



Holy Bravery Parsh Chukas

On May 10th, 1940, Nazi Germany invaded France. German armor outflanked the Maginot Line and pushed deep into France, German forces arrived in an undefended Paris on June 14th. Hitler became ruler of most of Europe. After the Nazis entered Paris they ordered the registration of the entire population. Thousands of Wehrmacht soldiers were deployed throughout the city to give out the census forms. The Jews knew the intent of the census, and feared its consequences – the theft of their property and their deportation from France.

Some decided to try and conceal their Jewish identity; however, one of them, the son-in-law of the Lubavitcher Rebbe at the time, ruled that one should not conceal his Jewish identity and not fear the possible outcome. It was Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson who gave the ruling. At the time he lived in France, continuing with his life of Torah, despite the Nazi occupation.

When asked by the Nazis authorities, the Rebbe's wife declared they were 'orthodox', thus stating their devotion, and yet dodging the fact they were Jewish. When Rabbi Schneerson came home and heard of this he left his house. His wife asked where he was headed. He replied: "I am a Jew and not ashamed of it. I am going to declare to the Germans that I am a Jew and to correct the registration error regarding my Judaism."

The clerks were dumbfounded. The Jews in France were all involved in evading the authorities, and yet this Jew was determined to have himself identified as one.

This is what the future Lubavitcher Rebbe would teach - in our weekly parsha it is written: "The Lord spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: This is the **statute of the Torah** which the Lord commanded, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow."¹ The verse should read 'this is the statute of the laws of the **red heifer**'? The Torah is teaching us that each commandment has an aspect of statute.²

In the *Tanya*³ it is written that the Hebrew word for statute, חוקה, is akin to the word חקק, to etch. One can etch with ink on a scroll, and one can etch in stone. The difference is that

one who writes on parchment brings together to foreign elements; on stone the words become a part of the stone. The statute symbolizes the full and inseparable connection. The commandments are categorized as statutes, as the connection to G-d does not emanate from the mind or feelings but through the fulfillment of the Mitzvos, which are a testament to the bond between G-d and the Jewish People. "I have decreed it; you have no right to challenge it."

'This is the statute of the Torah' - the Torah binds us to G-d in an indivisible link. This is what our Sages have taught us in regards to the red heifer – "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."⁴

The statutes are what differentiate the Jewish Nation from other nations. Other nations question the commandments, but the Jewish Nation is bonded eternally.

The Chief Rabbi of Paris, Rabbi Shmuel Yaacov Rubenstein, would tell of the years under the Nazi shadow. "In September 1941 I was approached by Rabbi Schneerson on the question of how much is one obligated to sacrifice himself for the sake of Hiddur Mitzvah,⁵ the beautifying of a Mitzvah. We concluded that there was no call for self-sacrifice in the realm of Hiddur Mitzvah."

"But the Rebbe did not relent. He went to Italy to obtain Esrogim. He explained that in times of hardship Hiddur Mitzvah becomes even more important. The Rebbe exhibited dedication towards his Jewish identity during those years, which should serve as an example for every Jew."

This was the Lubavitcher Rebbe that I had the pleasure and privilege to know, and he guided me in my endeavors for the benefit of the Jewish Nation.

¹ Bamidbar 19:1 – 2.

² In this context, a commandment with no apparent reason or explanation.

³ The *Tanya* is the main work of the Chabad philosophy and the Chabad approach to Hasidic mysticism, as it defines its general interpretation and method written by the first Chabad Rebbe Shneur Zalman of Liadi

⁴ Talmud tractate Yoma 67b.

⁵ When one performs a mitzvah, he has the option of performing the mitzvah in a manner that fulfills the minimal requirement or he can perform the mitzvah in a manner that glorifies the performance of the mitzvah. Performing a mitzvah in a glorified manner is known as hiddur mitzvah