

PARSHAS CHUKAS

by Gedalia Litke

The mitzvah of parah adumah (red heifer) is a "chok". Rashi explains that chok refers to mitzvos that the satan and the nations of the world denigrate ('monin', from the word ona'ah/abuse or torment) as being simply irrational, but we nonetheless follow as being HKBH's decree. (19:1) [Rav Yaakov Weinberg, ZT'L, would note that we consider chukim to be super-rational, i.e., with profound reasons but beyond our comprehension.]

This Rashi stands in subtle distinction to two other Rashis: In both Parshas Toldos (26:5) and in Parshas Acharei Mos (18:4) Rashi says that a chok is a mitzva that the yetzer hora and the nations of the world respond to (me'shivin) as being irrational. Why in our parsha does Rashi change his language from satan to yetzer hora and from me'shivin to monin? [Rabbi Chavel notes an alternate version of Rashi in our parsha which reads me'shivin; however the Ramban quotes our Rashi using monin, and in any event the change from yetzer hora to satan remains an issue in both versions.]

There is a fundamental difference between a mitzva such as sha'atnez which has no obvious rationale, and one such as parah adumah which, in addition to having no obvious rationale, is inherently contradictory - the ashes of the parah adumah have the power both to purify the defiled and also to defile the pure. The nations of world challenge us (me'shivin) about the mitzvos that seem irrational, but they outright denigrate us (monin) for mitzvos which also seem internally inconsistent. Along the same lines, the yetzer hora represents challenges and questions designed to steer us away from our commitments; there always seems to be a good reason not to do what we know we should be doing. However, the yetzer hora stops short of actually mocking or denigrating. That is the job of the satan. (See usage of l'satan/to harm in Parshas Balak 22:32.)

[This is based on a shiur of HoRav Yochanan Zweig, Shlita.]

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