



All the Way to Father
Parshat Chukas

It was during a defining period for the State of Israel, when Jews came from the four corners of the world to restart their lives in the Holy Land. In those days, I would travel to the towns and bring the Jews closer to their Jewish heritage.

During one of the visits Nazareth Illit, I came upon a Hebrew language school for new immigrants. I met the students for a few times and then they asked me to teach them. I befriended them and invited them to join me at the Seder on Passover eve. Some 30 new immigrants joined us that year. I had one request of them – that they spend the entire holiday with us and not leave in the middle. They agreed.

One of the participants was a university student studying philosophy. She sat by my wife and wept, unable to contain her excitement. My wife showed her support, but something appeared to be disturbing her.

About a month later, just after Lag Ba'Omer, we heard knocks on the door. The student was at the door, asking to speak with us. She shared with us her intentions to marry a young man. She told us of the obstacles and troubles she had encountered in her life. She came from a traditional home, but lost her parents at a very young age. During the Seder, a spark from her childhood was reignited, and she decided to reclaim her past and heritage.

The problem was that her boyfriend was not even remotely interested in Judaism. She asked him to join her at Meron for the Lag Ba'Omer festivities. He initially refused, but then gave in. When he was offered to put on Tefillin he refused. She could not bear to see his aversion to Judaism and came to consult with us.

It became apparent that they had already purchased a home and a car, she had everything, and yet could not continue to live with a man who did not believe in G-d and who refused to put on Tefillin.

In our weekly parsha we learn of the process a person must undergo to purify himself after becoming defiled by the dead.

"This is the statute of the Torah which the Lord commanded," the Torah says.¹

The Talmud² explains: "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."

Our sages share with us the story of Dama Ben Netinah:³

"Rabbi Eliezer was asked: How far does the honor of parents extend? He replied: 'Go forth and see what a certain non-Jew, Dama ben Netinah, did in Ashkelon.'"

The Sages sought jewels for the *Ephod*, the Kohen Gadol's breastplate, at a profit of six-hundred-thousand gold denari, Rav Kahana taught: at a profit of eight-hundred-thousand, but as the key was lying under his father's pillow, he did not trouble him. "The following year the Holy One, blessed be He, gave him his reward. A red heifer was born to him in his herd (used in the process of purification). When the Sages of Israel went to him to buy it, he said to them, 'I know you, that even if I asked you for all the money in the world you would pay me. But I ask of you only the money which I lost through my father's honor.'"

The question is asked about the specific reward G-d gave Dama – why the red heifer? This teaches us a great lesson.

When Dama was approached by the sages he was faced with a serious challenge regarding his willingness to honor his father.

This situation aroused an accusation against the Jewish people in the Heavens - Dama, the non-Jew, showed immense respect for his father. Do the Jews do the same?

What did G-d do? He gave Dama a red heifer, to find merit for the Jews, who were willing to give any sum in the world to fulfill the mitzvah. So what is the difference between them and Dama, who also forego a fortune to show respect for his father?

While Dama was willing to sacrifice for a commandment that is understandable and well accepted, honoring one's parents, the sages showed eternal love to G-d. They were willing to relinquish a fortune for a mitzvah which has no evident reason, a "stature."

This is the greatness of the Jewish nation, who fulfill all of G-d's commandments, including the ones' that have no apparent reason, and all fulfill G-d's commandments, because he commanded them.

We went to great lengths to try and calm her down. I promised to speak to the young man. As the hours passed I understood that we were at an impasse. She clung to her belief, while he was distant from her spiritual world. They were holding diametrically opposed views.

I was awed by her steadfastness. She was willing to give everything up, even money and the house, as long as she could cling to G-d.

The next morning she packed her bags and traveled to Jerusalem. She joined a study program and came closer to her heritage and her G-d.

A year later I received an invitation for her wedding. I arrived at the hall and was delighted to meet her groom, one of the finest, a yeshiva student.

She gave up everything to be close to her G-d.

¹ Bamidbar 19:2.

² Tractate Yomah 67b.

³ Tractate Kiddushin 31a.