

“CHOK” IS THE REAL THING

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe and to Aaron saying, "This is the decree (chukos) of the Torah, which HASHEM has commanded, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall take to you a completely red cow- which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come. (Bamidbar 19:1-2)

HASHEM spoke to Moshe and to Aaron, saying, "Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation to the land that I have given them. (Bamidbar 20:12)

The verse reveals that if they had not done this sin they would have entered the land. (Why?) In order that they should not say about them, "Because of the sin of the rest of the "generation of the desert" that was decreed upon them, they did not enter." (Rashi)

Ask the man in the street, "Why were Moshe and Aaron not allowed to enter the Land of Israel?" The answer you're likely to get, "Cause he hit the rock!" Rashi more than implies that this is not the real reason. The verse only reveals this incident so that we dare not conclude that some less acceptable reason was the cause of them not entering. What is the real reason Moshe and Aaron did not enter the Land of Israel? Why is this entire episode included with "Chukas", having to do with the classically incomprehensible "Red Cow?

What is a "Chok"? A Chok is a law that, by definition, cannot be understood by the human mind. We may be tempted to reject it altogether if not for the credibility of the promulgator of that law. Even if it is not comprehensible to us, ultimately we defer to the expertise of a mind that supercedes our own. As Maimonides writes in Moreh Nevuchim, "Truth does not become more-true by virtue that the whole world agrees with it, nor less so even if the whole world disagrees with it!" Galileo concurs, "In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual."

The surprising fact is that, "These are the "chukos" of the Torah"- The whole of Torah is a "chok"! What we experience as a reason (in Hebrew Ta'am) is merely a taste. We have a flavor or a sense of some local benefit from a Mitzvos, but the bottom line of it all is that they are beyond human ken.

In reality HASHEM plays a subtle trick on all of us. It is the same trick we play on our children. When they are in need of some medicine the pharmacist laces it with candy flavor so the child will desire to take it. The parent has one motive- to get the spoon into the kid's mouth. The kid has an entirely

different agenda- to enjoy a sweet taste.

So it goes with apples and marriage and children and work. We are often there for one selfish reason but deep down buried beneath the surface of these experiences are vitamins packed with multiple life lessons we could not and would not have gotten otherwise. And so it is with Moshe and Aaron. We are shown a somewhat reasonable explanation as to why they were denied entry to the land of their and our desire. The real bottom line, though, is that it is a "Chok". It relates to HASHEM's infinite mind, and as we all now know- "chok" is the real thing. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.