it. His name, therefore, while containing the lofty letters that form the word *Chok*, a transcendent force, also contains the letter *reish* which means poverty. One who has the highest ideals and aspirations, but refuses to or is incapable of relating those ideals to the day-to-day exigencies of life, is truly impoverished. It is comparable to one who has millions in

the bank, but cannot withdraw any of it to spend on the necessities of life.

How ironic that according to our Sages, Korach was one of the richest people to have ever lived. Yet his name contains the idea of poverty.

Down to the Lowest Level

On the heels of the parsha dedicated to *Korach*, the rich man who couldn't make any withdrawals from his spiritual bank, the Torah introduces the parsha of *Chukas*. *Chukas*, as noted has the letter *tav* instead of the letter *reish*. The letter *tav* is the very last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This connotes the idea that all of the lofty ideals represented by the word *Chok*—a transcendent G-dly directive—finds expression in every aspect of life, down to the lowest and final letter—the realm of *tav*.

Moreover, according to the Talmud (Tractate Shabbos 55a) the letter *tav* is the initial of, and therefore represents the idea of, *Techiyas Hameisim*, the Resurrection of the dead. According to Jewish belief (mentioned in the Bible and Talmud, and codified by Maimonides), in the Messianic Era, the dead will be revived and brought back to life. When that occurs, we are told, we will all live forever.

Hence the last letter *tav*, the last letter of the alphabet,

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signifies not only the final period of history, but also the idea of eternal life.

Translated into down-to-earth terms all this means as follows:

There are some people who have great ideas and who live in the world of theory. Their ideas, however, lack true life and endurance, because they exist in the realm of thought and speech and do not enter into the realm of action. This was *Korach*, the ultimate personification of the term dichotomy.

To prevent one from becoming another Mr. Dichotomy, we must read and invoke the theme of the word *Chukas*—taking the lofty *chok* and connecting it to the letter *tav*. This means, we must seek to translate the highest and most spiritual ideals into action. This then provides us with a taste of the World-to-Come, where eternal life will be the norm. By introducing an element of consistency and durability in our own lives, we reveal that part of our soul that connects to our body that cannot be separated, i.e., eternal life.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY TEN

THREE HUMAN CONDITIONS: THREE PERSPECTIVES

As we stand ready to greet Moshiach and the final Redemption we sometimes second-guess ourselves and question our worthiness to be redeemed. We might think of ourselves as undeserving.

We must realize that we have beautiful garments that are woven together from all of the positive thoughts, words and actions that we as a people have performed notwithstanding the hardships of Galus/exile.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY TEN

THREE HUMAN CONDITIONS: THREE PERSPECTIVES

The Tree, Rock, Wheat and Wine

In this week's parsha the Jewish people are confronted with a new crisis. Miriam had passed away and now the miraculous rock that provided them with water in the desert in her merit ceased to function. So what do Jews do? They complain to Moses. Moses responds with the rhetorical flourish: "Could we draw water from this rock?" He then proceeds to strike the rock, whereupon water begins to gush from it. G-d then reprimands Moses for not speaking to the rock.

Ba'al Haturim notes that the Hebrew word *hamin* ["from"] can be found in two other Biblical texts. In the book of Genesis, when G-d confronts Adam for eating of the forbidden fruit, He asks him rhetorically: "Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" Here too the Torah employs the word *hamin*.

There is also a third text that uses the same expression. In the book of Kings (II: 6) when a devastating famine

plagued Shomron, a woman called out to the king for assistance. His response to her was "From whence shall I help you; from the grain or from the wine?" Again the word *hamin* is used for the words "from."

It is axiomatic that when the Torah utilizes the same expression in several places it is intended to inspire us to search for the connection among them. Even when they appear to represent disparate subjects, there must be some thread that runs through them.

What connection is there between the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, the rock that Moses struck, and the king's sad admission that he possessed neither grain nor wine?

Upon deeper reflection we will see that they represent three incorrect perspectives concerning the human condition that originate in our own perception of ourselves. And that, ultimately, G-d dismisses these assessments and exposes us to a far more positive analysis of the human condition.

G-d's Questions and Challenge to Adam

When G-d confronts Adam with the question as to whether he ate of the forbidden tree, the omniscient G-d was obviously not inquiring to find out if it was true or not. Furthermore, this question was a continuation of an earlier

question: “who told you that you are naked?” Adam, instead of answering these questions he shifts the blame on his wife.

In truth, one could say that by asking him who told him he was naked G-d was rejecting that very notion that he was naked. Adam's shame was precipitated not just by the awareness of his physical state of exposure but rather, as Rashi states, he felt naked in the spiritual sense.

G-d initially asked Adam, “*ayekah*, where are you?” According to the Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Tanya and the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement), G-d's question to him—and to each and every human being—is, “where are you in terms of where you ought to be in your spiritual life.”

If we read between the lines these are the sentiments voiced by Adam in response to G-d's question: “I have nothing to show for myself. I am naked and am deeply embarrassed with myself. I am debased and devoid of anything positive.” Needless to say, G-d took great exception to his self-denigrating remarks:

“How can you be so self-deprecating to call yourself naked? Why are you looking solely at your negatives? You have a soul; you just have to allow it to express itself so that it is not crushed by the evil that you have just absorbed from the **outside**.”

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Adam finally grasps that indeed man is essentially good and evil is external. Adam concludes that while the soul is pure and good, it must then be the body that is evil and negative. As a result, Adam turns to his wife and considers her to be the external force that caused his decline.

Ultimately, G-d rejects that notion as well and finally forces Adam and Eve to come to the conclusion that it is the serpent. It is an external force of evil that imposes itself on the soul (metaphorically represented by Adam) **and** the body (metaphorically represented by Eve). Not only is the soul pure and innocent, even the body is not inherently evil. All evil begins externally and can be super-imposed on our innocent body and holy soul. It is up to us to determine how far we allow the external evil to penetrate.

To summarize: G-d's question as to whether Adam ate from the forbidden tree was G-d's way of demonstrating to him that evil is not intrinsic; it is external; it comes from the forbidden fruit, not from within. It comes from the enticement of the serpent to partake of that fruit and not from within one's soul or body.

Moses' Perspective

Now let's return to Moses' incredulous remark to the Jews: "Could we draw water from this rock?"

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When Moses questioned how he could extract water from a rock he was also referring to the Jews who complained about the lack of water. He was comparing them to a rock because he felt that that they had become so desensitized that they were like hardened rocks from which no water could flow. Moses thus wondered, "How can I extract water from the physical rock if the people themselves are so hardened?" Moses believed that the physical world is affected by the spiritual state of the people. If their hearts were open, the water would flow freely.

Perhaps, it was the loss of Miriam that created a void of feminine receptivity to the spiritual that prevented the miracle of a rock producing water from occurring. Once the Miriam element was missing in their lives, the people lost their ability to extract the nurturing and refreshing waters associated with Miriam from their hearts and souls. This then manifested itself in the inability to get water from the rock.

Of course, Moses did not think that they had lost their spiritual core. He also knew that evil is external. But he felt that their intrinsic good had become so suppressed by the external negativity that the only way it can be revealed is through some tough measures. Moses thus resorts to using harsh words of rebuke and, in addition, strikes the rock.

G-d disagreed even with this somber assessment of the human condition. According to Rashi, G-d “rebuked” Moses for not speaking to the rock. One does not need to be harsh to liberate one’s inner core of goodness and faith. Words spoken from the heart can accomplish the same in most cases.

The King of Shomron’s Perspective

The city of Shomron was taken over by a deadly famine. A woman turns to her king and asks for assistance to which he helplessly replies: “From whence shall I help you; from the grain or from the wine?”

In this tragic episode where people were resorting to eating their own children as recounted in the Biblical text, the king sees no redeeming quality in the people because he sees nothing positive in himself. He therefore states, “From whence shall I help you?” He felt that he was bereft of all good. The physical famine was a manifestation of utter absence of anything positive in the spiritual realm. In his mind, there was nothing that can be done to bring out the positive qualities that would be expressive of grain or wine. There is just total emptiness and despair; not even harsh measures could do anything.

At that point the prophet Elisha enters and predicts a total reversal of the famine and a period of incredible bounty.

Once again, G-d demonstrates that our assessment of our spiritual state is incorrect. Or even if we have degenerated to the abyss, we can transform that situation into a positive one.

The Three Lessons

The lesson from all of the above is that as we stand ready to greet Moshiach and the final Redemption we sometimes second-guess ourselves and question our worthiness to be redeemed. We might think of ourselves as undeserving.

There are three ways in which we may consider our spiritual state to be wanting.

The first is to see the negative and feel that we are essentially naked.

The lesson from the first occurrence of the word *hamin* in the context of G-d's challenge to Adam is: we must realize that we have beautiful garments that are woven together from all of the positive thoughts, words and actions that we as a people have performed notwithstanding the hardships of Galus/exile. When a Jew claims spiritual nakedness, we must repeat G-d's question to Adam: "Who told you that you are naked?!" No Jew could make that preposterous claim even in the interests of humility. "Even

the sinners of Israel,” the Talmud declares, “are filled with Mitzvot as a pomegranate is filled with seeds.”

If the Mitzvot are likened to garments then we are wearing exquisitely beautiful garments.

The second way we may look at ourselves in a negative light is to focus on the lack of sensitivity we have towards spiritual matters due to the effects of Galus. The second lesson we can glean from the narrative of Moses is that while we do sometimes lose some of our sensitivity there is no need to strike the rock. Soft words of encouragement and inspiration will suffice to melt even the most hardened personality.

And the third lesson relates to the lack of grain (the metaphor for Torah knowledge) and wine (the metaphor for the mystical teachings of Judaism that engender joy) in our lives. We might feel parched and devoid of any substance. Compared to our forebears we lack the devotion to and the knowledge of Torah.

To allay this pessimistic view of ourselves we are told that even after the king of Israel deemed the situation hopeless, the prophet Elisha reversed everything.

The same can be said of our generation. No matter how lowly we consider ourselves and our generation to be—especially as we compare it to our forebears’ generation—we know that imminently Moshiach will come and reverse

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that situation and usher in the age when the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d. We will have both an abundance of grain and the wine of Torah.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

THE CONFIDENT SPIES

The Jewish people have been compared to the human body.

A healthy human body is one where all of its organs and limbs work in concert because their connection to the brain is intact.

Similarly, the Jewish nation is spiritually healthy when all of us are united under the direction of our head; its Moses.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

THE CONFIDENT SPIES

Early Conquest

At the end of this week's parsha the Torah relates how the Jewish nation conquered territory on the east bank of the Jordan. This territory was to become the land allocated to the tribes of Gad and Rueben as well as half of the tribe of Menasha.

Although the plan was for the Children of Israel to cross the Jordan River and settle the land west of it, circumstances caused them to make an adjustment. Sichon the king of the Amorites refused to allow safe passage for the Israelites through his territory and amassed his army on his boundary, ready to attack the Jewish nation. In response to his provocation the Jewish nation attacked him and conquered his land.

After that conquest was completed, the Torah records how Moses sent spies to scout a location called Yaazer. These spies, the Torah continues, captured the villages of that area.

Rashi comments that their conquering of the Yaazer area was a reaction to the story of the original spies sent by Moses to scout the land of Canaan and who returned with a negative report. That tragic episode resulted in an entire generation forced to wander through the desert for forty years. According to Rashi, these new spies said:

“We will not do as the first spies, we are confident that we can wage war because of the power of Moses’ prayer.”

In other words, these spies not only scouted the Yaazer but also took the initiative to conquer it as well.

Taking Liberties

This prompts the following question: The original spies erred as a result of the liberty they took in going beyond their mission. Moses instructed them to simply report on the land and its inhabitants. He did not ask them to draw any conclusions as to whether the Jewish people ought to conquer the land or not. Yet the spies decided to campaign against the conquest of Canaan. Had they simply reported all of what they had seen, even if some of it would appear negative, it would not have evoked such negative emotion and all the negative consequences would have been avoided.

From this we can appreciate how serious a mistake it is for a person sent on a mission to alter its focus by adding or subtracting from it.

If so, the question has been asked, why did these new spies, who were certainly well aware of their predecessors' error, repeat the same mistake of adding on to the mission? Moses did not instruct them to conquer the land of Yaazer, only to scout it. Yet they seemed to have added on to his directive and conquered it as well.

Going to the Other Extreme

The Rebbe answers the question by referring to a basic principle associated with the process of Teshuvah (repentance or return). When a person strays and moves in the wrong direction, when they realize their error and try to rectify their mistake it does not suffice to go back to the proper path. One must go to the opposite extreme as a way of balancing his or her life.

While the first spies overstepped their mission in a negative way, the second spies sought to exceed their mission in a positive way. The first spies doubted Moses' instructions to them to scout the land as a preparation for their conquest of it. Their sin derived from their lack of faith in Moses who communicated G-d's directive to the Jewish people to conquer the land.

The second set of spies thus exceeded their mission and conquered that which they were not expressly instructed to do precisely because they believed in Moses' "connections." And they took this belief to its logical conclusion: Let us do what we have to do to make the land that we were instructed to scout our land.

Connecting to Moses

There are several lessons that can be derived from this analysis:

First, from this episode we see that there is a need to be connected to Moses or the spiritual leader of each and every generation and be confident in his ability to pray for our success in doing the right thing.

This dependence on Moses' prayer does not contradict Judaism's insistence that we make no intermediaries between ourselves and G-d. The definition of an illicit intermediary is someone who causes us to be separated from G-d, not someone who enhances our relationship with Him. Moreover, the Jewish people have been compared to the human body. A healthy human body is one where all of its organs and limbs work in concert because their connection to the brain is intact. Similarly, the Jewish nation is spiritually healthy when all of us are united under the direction of our head; its Moses.

A time for Moderation and a Time for Extremes

Second, there are times when we have to follow a moderate approach to things. But when we try to correct an imbalance it is crucial that we go the extra mile in the right direction.

Third, notwithstanding their confidence in Moses' prayer, they did not rely on his prayer alone. They took action to conquer Yaazer. Relying on Moses does not exempt us from our own efforts. Moreover, not only do we not sit back and wait for Moses to secure G-d's help for us, but we go beyond that which we were expressly commanded.

Our Moses

In our generation we are privileged to have the Rebbe as our Moses, whose inspiration and guidance we continue to benefit from in spite of the physical impediments that were put up on the third day of Tammuz a number of years ago. Nevertheless, we can still be confident of his prayers that we will succeed in "conquering" the remaining areas of life that are in need of liberation.

The Rebbe's instruction to us is to fight against the darkness of exile, where our spiritual and physical lives are compromised, by bringing more light into the world. The Rebbe's constant prayer was for Moshiach to come and

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liberate the Jewish people and the entire world from exile and its suffering. We are confident that the Rebbe's prayerful wish and demand for Redemption will spur us to action and will enable us to conquer the remaining vestiges of exile and transform it into Redemption imminently.

ESSAY TWELVE

CATCHING UP

The Torah, which comes from one G-d, is the very source of unity in our lives.

Nevertheless, the Torah itself recognizes the legitimate division that exists between holy and the ordinary.

The world was designed to have times, places, personalities and experiences that are special and holier than others.

ESSAY TWELVE

CATCHING UP

Unity

This week, there is something rather unusual about the Torah reading. In some years the people in Israel are one parsha ahead of the Jews in the Diaspora.

In these years where we are behind one Torah reading, we will have finally caught up with our brethren in Israel who, for the last few weeks, were reading a different weekly parsha. They were one parsha ahead of us in the Diaspora.

Let me explain: The Festival of Shavuos we observed a little over a month ago, occurred on a Friday and Saturday. However, in Israel, they were only required to observe one day of the Festival, so that the next day (Shabbos) was an “ordinary” Shabbos. (Of course there is no such thing as an ordinary Shabbos; the intention here is that it was not a Shabbos that coincided with a Festival.)

As a result, in Israel, they read the weekly parsha of Naso, on the day that we, in the Diaspora, read the festival Torah

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reading, not the weekly parsha. For the next three weeks, thus, we would be a week behind.

To rectify that disparity, in those years, we will combine the two sections of Chukas and Balak, while in Israel they would read the second parsha of Balak. And so, this is the week where we are one with our brethren in Israel insofar as the Torah reading is concerned.

No Coincidences

The Ba'al Shem Tov (whose passing occurred on the Holiday of Shavuot from which the aforementioned division began) taught us that there are no coincidences. And that everything that we hear or see must serve to teach us something about our relationship with G-d and our Judaism.

What does this phenomenon of reconciling the Torah portions teach us?

One obvious lesson is that despite the fact that Torah, which comes from one G-d, is the very source of unity in our lives, nevertheless, the Torah itself recognizes the legitimate division that exists between holy and the ordinary. The world was designed to have times, places, personalities and experiences that are special and holier than others.

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In terms of “space,” Israel is the Holy land, while the rest of the world is not.

In time, we have the Shabbos that is qualitatively holier than the rest of the week. And when it is over we recite the Havdalah (Separation) service that highlights the difference between the holy and the profane.

In terms of personalities, we also have certain individuals, who are “head and shoulders” above the level of the ordinary person. People such as Moses and Aaron, were/are considered holier than the rest of the Jewish people.

And there are experiences in everyone’s life that are special, holy, Sabbath like, that are clearly demarcated by us as being different from others.

Dispelling Two Misconceptions

With this approach of the need to recognize and respect the abovementioned differences there is also room for some challenges and misconceptions.

Some might think, as Korach did, that, in fact, everyone is holy. There ought not to be a hierarchical structure within the Jewish community, where one Jew is considered more holy than the other. Even the most ordinary Jew, he argued, was holy.

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A second challenge, from the opposite direction, is that it is wrong to make these separations since we should maintain a constant state of Holiness, at all the time and in all places. This extreme view might have been the view of the spies who wanted to stay in the desert. As explained in Chassidic literature, they wanted to preserve the exalted spiritual atmosphere they experienced in the desert where they had no distractions from the physical world. All of their needs were taken care of by the Manna and other miraculous sources of nourishment and protection they were afforded. In other words, they wanted a perpetual Shabbos.

And then there are two misconceptions that can arise from the assertion that there are two states of existence: holy and ordinary.

The first misconception is that the definition of “ordinary” is a life devoid of meaning and holiness, thereby legitimizing the removal of all standards from an “ordinary” person’s life, on an “ordinary” day in an “ordinary” place. This translates in a frequently heard statement that only in Israel does one have to act in a prescribed manner; only on Shabbos or on a Holiday do we have to act Jewishly etc.

The second misconception, conversely, is that the separation between the holy and profane is etched in stone.

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The ordinary must remain ordinary and separated from the holy.

This double-portion of Chukas and Balak, where the reconciliation of the Torah readings in Israel with the Diaspora takes place, suggests that none of the four challenges and misconceptions are valid:

First, there is indeed a separation that must be preserved between the Holy and the profane. One must recognize that the Shabbos is unique and must be treated differently from all the other days of the week. And we must also realize that the Land of Israel cannot follow the rules that govern all other places; it is a land that is directly answerable to G-d. And there are individuals who stand apart, and whose special status must be respected and revered.

Second, there is a need to appreciate that there are times in which the person must “descend” from the lofty perch of Shabbos, and that there is a lesser degree of holiness outside of Israel, and that the ordinary person has certain limitations that do not apply to those on a higher level. In short, we cannot live on and maintain the same spiritual plane all the time.

Third, notwithstanding the first two points, we must also understand that even in the weekdays, there is spirituality and meaning. Even in the Diaspora a Jew must live a holy

and Torah life. Not being on the level of Shabbos and not living in Israel is not a license to do whatever pleases us.

And finally, the reconciling of Israel with the Diaspora this week suggests that even though there is a designated separation between the holy and the ordinary, the ultimate goal is for the holy to “invade” the ordinary, for the boundaries to be removed, so that even during the week, we sense the holiness of Shabbos, and even in the Diaspora we feel the holiness of the Land of Israel. And the lofty heights that certain holy individuals attain affect and uplift the plain ordinary individual.

To summarize: there must be a separation between the holy and the ordinary, but the ordinary is also holy and replete with meaning, and that ultimately, the holy will influence and permeate the ordinary.

Israel Spreading to the Entire World

This indeed, is what our Sages meant when they said that in the days of Moshiach the Land of Israel will spread to the entire world. This refers to the spiritual state of the Land of Israel. It will eventually break through its own boundaries and borders to instill its holiness throughout the world. And we facilitate this process on our end by “making Israel here,” i.e., attempting to make every aspect of our lives more G-dly.

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To be sure, in the Messianic Age, the state of holiness of Land of Israel will also grow to greater heights because, "Jerusalem will spread to the entire Land of Israel," and the holiness of the Temple will spread throughout Jerusalem. But, the increase of holiness in each of these realms will pierce through the barriers to make the entire world bask in the aura of the Holy of Holies. May we see the fulfillment of this experience with the coming of Moshiach, imminently!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TORAH'S RESPONSE TO THE KKK

The three letters kuf (equivalent to the English letter k) corresponds to the three words that we exclaim in our prayers in praise of G-d: "Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh-Holy, holy, holy."

According to the Zohar these three forms of holiness that are vested within each and every Jew is an inheritance from our three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE TORAH'S RESPONSE TO THE KKK

The Letter K

This names of this week's double portion—Chukas and Balak—share the Hebrew letter kuf, the equivalent of the English letter “k”. Likewise, last week's parsha, Korach, also begins with the letter kuf.

The letter kuf is the initial of two opposite meaning words: On the one hand the kuf is the initial of the word Kedusha which means holiness. But the same word that denotes Divine holiness is also used biblically for one whose life is dedicated to immorality. Indeed, the letter kuf is also the initial of the word Kelipah, which means “shell” and is the term used in Kabbalah to describe all forms of evil. Evil is not a true entity it is the cover that obscures the inner light and goodness. Sometimes it can be opaque and sometimes it can be translucent or even transparent; but it always covers the inner goodness and holiness.

Of the myriad forms that Kelipah/evil can take, one can discern three root causes that are among the most socially disruptive forces. In the words of our Sages in the classic work, Ethics of the Fathers, these three traits are: “Jealousy,

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lust and pursuit of glory that drive a person from this world.” Why do people steal or commit murder? What causes the disintegration of society? It can usually be traced back to one or several of these three vices.

Upon reflection we will see how these three vices parallel three themes in these three Torah portions (last week’s Korach, and this week’s double portion of Chukas and Balak):

The theme of last week’s parsha entitled Korach is about Korach, the man who envied Aaron and wanted to take his position. His weakness and “opaque shell” that covered up his holiness was envy. His envy of Aaron brought about his own destruction and the destruction of thousands of others in the ensuing plague.

One of the central themes of this week’s parsha is the well—a rock—from which water flowed. In the literature of Kabbalah and Chassidus, water is often employed as a metaphor for physical pleasure inasmuch as it is what causes all of the world’s culinary delights to grow. Hence it is the symbol of the pursuit of pleasure—lust.

Balak highlights the villain Bilam, who was hired by him to curse the Jewish nation. Bilam confessed to his desire for money and honor—the pursuit of glory.

The link between these three narratives can also be found in Ethics of the Fathers that is traditionally read and

studied each week from Passover until Rosh Hashanah. In chapter five (read and studied this week) we read of the ten things that were created Friday at twilight, after everything else had been created. The first three that are enumerated are:

“The mouth of the earth (that swallowed Korach), the mouth of the well (that provided the Jews with water in the desert) and the mouth of the donkey (that miraculously spoke to and chided Bilam).”

The three letters kuf (equivalent to the English letter k) corresponds to the three words that we exclaim in our prayers in praise of G-d: “Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh-Holy, holy, holy.” According to the Zohar these three forms of holiness that are vested within each and every Jew is an inheritance from our three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Abraham personified love and kindness. But there are two types of kindness. The first is the selfish one, where we do good for others so that we can receive something in return. G-d’s kindness is unconditional. It is a holy or higher form of kindness. This higher form was practiced by Abraham and bequeathed to each and every one of us.

Korach’s “outreach” program to the Jewish community—telling them that they are all holy and that he was fighting for their rights and equality—was clearly a selfish form of

kindness. His kuf was a negation and perversion of the kuf and holiness possessed by Abraham.

Isaac personified the trait of reverence and awe. He was constantly judging and refining himself searching for the divine holiness within. This form of holiness he bequeathed to his descendants and it is the one that gives us the drive for self-perfection and a desire to find the divine within ourselves and in everything in our environment. It is the symbol of a well—digging of wells was a favorite pastime of Isaac—that involves clearing out the dirt to find the refreshing waters. The antithesis of this manifestation of Kedusha-holiness (the second kuf-K) is the pursuit of materialism. Instead of searching for the inner meaning of life, one looks to live it up with the obsession for material and sybaritic pleasures.

And then we have the third manifestation of Kedusha (the third kuf-K) that was represented by Jacob. The more G-d showed Him kindness, the more humble he would become. As Jacob exclaimed upon experiencing the kindness of G-d “I have become small because of all the kindness..” He was the very antithesis of Bilam. The more G-d got close to him—by resting His divine spirit upon him—the more arrogant and vile he became.

Thus the negation of the KKK is by utilizing the Jewish version of it; the three levels of holiness that we all possess:

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the holy, unconditional and selfless form of kindness, the quest for the Divine within life and the sense of humility that grows with our closeness to G-d.

Moshiach, the Jewish leader that takes us out of exile and leads us to the final Redemption, must possess certain traits and characteristics. They include: reaching out to every Jew in love and caring for their material as well as spiritual welfare. His care and devotion to all of the Jewish people and indeed all of humanity is reminiscent of the trait of Abraham who reached out to all and brought them into his tent and shared with them the unity of G-d.

Moshiach must also be a person who looks for the spiritual essence of everything—the trait of Isaac. He must be a well-digger who removes the cover of each and every Jew to expose his or her Divine soul. Moshiach sees the good in everyone and works tirelessly to expose it.

And like his forefather Jacob, Moshiach must also be exceedingly humble. Moshiach is a person who in spite of his powerful leadership role has no ego; basking in the light of the Divine he is humbled and self-effacingly goes about changing the world to make it a more G-dly place.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

WASHING THE DUST OFF OUR FEET

**Idolatry is not merely the worshipping of pagan g-ds made
of wood and stone.**

**According to the Talmud there are other far more subtle
forms of idolatry, such as an inflated ego or anger.**

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

WASHING THE DUST OFF OUR FEET

Measure for Measure

Upon the death of Miriam, Moses' sister, a grave and unexpected crisis threatened the Jews. Their water supply suddenly went dry. The miraculous water that sustained the Jewish people in the desert came in the merit of Miriam. When she passed on, the water also came to an end. The Jews complained bitterly that they would all die of thirst and demanded that Moses supply them with water.

The Torah continues:

“G-d spoke to Moses, saying: ‘Take the staff and, together with your brother Aaron, you should assemble the congregation. In their presence, speak to the rock, and it will produce water.’”

The Torah then describes how Moses struck the rock and it produced water.

In his commentary on the story in Genesis of the angels who visited Abraham, Rashi cites a Talmudic commentary

which connects Abraham's actions then to Moses' actions in this week's parsha.

When the three angels, disguised as humans, came to visit, Abraham went out of his way to take care of their needs. Abraham personally got them bread and served them with meat and dairy. The one thing he delegated to others was providing water for washing the dust from their feet. The Torah shows, in Genesis (18:4), that Abraham directed others: "Let some water be brought."

Rashi observes the differing attitudes Abraham had with regard to the food and the water. He comments that by saying "Let some water be brought" Abraham meant that the water should be provided "by means of a messenger." Rashi continues: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, repaid His children by means of a messenger, as it says, 'Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock.'"

In other words, because Abraham personally and directly supplied the bread and the meat to his guests, the Jewish people were privileged to receive the Manna and the meat directly from G-d. By contrast, since Abraham did not deem it important enough to personally provide water to his guests, the Jewish people likewise received their water supply by way of a messenger and not directly from G-d—i.e., by means of Moses striking the rock.

The commentator Maskil L'Dovid raises a question: Why does Rashi cite the verse in this week's parsha to indicate that the water was provided to the angels by means of a messenger? Rashi could have cited another verse from the Book of Exodus (17:6), which recounts an earlier episode soon after the Exodus, where G-d tells Moses to strike a rock to produce water.

The Difference between Exodus and Numbers

One answer to this question can be that in Exodus, Moses' striking of the rock at G-d's behest was not considered to be a diminution of G-d's direct relationship with the people. All of the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed up to that point were performed through Moses and Aaron. Even so, there is no suggestion that G-d did not play an active role in these miracles. Moses and Aaron were merely the instruments that G-d used to channel His power to the people. Likewise the water that G-d provided the Jewish people, as recorded in Exodus, was the product of G-d's direct involvement and is not attributed to Moses His messenger.

Indeed, this concept is alluded to in the Haggadah which states that G-d took us out of Egypt and not a messenger. At first blush, this statement seems to contradict the entire

narrative of the Exodus where Moses and (to some extent) Aaron were the ones through whom the Exodus occurred.

However, in light of the above there is no discrepancy. Moses was a transparent individual who had totally removed his ego. As a result, G-d's actions were channeled through him. Moses was no more than a conduit and all that happened was considered to be completely the work of G-d and not that of a messenger.

Attributed to Whom?

Thus, when G-d told Moses to strike the rock, although it was Moses who took the action it was not ascribed to him. It was entirely G-d's action.

However, in this week's parsha, Moses strikes the rock **contrary** to G-d's instruction to speak to it. The result—though certainly of G-d's doing—is characterized as having come through His messenger, Moses. The indirectness of the result points to a measure of dissatisfaction with the way it was executed.

Moreover, according to Maimonides, Moses "sin" in this episode was the anger he vented towards the Jewish people. The Talmud states that a person's anger causes the Divine presence to depart from him. This suggests that G-d does not want to be "implicated" in one's anger, even if the

anger is justifiable. Hence, Moses' action here in providing water for the people was attributed to him, as if it were his action and not the result of G-d's direct involvement.

We can now understand why G-d treated Moses' actions so harshly. It was not a punishment for a sin. Rather it was an acknowledgment that Moses' actions lowered the spiritual level of the Jewish people. Whereas, previously, all the miracles they witnessed were direct expressions of G-d's power, now His involvement was seen as being indirect. Moses' anger created a barrier between G-d and the Jewish people that would have sorrowful repercussions for the future. With the loss of G-d's direct involvement in the miracles of the conquest of Eretz Yisroel, future generations would not have the power to sustain their hold on the Land of Israel.

Why did Abraham Not Provide Water?

As stated by Rashi, G-d's providing water to the Jewish people indirectly was caused by Abraham's indirect providing of water to his guests. How can we understand why Abraham did not deem it important enough to provide his guests with water personally? Knowing the extreme lengths Abraham would go to show hospitality to every guest, it is difficult to comprehend why he deemed it unnecessary to provide them with water himself.

One way of answering this question is to reflect on the reason he wanted them to wash their feet before he brought them into his tent. Rashi explains that Abraham was concerned that his three visitors were members of a cult that worshipped the dust on their feet. He wanted them to wash away any trace of idolatry before he allowed them to enter his abode.

Perhaps, then, Abraham did not deem it so important to personally attend to this need since it was not intended to satisfy their thirst but rather to prevent them from sullying his home with idolatry.

Intolerance for Even the Traces of Idolatry

There is an important lesson we can derive here. When we help remove another person's impurity, it is no less a favor to them than to give them water to drink. If Abraham had shown his visitors how distasteful their presumed idolatry was to him and how he would personally exert himself to cleanse them of it, it might have had a powerful impact on them. They would have been left with the impression that any trace of idolatry—even the residual dust on one's feet—is not welcome in a person's home. Even the smallest vestige of idolatry is lethal. By employing a hands-off approach Abraham—inadvertently—allowed some measure of tolerance for idolatry to fester.

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There is a powerful lesson for us from the foregoing for our own day and age.

Idolatry is not merely the worshipping of pagan g-ds made of wood and stone. According to the Talmud there are other far more subtle forms of idolatry, such as an inflated ego or anger. It would seem on balance that we should place a greater emphasis on the very serious problems that plague our society and not exert that much energy into dealing with the vices of ego and anger.

Abraham's story informs us otherwise. If Abraham had invested as much energy in ridding his guests of the dust on their feet—that symbolized subtle forms of idol worship—as he did in catering their meal, Moses would not have suffered the momentary diminution of his status as a transparent channel of G-d's energy to the people. The water would have come without Moses' disruptive anger and the Jewish people would have clearly seen the unconcealed hand of G-d.

If the most subtle forms of idolatry that obscure G-d's presence in this world had been removed, Moses would have been allowed to bring the People into the Promised Land. If that had happened, the Jewish nation would not have degenerated into the actual, unmitigated forms of idol worship which led to their exile; "and the rest is history," as they say.

Of course, the above is not intended, G-d forbid, to impute any real sin to Abraham and Moses. Their apparent shortcomings were part of G-d's plan, orchestrated by Him to teach us how to remedy the problem of that generation and bring about the final Redemption.

Deal with the Subtleties

The Rebbe has informed us, based on the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, that all the gross and heavy forms of idolatry and related vices have, for all intents and purposes, been dealt with. While there might still be people guilty of heinous crimes, it is a problem of individual consequence and an aberration from the norm. As a people and as individuals we still have to address the subtler forms of idolatry. Towards this end, we are privileged to have the teachings of Chassidus to help us remove the veil that obscures G-d's presence. Our challenge is to rid ourselves of the traces of idolatry by washing them off with Torah knowledge, which is likened to water.

Even though Abraham might once have been justified in not putting so much emphasis on personally removing the residual dust of idolatry, we now have to remedy that. It behooves us to invest all of our resources into providing the cleansing waters of Torah to each and every Jew. It is

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our obligation to remove the last obstacles to Redemption,
a task which cannot be delegated to others.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

KEEP YOUR MOUTH OPEN!

Misplaced humility that minimizes our ability to generate positive energy is a denial of G-d's power.

Never underestimate the power of positive speech and the power to correct the past when the power of speech was abused.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY FIFTEEN

KEEP YOUR MOUTH OPEN!

What did Moses do Wrong?

One of the most enigmatic narratives in the Torah is the one that appears in this week's parsha concerning Moses' attempt at producing water from a rock. When Miriam his sister dies, the miraculous well that traveled with them in the desert disappeared and their water supply cut off. When the Jews complained, Moses was told by G-d to take his staff and speak to the stone and it will produce water. Moses then strikes the rock with his staff and the water gushes forth. Everything seems fine until we read of how G-d reprimands Moses for doing something wrong and thereby not sanctifying G-d's name.

The question as to what it was that Moses did wrong for which he was punished so severely—he would not live to enter the Promised Land—has occupied the minds of the greatest Jewish scholars.

According to Rashi, Moses' error was that he struck the rock, when it did not initially produce the desired result, instead of speaking to it as he was commanded by G-d.

According to Maimonides, Moses' error lies in the manner with which he responded to the Jewish people's complaint. Moses got angry at them and berated them, and for that he was punished.

However, both of these interpretations do not appear to fit in with G-d's words to Moses that he did not sanctify his name. What does not speaking to a stone or getting angry have to do with not sanctifying G-d's name?

A Chassidic Approach

There is a Chassidic/mystical approach to this narrative that will help resolve these difficulties.

The author of the work *Bat Ayin* cites a Talmudic analysis of the Hebrew Alphabet. When it comes to the letter *pei*, which comes in two forms—a closed *pei* and an open one (that parallel the English letters of p and f)—it states: *Peh sasum* (a sealed mouth) and *peh pasuach* (an open mouth).

In order for one's mouth should be open to elicit all of the positive energies through one's power of speech, the mouth must first be closed so that nothing forbidden comes in to

the body through the mouth and nothing unsavory leaves the person via his mouth.

The Power of Speech

To elaborate: The power of speech is what makes a human being unique. Our ability to communicate in an intelligent fashion is a distinct human trait. But what is even more unique about our power of speech is that it can change the world for the good. A directive that issues from a righteous person or an inspirational talk can inspire and influence countless others to do good. The ripple effect of this influence cannot be quantified.

Even where nobody hears the spoken word, human speech possesses powerful spiritual energy that can have an impact on the entire world; bringing blessing in its wake.

Thus G-d says to Moses, **speak** to the rock; recognize that your power of speech is sufficient to transform an inanimate rock into an endless source of refreshing water. Your words will make a difference!

Moses was about to comply with G-d's instruction to him to speak to the rock when the scene of rebellious Jews provoked him and led him to utter the sharp words of reprimand suffused with indignant anger.

The Conventional Approach

When Moses realized what he had done—that his mouth that should have been closed and should not have been opened to utter those angry words—he felt that he no longer possessed the power to “open his mouth” to extract water from the rock. In Moses’ mind, his speech was no longer endowed with the capacity to generate the positive energy that would translate into refreshing water for the entire nation.

Moses thus decided that in the absence of his ability to produce water from a rock through his power of speech he would have to revert to the more direct and “conventional” method of striking the rock.

It might be suggested that Moses remembered how G-d told him to strike the rock to produce water close to forty years earlier when the Jews first left Egypt and complained about the lack of water. Moses might have wondered why G-d told him then to strike the rock and now he asked him to speak to it and he came up with the following analysis:

Before the Torah was given Moses had as serious speech impediment. Although it was a physical disability, it was a reflection that Moses’ power of speech was not yet sufficiently potent to generate the positive energy to extract water from a rock.

When Moses served as the conduit for transmitting the Torah to the Jewish people, our Sages tell us, he was healed. He now had neither the physical or spiritual speech impediment. Thus Moses reasoned that the power he possessed to generate blessing for others was intimately related to his use of speech to transmit Torah values. When he got angry, Moses felt—incorrectly—that he no longer had this power since his mouth that should have remained silent was not. In his mind he had no other choice; he had to extract the water employing the same pre-Sinai method that succeeded in the past.

Where did Moses go Wrong?

According to the analysis of Bas Ayin, Moses' mistake—that was a product of his humility—was to deny the possibility that he had redeemed himself by acknowledging that he erred by uttering angry words at the people. Had Moses demonstrated that despite his misuse of his power of speech he had reversed that by doing Teshuvah (repentance, or return to the proper path of behavior) it would have demonstrated G-d's greatness that He gives everyone the opportunity to redeem themselves.

And while it is certainly true that Moses' miscalculation about the efficacy of his speech was a product of his humility, it was not accepted by G-d as a legitimate

defense. To be humble is certainly a virtue. But to be humble at someone else's expense is not. Had Moses given his power of speech more credibility that would have demonstrated how G-d was "great enough," as it were, to forgive Moses' angry outburst and restore his power of speech to do good.

Thus, Rashi's and Maimonides' explanations are complementary. Moses' misuse—or perceived misuse—of speech—to vent his anger—led him to the erroneous conclusion that he could no longer use his power of speech to do good by commanding the rock to produce water. He therefore hit the rock instead of speaking to it and the lesson of G-d's forbearance and power of forgiveness was lost on the people.

The Lessons

The lessons we learn from this narrative are many:

First, one must not sully G-d's great gift to humanity; its ability to speak and communicate.

Second, the power and efficacy of our positive speech is tied to the measure of refinement of our speech.

Third, even if we do corrupt our power of speech, this does not mean we have lost our ability to produce water

(literally, or metaphorically). By recognizing our mistake we restore the power of positive speech to its rightful place.

Fourth, we should never allow ourselves to deny our G-d given power of doing good. Misplaced humility that minimizes our ability to generate positive energy is a denial of G-d's power. Never underestimate the power of positive speech and the power to correct the past when the power of speech was abused.

Why so much Negative Speech Lately?

There is also a special lesson we can learn from this episode with respect to the unique times we are in: on the very cusp of the Messianic Age.

Never before in history have we been inundated with all sorts of negative expressions of speech through all the modern media. The mouth that should have been sealed was and still is open to express the most vile, hateful and immoral words.

To counter abusive speech and the general abuse of speech, we must increase the use of our mouths for positive ends. Our mouths must be opened for prayer, Torah study and speaking well of others (while not shying away from criticizing immoral and illegal behavior). In particular, our power of speech should be used to implore G-d and

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demand of Him to bring an end to this exile and all its attendant miseries and bring us Moshiach, now!

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE ROLE OF THE TZADIK

Chassidic thought teaches that true tzadikim have risen
above sin.

Nevertheless they too are “human” in that G-d causes them
to experience temporary lapses in order for them to
advance spiritually.

When one falters and experiences a setback they can then
leap to an exponentially higher level.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE ROLE OF THE TZADIK

Humanizing for our Self-Esteem

At the end of the Jewish people's journey in the desert we read that Moses and Aaron were not destined to take the Jewish nation into the Promised Land with their people. The reason for this denial is stated in this week's parsha, Chukas, in a rather ambiguous fashion. Despite the Torah's devoting a large section to this story, the real cause of G-d's "anger" with the two greatest leaders is not really clear. Indeed, Or Hachaim cites 10 different explanations for this matter! If one single explanation were obvious there would be no need to search for other reasons. One may suggest that the Torah was deliberately vague about the "sin" so that we should never impute any real transgression to these holy people. Otherwise, it would be difficult to resist the "temptation" to diminish these spiritual titans by viewing them as ordinary humans.

One can discern two reasons why people might want to humanize even the greatest tzadikim. One simple reason is that we wish to preserve our own self-esteem. If Moses

and other greats could transgress without it detracting from our high regard for them, then we too can sustain our own self-respect notwithstanding our many all-too-human flaws.

In truth, this rationale hardly justifies our ascribing outright transgressions to people who were so close to G-d, so totally devoid of egos and self-interests and whose entire beings were devoted to G-d and His people.

When one studies Chassidus, one discovers that a true tzadik neither transgresses nor harbors a desire to go astray. The perfect tzadikim—such as the Patriarch Abraham—have completely transformed their evil impulses into holy impulses. How can we then suggest that they consciously rebelled against G-d or even were negligent in their responsibilities to G-d?

Moreover, the Midrash uses the metaphor of a “chariot” to describe the Patriarchs dedication to G-d’s will. Just as a vehicle can only go in the direction toward which its driver steers, so too the Patriarchs had conditioned their bodies to “automatically” act consonant with G-d’s will. How can we then say that people of this caliber were guilty of sins, let alone to be openly rebellious towards G-d?

Temporary Lapses

Chassidic thought teaches that true tzadikim have risen above sin. Nevertheless they too are “human” in that G-d causes them to experience temporary lapses. In order for one to truly grow and advance spiritually, one must falter and experience a setback from which one can leap to an exponentially higher level. This is the underlying sentiment in Proverbs when it states: “For a tzadik falls seven times and rises up again.” While the tzadik’s fall is not, G-d forbid, intentional or due to neglect, it is nevertheless, a diminution of his spiritual stature. The stumbling tzadik feels an emptiness which, in turn, ignites an intense passion for G-d and the Torah.

When a person sins, he or she is distanced from G-d and it creates a spiritual vacuum. Likewise the tzadik, in a period of G-d induced decline, experiences an inner sense of emptiness. In this respect, the tzadik shares an experience of “sin” with all others which enables him or her to relate to and empathize with those who stand on a much lower plane of righteousness.

The void created by sin and the consequent distancing from G-d is the deeper meaning of the term *Chilul Hashem*. This term is translated as “desecration of G-d’s name.” However, a more literal rendition of the term *chilul* is a void. Transgressions create that void. In truth, even

before one transgresses, the world we inhabit already conceals its G-dly essence from us. The Hebrew word for world, *olam*, is closely related to *helem*, which means concealment. When one transgresses it increases the world's degree of *helem*. Whatever spiritual energy that enters the world thereafter is lost; it "drains out" through the "hole" one creates as a result of sinning. This dynamic is true both for tzadikim and the less spiritually advanced. It sets back G-d's desire to be fully revealed in this physical world.

Moses experienced a spiritual decline when he got angry (Maimonides' interpretation of Moses' "sin") and struck the rock (Rashi's interpretation of Moses' "sin"). Although it wasn't a deliberate or conscious attempt to subvert G-d's desire that he speak softly to the rock, it nevertheless stimulated a spiritual vacuum within him. It is in our parsha this week that G-d tells Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land because he didn't sanctify G-d's name. The Hebrew term *Kiddush Hashem*-Sanctification of G-d's name is the opposite of *Chilul Hashem*-desecration of G-d's name. Hence, if *chilul* implies a void, *kiddush* implies filling in that void so that G-d's holiness is not lost to the world.

Kaddish Prayer: Filling in the Void

Incidentally, the above understanding of the terms *chilul* and *Kiddush* respectively as a void and a filling in of the void provides a rationale for our recitation of the *kaddish* prayer upon the loss of a loved one.

When a person passes away, the soul—a part of G-d—departs from this physical world and leaves a gaping hole behind. G-dly energy and light that heretofore illuminated the world of even the lowliest Jew has gone missing. That vacuum must be filled in by the recitation of kaddish, which extols G-d's greatness and reintroduces the G-dly light that was withdrawn with the passing of that soul.

The Tzadik Within Us

As stated above, there is another psychological reason why many try to humanize the tzadik. We will often feel that it is too difficult to emulate one who is so spiritual, G-dly and other worldly. We need human down-to-earth role models, with all their flaws and foibles, with whom we can easily identify, to emulate.

To address this concern Chassidic literature furnishes two responses:

First, while it is indeed hard to imagine that the average person could attain the spiritual heights of the Patriarchs,

Moses and contemporary spiritual giants such as our Rebbe, we can and must emulate their **actions**. Thus, the Midrash declares: "Each and every person can say, 'when will my **actions** reach the **actions** of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'" The Rebbe explains: While it may not be possible to achieve the same spiritual level as the Patriarchs with whom G-d communicated freely and frequently, we can reach, or at least touch, their level of action (the Hebrew word used here "*ya'gi'u*" can mean either reach or touch).

Ben Zoma (Avos 4:1) tells us: "Who is a wise person? One who learns from every person." Simply put, this means there is something we can learn even from those who are inferior to us. The Rebbe added an interpretation that conveys a complementary lesson: We must also be able to learn from the most spiritual of people who are superior to us. We should never say, "That person is too holy for me."

Second, Tanya teaches us that we inherited spiritual traits of kindness and compassion from our Patriarchs. Moreover, every Jew has the capacity to give his or her life to remain true to his or her belief in one G-d. Jews of all stripes and levels of observance or lack of observance have tragically demonstrated this fact over the ages: we inherited **that trait of self-sacrifice** from our Patriarchs, and it is deeply embedded in our souls.

Similarly, each and every Jewish soul possesses a spark of Moses' soul. He bequeathed his knowledge of G-d to every Jew, which gives us the potential to generate feelings of awe and reverence for G-d.

The Ba'al Shem Tov, cited by Me'or Einayim of Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl, taught that every Jew also possesses a spark of Moshiach. It is this spark, referred to as the *Yechidah*, the essence of the soul, that, when ignited, enables us to reveal the soul of Moshiach. As the Rebbe taught us, when we declare the words "*Yechi Hamelech*—May the King live" in reference to Moshiach, as well as other expressions of our heartfelt plea for Moshiach and Redemption, such as *Ad Masai*—How much longer, we empower Moshiach to usher in the Messianic Age.

Gimmel Tammuz

This Shabbos precedes Gimmel Tammuz. Since this day, 20 years ago, our physical ability to see and hear the Rebbe has been obstructed. Many have attempted to describe the Rebbe and his accomplishments by putting pen to paper. Books have been written recently that tell of his incredible brilliance, love, leadership, compassion, wisdom, etc. Even so-called self-professed "outsiders" (in truth there is no such thing; to the Rebbe every Jew is an insider) have described the Rebbe as the most influential rabbi in

modern times. However, there are also those who try to “humanize” the Rebbe by deemphasizing his spirituality, his closeness to G-d, his prophetic predictions, the many miracles, etc., to make him more accessible to the common person.

While we can understand the basis for this misguided effort now, we should appreciate its fallacy; there is no need to minimize those lofty aspects of the Rebbe. We must not be afraid to look up to the true giants of Torah and allow their greatness to inspire and influence us.

A Synthesis

Every myth and misconception may have a kernel of truth in it. The Rebbe, notwithstanding his position of transcendent spirituality, was/is equally present in and related with our “lowly” world. The Rebbe empathizes with each and every person on his or her own level. In the span of a few hours, the Rebbe could advise a Torah Sage, Prime Minister, scientist, business person and a host of “simple” people. The Rebbe’s lofty, loving soul penetrated the hearts and minds of every person.

This paradoxical quality, associated with Moses and Moshiach, of being simultaneously worldly and other-worldly, human and G-dly, can be attained by every Jew. To do so requires only that we must seek to rise to higher

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spiritual levels without losing sight of the need to relate and empathize with people at all levels.

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE LOGICAL MYSTERY

Logic cannot capture everything just as a cup cannot contain ideas or feelings.

In the words of the Tanya:

To state that G-d is unfathomable is the equivalent of saying that one cannot touch wisdom with hands.

G-d is inherently beyond the realm of logic.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE LOGICAL MYSTERY

The Mother of Enigmas!

The Torah is replete with enigmas, paradoxes and mysteries. But the enigma of all enigmas is the subject of the Red Heifer, discussed at length in this week's parsha. The ashes of the Red Heifer were used to purify a person who had come in contact with the dead and, as a result, was considered ritually contaminated and could not enter the Temple or partake of consecrated food.

When the Torah introduces this ritual it states: "This is the statute [more literally: the etched-in-stone, supra-rational dictates] of the Torah," the connotation of which is that this is not only an enigma but it is the "mother" of all enigmas.

Korach is Back

This parsha comes right after the parsha of Korach who rebelled against Moses and was swallowed up by the earth.

An enigmatic Midrashic comment connects Korach with the Red Heifer when it says: "What did Korach see that caused him to rebel? He saw the section of the Red Heifer."

What is it about the Red Heifer that could have motivated him to rebel against Moses?

Hedging His Bets

One way we can explain how the Red Heifer influenced Korach's decision to rebel is based on Rashi's comment (in the name of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan) that the Red Heifer was intended as atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Just as a mother cleans the mess of her child, so too, the Red Heifer (mother) atones for the sin of the Golden Calf (child).

Korach was thus hedging his bets. In case his rebellion was judged to be an egregious sin, Korach was convinced that he would still be able to procure atonement. After all, if the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish people's most heinous crime against G-d, could be atoned for by a Red Heifer, then his action, directed "only" against Moses, could certainly be atoned for.

This ties in with another Midrashic statement that Korach saw his future descendants, the prophet Samuel and his children, serve in the Temple. This convinced him that he

would be absolved. Just as the Red Heifer can atone for the Golden Calf, so could his righteous descendants atone for him.

Underlying this thought process was the belief that one can invoke the merit of one's forebears in procuring G-d's forgiveness. Our liturgy is replete with pleas that G-d should save us in the merit of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. This concept is metaphorically represented by the Red Heifer atoning for its progeny, the Golden Calf.

Korach pushed this idea a step further. He believed that one could also invoke the righteousness of one's descendants for protection from punishment.

This thought process is captured in the last words of the Prophet Malachi that, in the end of days, "G-d will restore the hearts of fathers to their children and the children to their fathers."

Korach's error was that he used the hope of his children bailing him out to justify his sin. In the words of the Talmud: "A prosecutor cannot become a defender." The very cause of his sin, i.e., reliance on his children's merit, could not become the means through which he would be absolved of his sin.

Moses' Exclusivity

One may explain Korach's connecting his rebellion with the Red Heifer on yet a deeper level:

Our Sages taught that the Red Heifer was an enigma so abstruse and elusive that even King Solomon, the wisest of all people, admitted that he could not fathom its reason. However, G-d revealed the reason to Moses.

This troubled Korach. If Moses had lacked this knowledge, just as the rest of the nation, Korach would not have been stirred to fight Moses' authority. After all, in that case Moses would be like everyone else with limited understanding who must accept G-d's judgments without reservation.

Conversely, if Moses were able to reveal the reason for the Red Heifer then he would have enjoyed Korach's respect because he was demonstrating that he was a faithful teacher who imparted all of his knowledge to the masses. That would have demonstrated to Korach that Moses was a man of the people who did not consider himself head and shoulders above the congregation.

But when Korach saw that Moses kept this knowledge secret, he became convinced that Moses was not a worthy leader of the Jewish nation.

Unequal Equality

The foregoing rationale for Korach's rebellion against Moses leadership can answer another question, how could Korach convince people that he considered everyone equal and there was no need for leaders like Moses and Aaron, when he himself craved to be the High Priest? (See *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 4, parshas Korach, for a different answer).

Following the above explanation of Korach's displeasure with Moses it may be suggested that Korach was not against Moses being their leader. A nation must have leadership and Korach surely appreciated Moses' role in liberating them from Egypt, giving them the Torah, providing them with Manna in the desert, etc. What he opposed was Moses claiming exclusivity when it came to understanding the most mysterious aspect of Judaism. If it was truly supra-rational, how could Moses comprehend it? And if it were not supra-rational then why not share it with all?

This led Korach to believe that Moses was not a legitimate leader since he withheld the knowledge from the rest of the community.

Moses, the Smartest Person?

We now have to understand why Moses did not share this knowledge with the entire Jewish nation.

One possible answer is that Moses' intellect was much higher than all other human beings. He could fathom that which no other human could.

However, this still does not fully answer the question. Why couldn't Moses attempt to condense his knowledge and bring it down to the level of the rest of the nation? Isn't this the method every teacher uses to teach a deep subject to his or her students? The teacher looks for a good parable or analogy that will help make the deep concepts accessible in some way to the people. Why did Moses not make that attempt? Instead he states categorically, "This is the statute of the Torah," as if to say, don't even try to understand it or expect me to explain it to you.

An Elephant through the Eye of a Needle!

In truth, as the Rebbe explains (*Likkutei Sichos*, volume 18, p. 230) Moses could not explain this commandment because it is truly beyond logic. Logic cannot capture everything just as a cup cannot contain ideas or feelings. Or, as the Alter Rebbe put it, to state that G-d is unfathomable is the equivalent of saying that one cannot

touch wisdom with hands. G-d is inherently beyond the realm of logic.

Similarly, the commandment of the Red Heifer exists inherently beyond the realm of logic. The fact that G-d revealed the logic behind it to Moses was a miracle that only G-d could perform. The miracle was the equivalent of putting an elephant through the eye of a needle without benefit of a crash diet... The elephant is big but still finite. The commandment of the Red Heifer expresses G-d's infinite will and can certainly not fit into a finite mind; not even that of Moses.

Only G-d, who transcends both finitude and infinity (for infinity is also a category in that it is not finite), can take something infinite and put it into something finite. As great Jewish philosophers stated: "For G-d the impossible is impossible."

G-d's revelation of the reason for the Red Heifer to Moses was, therefore, essentially a miracle of the highest order. Moses could not replicate this miracle and impart this knowledge to others without G-d so desiring. Absent that Divine license, Moses could not reveal the reason.

Why Not Everyone?

But why didn't G-d want us to comprehend the reason for this commandment in particular?

The Rebbe explains that, in essence, all of G-d's commandments, even the rational ones, are inscrutable because they are expressions of G-d's will, which must transcend logic. Leaving, at least, one Mitzvah beyond our understanding reminds us of the true nature of all of the commandments.

Our awareness of the fact that even the most logical Mitzvah is essentially Divine and beyond human understanding affects the way we approach a Mitzvah.

Were we to base our observance on logic the entire concept of self-sacrifice to perform G-d's will would be absent. Our observance would be measured by and limited to our mind's dictates. Knowledge that the essence of Mitzvos is trans-logical propels us into total devotion to G-d's will, beyond the parameters of our understanding.

(See *Likkutei Sichos* ibid. for an analysis why the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer was selected to be the paradigm for all Mitzvos and why Moses was allowed to comprehend it.)

Things Will Change!

In the present day and age it is crucial that we remember that the commandments are Divine and transcend logic. The secular mindset engendered by the “Enlightenment” dictates that we must base everything on logic. In this mindset, religion based on faith is anachronistic and infantile. Now, more than ever, we need the example of the Red Heifer to keep us from succumbing to these pressures. We must recognize that it is the secularists who are the primitive thinkers if they stop at logic and fail to realize that logic itself has a ceiling and the Divine, and all that is attached to the Divine, is beyond that ceiling.

In the imminent Messianic Age, however, there will no longer be any reason for G-d to restrict our ability to understand the unfathomable. This explains the words of the Midrash that in the future, G-d will reveal the reason for the Red Heifer to all. And this is also why we are told that all the Divine mysteries (of the Torah and of life in general, such as the existence of pain and suffering) will be revealed to us. In the coming period of Redemption we will simultaneously see the supra-rational nature of G-d and His commandments as well as their rational basis without need to compromise either.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

When the Jewish people are exalted and seen in their true spiritual light nature “feels” comfortable and more than willing to acquiesce to their needs.

In this way, nature facilitates their dedication to the ideals of Judaism they so strongly identify with and for which everything was created in the first place.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS CHUKAS

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Talk to the Rock!

One of the three major miracles the Jewish nation experienced in the desert had come to an end. The Manna that descended from heaven, our Sages teach us, came in the merit of Moses. The clouds of glory that surrounded and protected the Jewish nation came in the merit of Aaron, and the water supply that emerged from a rock that traveled with them in the desert came in the merit of Miriam.

Now that Miriam had passed on, the rock stopped supplying water to the multitudes. And when they realized they were in a barren and arid desert they complained to Moses, as was their wont. G-d then instructed Moses to take his staff and talk to the rock so that it would provide water once again.

Moses harshly rebuked the people, addressing them with the introductory words: "Listen, you rebels!" Moses then

took his staff, struck the rock twice and water gushed forth.

G-d was upset with Moses and strongly reproved him for not doing the right thing. It was for this reason that he was not allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land.

Why was G-d so upset at Moses? What did he do wrong? The Jews demanded water, Moses struck the rock and it miraculously produced water. What's so terrible about that?

Two Explanations

Commentators who grappled with this question have come up with multiple answers. The two most prominent explanations were given by Rashi and Maimonides, respectively

According to Rashi, Moses was faulted for **striking** the rock instead of speaking to it as G-d had so expressly commanded him. According to Maimonides, Moses was rebuked since he angrily referred to the Jews as rebels in reaction to the way they demanded water.

The great Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, in his classic work *Kedushas Levi*, sheds light on this narrative and demonstrates that the interpretations of

Rashi and Maimonides are interconnected. The following is an adaptation of his commentary:

Two Approaches

There are two ways to influence others to do the right thing. The first approach is to uplift them by telling them how much G-d loves them; the preciousness of the G-dly soul they possess; the beauty of Torah and Mitzvos; and the incredible pleasure their observance brings to G-d. Indeed, the entire cosmos, including the physical universe and all of the spiritual worlds, are uplifted and experience phenomenal delight when a Jew does even one Mitzvah!

This approach is not patronizing or condescending. Even the most sinful individual possesses a G-dly soul. Praise of even the sinful individual allows the person to get in touch with his or her inner holiness.

The other approach is to harshly scold the recalcitrant members of the community for their errant behavior or their slack initiative in doing good. In this approach the focus is on their animal soul's lowliness. This approach is often accompanied with threats of punishment and warnings of negative consequences. In many situations this approach works well because of the psychological pressure it brings to bear on the individual. Ultimately, this individual will feel "compelled" to comply with G-d's will.

Although the result appears to be identical—the individual is lead to the Mitzvah or pulled away from the transgression—the effects of the two approaches cannot be further apart.

Mastery over Creation

When one extols the virtue of the Jewish people, the entire universe “bends” to conform to their needs. After all, as Rashi states in his commentary on the very first word of the Torah, *Bereishis*, “the entire world was created for Torah and Israel (the people).”

The very word Israel can actually be translated as: “Having mastery over the G-dly forces of nature.” That power is a built in part of existence. When nature “sees” the Jewish people’s need to follow the Torah it recognizes that it must conform to those needs.

When the Jewish people are exalted and seen in their true spiritual light nature “feels” comfortable and more than willing to acquiesce to their needs. In this way, nature facilitates their dedication to the ideals of Judaism they so strongly identify with and for which everything was created in the first place.

However, when we fail to promote the greatness of the Jewish people, and instead denigrate them, the world does

not feel compelled to accede to their needs. The world looks at the Jewish nation and sees a people like any other. Their weaknesses belie their true G-dly nature. To the rest of creation, these weak individuals appear no different from any other part of the natural order, nay, even inferior to it. And while specific individuals may indeed exhibit animalistic tendencies, the mere focus on it by others casts that individual in a weak position vis-à-vis the rest of nature. This is particularly so for people like Moses, whose word carries weight in all of the physical and spiritual realms.

In this situation of weakness, nature must be “forced” to comply with the needs of the Jewish people. It requires greater exertion because nature does not feel the need to alter its course to accommodate a lowlier part of existence and thereby facilitate its deviant ways.

The Connection

We can now understand how Moses’ speaking harshly to the Jewish people, calling them rebels, actually forced him to strike the rock instead of just speaking to it about producing water. Moses, the consummate leader of the Jewish people, called them rebels and, in effect, reduced their profile in the eyes of the natural order. Thus, “nature,” i.e., the rock, resisted providing water. Why would

the rock yield to mere soft-spoken speech to go against its own G-d given nature? The rock therefore resisted Moses' attempt at speaking to it softly to give water.

Had Moses extolled the Jewish people and focused on their G-dliness and the beauty of their trust and the faith that they had exhibited in the past, his testimony would have been able to penetrate even a hard rock and it would have enthusiastically gushed its supply of waters. His talking to the rock would have meant addressing nature's willing subordination to the needs of Israel. By speaking to the rock, Moses would have essentially been saying to it, "You were created to serve the interests of Israel! Now, proceed to give them water! This is your true calling." And the rock would have given no resistance.

However, when Moses used the harsh rebuke and labeled the Jewish nation as rebels, the rock failed to recognize their preeminent role in this world and refused to alter its own nature. Nature has an innate sense of who is worthy of its service and before whom it must bow.

How Could Moses Have Erred?

An important question still remains. How could it be that Moses, the greatest leader, would so misjudge the situation and use the harsh approach knowing that the soft approach is far more effective?

The answer lies in the historical reality. The Jewish people were in the beginning stage of their journey and had not yet had the opportunity to prove their true inner G-dly spirit. We all know that while praise and positive reinforcement works wonders with some, it has the opposite effect on others. A child whose talents are so covered up cannot be helped by mere praise. A harsher approach might have to be used.

In truth, Moses did not really err. At the time this event transpired, Moses' actions were indeed the right ones. They were only wrong if used out of context. This is true of all the reported sins of the greatest *tzadikim*. Although the Torah characterizes some of the actions of the Patriarchs, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Kings David and Solomon as sinful, in truth, Chassidic thought teaches us that they were not really sinful actions, in the literal sense of the word.

The "sins" of *tzadikim*-the righteous describe a decline from their lofty spiritual heights; not a gesture of independence, rebelliousness, ego, desire, etc., the classical culprits in our world of iniquity. Furthermore, Chassidus explains, the decline of the *tzadik* is actually orchestrated by G-d to serve two objectives.

The first is that declining from their spiritual heights energizes them to climb even higher. This is the *tzadik's* version of the *Ba'al Teshuvah*, the penitent or returnee,

whose actual sins and the remorse for them propel him or her to a more passionate attachment to G-d. Similarly, when the *tzadik* “falters” he or she is given the opportunity to be catapulted to an even higher level.

The second benefit of the *tzadik's* decline is for everyone else to learn an important lesson from it that applies to us in our own spiritual lives.

The Lesson for Our Generation: Love it and Live it!

What Moses did in his generation may have been proper for that period and for those people, but it is not proper for our generation, situated on the crossroads of history—on the threshold of the Messianic Era. Our generation is, paradoxically, both very delicate and very strong.

On the one hand, it is fragile and cannot endure too much negative pressure. We carry the weight and burden of millennia of persecution and pain. Particularly, as the first generation after the Holocaust, we, as a general rule, cannot be spoken to harshly. The only way one can penetrate the darkness in our world is through light.

On the other hand, our generation is the strongest and can best handle positive reinforcement, because all the positive energy we possess is so close to the surface. Thousands of years of cumulative good have left an indelible mark on our

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collective psyche. We respond well to praise and positive energy.

Our approach today to our fellow Jew is: "We are members of a holy nation and G-d has chosen us to be on the cutting edge of spiritual growth. We are distinguished members of the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption! So love it and live it!"

ESSAY NINETEEN

MOSES' OBSESSION WITH THE COMPLETE GEULAH

**Moses' life was dedicated to removing the scourge of death
from the earth.**

**His quest will not be complete until he fully succeeds in
the Messianic Age.**

**The final Red Heifer in the Messianic Age will epitomize
the completion and fulfillment of Moses' life-goal of making
this world G-dly by removing the last vestiges of evil.**

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ESSAY NINETEEN

MOSES' OBSESSION WITH THE COMPLETE GEULAH

Most Enigmatic Mitzvah; Except for Moses

The most enigmatic commandment in the Torah concerns the Red Heifer. This commandment involves taking a totally red cow, slaughtering it, burning its flesh, mixing its ashes with spring water and then sprinkling the mixture on a person who had become ritually impure by contact with a dead body. This procedure had to be done twice; on the third day and the seventh day after becoming defiled.

To make this ritual even more enigmatic, the people involved in the preparation of this mixture would themselves become ritually unclean even as they bring purity to others; although an impurity of a lesser degree, which did not require the same purification ritual.

This commandment was such a mystery that even King Solomon, the wisest of all people, stated, "I said that I want to fathom its meaning and I discovered it was remote from me." Yet, G-d did reveal its secret to Moses.

This is hinted in the opening words of this week's parsha:

“This is the **statute (Chukas)** of the Torah that G-d commanded saying, ‘speak to the children of Israel and they shall take **unto you** a red heifer...”

The words “unto you” our Sages comment mean that G-d revealed the secret meaning of this commandment to Moses. To him it was no longer an enigma.

Three Tiered System

This raises a question. The fact that this Mitzvah is trans-rational is understandable for Judaism is based on a three pronged Mitzvah system: Mishpatim (judgments), Eidos (testimonies) and Chukim (statutes). We need the rational Mishpatim such as the Mitzvos not to steal and to give tzedakah because G-d wants us to develop kindness, compassion, love and sensitivity towards others and not just do things because we were commanded to do them. In other words, G-d’s will was that we perform these Mitzvos because of their underlying rationale and not just rely on the fact that they are G-d’s will.

The Eidos are those Mitzvos that we do such as observing the Festivals because they are constant reminders of G-d’s presence and expose our spiritual energies. While Mishpatim make us more moral, the Eidos make us more spiritual.

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The Chukim, which we cannot fathom, were designed to connect us to G-d, who transcends rationality and spirituality. To do a Mitzvah “because G-d said so” unlocks our soul’s connection to G-d in a way that goes beyond conventional feelings and limited minds.

Of all the Chukim, the Red Heifer stands out as being the most enigmatic. This suggests that our most powerful connection to G-d comes through observance of this Mitzvah in a way that transcends our deepest forces of logic.

Why would G-d reveal the reason for this Mitzvah to Moses and thereby deny him this level of commitment to G-d? And if there was a benefit in understanding this Mitzvah why did G-d deny it to everyone else, including Solomon?

Ascribed to Moses

The answer to this question can be provided by way of another interpretation of the words “unto you,” which suggests that Moses had a special connection to this Mitzvah. Rashi states that “the Red Heifer will always be ascribed to your [Moses’} name; the Red heifer made by Moses in the desert.” In other words, whenever people would use the ashes of the Red Heifer to purify somebody

they would always refer to the Red Heifer Moses made in the desert.

The classic commentator Kli Yakar asks, why would we want to always ascribe the Red Heifer to Moses in particular? What praise does this confer to him?

Kli Yakar answers that the mitzvah of the Red Heifer was intended as atonement for the creation of the Golden Calf. In the words of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan (cited by Rashi): “Let the mother (Red Heifer) come and clean the dirt caused by its child (the Golden Calf).” Moses began the atonement process when he burnt the Golden Calf and ground it into dust. Moreover, Moses put his life on the line in his attempt to procure forgiveness for the children of Israel by offering to G-d to “erase him from His book.” Since it was Moses who began the process of forgiveness, he too will complete the process.

Why was it so important for Moses to be associated with the completion of the process?

“A Mitzvah is only credited to the one who finishes it.”

The Kli Yakar explains that it is based on the Talmudic principle, “A Mitzvah is only credited to the one who finishes it.” By having all the Red Heifers identified with

Moses it can be said that he is the one who completed the atonement process.

According to the Kli Yakar, it was important that Moses should be involved in the end of the process because one gets the credit for a Mitzvah only when it is completed.

This however raises a question when we compare it to different Mitzvah that Moses inaugurated but for which he did not receive credit by its completion. This is the Mitzvah of designating six cities in Israel as Cities of Refuge. These cities were intended to protect those who committed criminally negligent homicide. It was part punishment, part atonement and part protection from revenge-seeking relatives. Moses, the Torah tells us, designated three such cities, although they did not begin to function as refuges until the Mitzvah was complete with all six cities in operation. And even that is not the end, for in the Messianic Age an additional three cities will be designated. Yet while Moses initiated the Mitzvah he was not to be credited for its end.

The question thus is why Moses' name is attached to the Red Heifers of the future to credit him for the completion of the Mitzvah but not to the future Cities of Refuge.

The answer might lie in the different types of atonement these two Mitzvos accomplished.

Cities of Refuge versus the Red Heifer

The Cities of Refuge were atonement for the commission of a crime without malice or forethought. There was no evil intent; just negligence. The Cities of Refuge could not remove, let alone transform, unmitigated evil. However, the Red Heifer's objective was to atone for the Golden Calf, which reintroduced death to the world. Death was introduced into the world when Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit and allowed themselves to absorb pure evil into their systems. This is why in the Messianic Age death will be abolished and the dead will be brought back to life. In the words of the prophet, "The spirit of impurity I will remove from the earth."

Moses' role was not just that of removing some quantum of imperfection from the world. While he started that process by designating the first three Cities of Refuge, that was not his primary goal. Moses wanted nothing short of reversing the entire process of evil from the earth. This process, as stated, was introduced with Adam and Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit but it was reversed at Mount Sinai, when, as our Sages put it, "Their filth ceased." However, when the people sinned with the Golden Calf, "their filth returned."

Moses' life was then dedicated to removing that scourge from the earth. His quest will not be complete until he

fully succeeds in the Messianic Age. Removing all evil and even transforming it into good, is the core function of the Red Heifer, which atones for one's association with death. The final Red Heifer in the Messianic Age will epitomize the completion and fulfillment of Moses' life-goal of making this world G-dly by removing the last vestiges of evil.

"First Redeemer and Final Redeemer."

This explains another saying of our Sages: "Moses was the first redeemer and Moses will be the final redeemer." Although Moshiach will be the final redeemer, he will be empowered to be the final redeemer only because he embodies the qualities and, indeed, the very soul of Moses. It is Moses who stands for the ultimate end of evil and its transformation. And Moshiach, empowered with the soul of Moses, will accomplish that goal.

We can now understand why Moses' name does not need to be attached to the future Cities of Refuge in the way it does with the Red Heifer. The Cities of Refuge do not bring us to the end goal of transforming unmitigated evil into holiness. Their Mitzvah does not remove pure evil; only the lesser form of evil of unintentional and negligent behavior. Moses' essence does not demand the completion of a Mitzvah that does not bring our world to its state of completion. Moses wants the **complete** Redemption; not

some superficial and provisional reversal of negative forces in the world.

Moshiach too, the Talmud tells us, suffers greatly from even the slightest delay in the process of Redemption. No matter how many transformative things happen in our world, Moshiach, imbued as he will be with the passion of Moses, will not be satisfied by anything short of its total transformation. This explains why the Rebbe always referred to the “**True and complete** Geulah.”

We can now understand why G-d revealed the secret of the Red Heifer to Moses. Moses was the ultimate leader. His entire life revolved around bringing the world to a state of perfection. This goal is symbolized by the Mitzvah of the Red Heifer, the completion of which will bring the world to that state of perfection. This is why Moses’ entire being had to “wrap” around this Mitzvah in particular; his mind, emotions and all of his faculties. This was/is Moses’ essence.

Moreover, in the Messianic Age even the deepest mysteries of life will be revealed to one and all. Moses was given a taste of this future because his entire life was about the future.

The Rebbe quoted the abovementioned statement of our Sages in a letter, “A Mitzvah is only credited to the one who finishes it,” and then applied it to **our** generation as “the **final** generation of Galus-exile and the first generation

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of Redemption.” This Moses-Moshiach passion to bring an end to Galus in all of its forms must be our passion as well, for each of us possesses a spark of Moses and Moshiach and will never be satisfied until the Geulah is complete.

ESSAY TWENTY

RICH AND POOR MONTHS

**When we are at a low point in our life we should realize
two points:**

**First, all of the negativity that we might feel is only on the
surface.**

**And second, we should reflect on the good energies that
we have generated in the past and are still accessible to us.**

**By doing so, it will enable us to expose the hidden good
and make it a palpable and overt goodness.**

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ESSAY TWENTY

RICH AND POOR MONTHS

The Sivan Tammuz Contrast

Today is the first day of the month of Tammuz, which follows the month of Sivan. In no other time of the year is the contrast between two consecutive months as sharp as the one between Sivan and Tammuz:

Sivan, the month in which the Jewish people received the Torah, is a most joyous month; Tammuz is punctuated by the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem that presaged the destruction of the Holy Temple. On the seventeenth of Tammuz this and other tragic events are memorialized by fasting and reciting special penitential prayers called Selichos.

If even the slightest movement within the world of nature is directed by G-d as the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, taught, certainly the juxtaposition of these two months is not an accident.

Sivan is the month in which we are given extraordinary spiritual and physical blessings because it is the month in

which the Torah was given to us at Mount Sinai. In the annals of human history there has never been and there will never be, a single event that was as powerful and dramatic a manifestation of G-d's presence as was the revelation of Sinai. Torah is the very source of blessing and as such is G-d's greatest gift to humankind. It is even more significant an even when we consider the fact that it was the culmination of the process of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage.

During the month of Sivan, we are at an all-time high.

Tammuz, by contrast is the month in which Moses shattered the tablets that embodied all that was given to us in Sivan. It is also the month in which the walls of Jerusalem were breached, as well as other tragedies that are enumerated in the Talmud. It seems that all of what we gained in Sivan was reversed in Tammuz.

If we were to characterize Sivan as the month of Divine gifts, Tammuz (as well as the following month of Av) can be considered the month in which we forfeited that gift. If Sivan is the month of incredible spiritual elevation, Tammuz is the month of great spiritual degradation and decline.

These two months thus represent two alternating phases in our lives. There are times when we feel G-d's hand touching us and uplifting us. We feel blessed and fortunate.

And then there are times when we are down; feel nothing, and are overcome with a sense of spiritual and emotional impoverishment.

Sivan and Tammuz represent the alternating states of spiritual affluence and impoverishment respectively.

Dealing with Spiritual Poverty and Famine

Now there are two ways we can relate to the state of poverty that we go through. The first and more common approach is one of resignation. One will simply accept the fact that there are good times and there are bad times in life. These are times that we just have to plow through and wait for it to end, hoping and praying that it will be short. The second approach is to draw from the wealth generated in and saved up from better times; attempting to search for and discover the positive in the negative.

To explain: Going through a joyous season can be compared to someone who earns a large sum of money and puts it in a bank or other financial institutions where the capital is secure while it generates interest and dividends that can come in handy for a “rainy day” in the future. To not withdraw funds from the savings account in hard times would appear foolish. After all, wasn’t this the very purpose of putting away the money in the first place?

The Biblical model for the above is the story of Joseph who advised Pharaoh to store food in the years of plenty to feed Egypt in the seven years of famine that were to follow. In this piece of advice Joseph was conveying not only a practical solution to the problem of famine but was also showing us how to cope with adversity in general.

In times of spiritual and emotional famine, we must draw inspiration from the times in which we experienced the richness of G-d's blessings. All of the spiritual energy that was experienced during our festive holidays or the holiness that we generate when we perform a Mitzvah never dissipates. We must use that stored up energy and inspiration in difficult times.

Sivan's Effect on Tammuz

We can now understand that the two contrasting months of Sivan and Tammuz were intended for each other. One of the richest months of the year is arguably the month of Sivan and one of the poorest months is Tammuz. How do we cope with the adversity of Tammuz?

The answer is, by drawing inspiration from the month of Sivan and introducing it into the month of Tammuz. Thereby the month of Tammuz will be different. Sivan will neutralize the negative character of Tammuz and even transform it to good. Indeed, the prophet has told us that

in the Messianic Age all of the fast days will be transformed into joyous days; fasting will turn into feasting. But where do we get the ability to achieve that transformation? It is from the stored up positive and joyous experiences of Sivan.

Gimmel-Giving; Daled-Receiving

The idea that Sivan is the month of inspiration for the month of Tammuz is reflected in the actual numbering of these months.

Sivan is hailed as the “third month” of the year, while Tammuz is the fourth. In Hebrew, the numbers three and four are represented by the letters *gimmel* and *daled*, the third and fourth letters of the Hebrew alphabet respectively. The Talmud explains that the words *gimmel* and *daled* can be translated as “giving to the poor.” Thus the third month of the year (*gimmel*) is the month of giving and the fourth month of Tammuz (*daled*) is the month of receiving; when we are compelled to draw from the inspiration of the third month.

There is, however, a catch to this process. In order for the act of tzedakah-charity to take place it requires the cooperation between the donor and the recipient. If the poor person refuses to accept the assistance from the rich,

then there is no act of charity no matter how much effort the donor expends to give.

It is therefore crucial for us in the month of Tammuz to be receptive to the beneficence of the month of Sivan.

The Essence of Tammuz

In truth, the month of Tammuz is not a bad month in spite of the tragedies that occurred in it, for which we have the fast day on the seventeenth day of the month. In essence, our Sages teach us, there are two forms of good: revealed good and hidden good. Since the true and essential nature of Tammuz is good, albeit concealed, we can understand how the negative features can be neutralized by introducing the energy of the month of Sivan into it. By introducing the dynamics of Sivan—i.e., by reflecting on the Divine gift of Torah and the love G-d has for us that it expresses—we help to reveal the true and hidden positive nature of Tammuz.

All of the above applies to all of life's vicissitudes. When we are at a low point in our life we should realize two points: First, all of the negativity that we might feel is only on the surface. And second, we should reflect on the good energies that we have generated in the past and are still accessible to us. By doing so, it will enable us to expose the hidden good and make it a palpable and overt goodness.

Coping with Exile

All of the above applies to all of exile that began with the seventeenth of Tammuz over 3,300 years ago when Moses shattered the tablets as he witnessed the way the Jewish people degenerated when they worshipped the golden calf. That event set into motion the destructive energies that made that day the day in which the walls that protected the holiness of Jerusalem were breached. This event unleashed a chain of negative events that led to the subsequent exile that will only end with the coming of Moshiach.

To help us cope with exile we were given the commandment to remember the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. These remembrances serve as positive and liberating forces that help us uncover the underlying positive energy within exile existence and serves as the catalyst to bring about the Redemption through Moshiach.