

DECREE OF THE TORAH

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week Parshas Chukas is read here in Israel and Parshas Korach is read outside of Israel. Chukas begins: "Zos chukas haTorah [these are the decrees of the Torah] [19:2]." 'Chukim' are the laws that we don't comprehend--they don't make sense to us. Our parsha begins with the laws of the parah adumah [the red heifer] whose ashes, mixed with water, ritually cleanse a person who became defiled through contact with a dead body. The process performed with the para adumah purifies those who were impure while at the same time defiles those who were pure. It is this apparent contradiction which classifies para adumah as the quintessential 'chok.'

Why does the Torah call this the "decree of the Torah"? Isn't it simply the decree of impurity/purity?

Rav Moshe zt"l explains that the passuk [verse] is teaching us that we must view the entire Torah as a chok. There are mitzvos [commandments] which we think we understand on our own and there are those which have reasons mentioned explicitly in the Talmud. All must be viewed as chukim--decrees.

A classic example of this is the command for a king not to take too many wives. King Solomon thought that the reason given was the basis for the command. He therefore erred thinking that if the reason didn't apply to him then neither did the command.

Korach and his group erred in a similar way. Thinking that the reason for the t'chailes [blue strings of the tzitzith garment] didn't apply to them, they felt that they should therefore be exempted from the entire mitzvah.

"Zos chukas haTorah [these are the decrees of the Torah]." The entire Torah must be viewed as chukim. There are things that we think we understand and things that we know we don't. Our realization must be that in regard to Hashem's perception and depth, any understanding of ours can only be viewed as abject ignorance.

This must carry over into our personal lives also. We can't base our observance on our understanding of the life-situations that Hashem deals out to us. "Zos chukas haTorah." Once again, our understanding or lack of understanding must bow to our trust and acceptance of what Hashem sends our way.

My writing has led to my receiving some amazing letters. I'm going to depart from my usual format and copy some letters that I've received from an amazing person in Poland. Besides removing his

name I've left the letters in their original. I was amazed and uplifted by this person's resolve and acceptance of "Zos chukas haTorah."

Letter #1:

Dear Rabbi,

I am amazed every time with your parsha weekly. Here where I live, in Poland, there are great troubles with getting good advice in religious matters. Therefore I would like to ask you about one thing. I am having bone marrow cancer. From two weeks I am having some troubles with eating. The result is that I have problems with having the 6 hours break between eating milk products and meat meals, because I eat when I am able not when it is time for that.

The question is how to solve it. I need a lot of different things, especially that I am vomiting very often.

I hope that Rabbi will help me.

I am terribly sorry for that haotic (hectic?) letter but I feel exhausted.

With best regards,

Sincerely Yours,
xxxxxxxxxxxxx:

I responded and then received this letter:

Letter #2:

Dear Rabbi,

I took me a long time since I was able again to seat by the computer keyboard and reply your letter. Unfortunately my illness has no mercy on me. Thank you for your advice in matter of kosher food. It helped me much. You wrote me that you are inspired with my heroic will of keeping all the Jewish Laws. I could not imagine my life without it. If there is anything that we have gotten from HaShem it is always created for our better not worse life. Why should I resign for instance of Aseret haDevarim only because the circumstances have changed. That is ridiculous. It is certain that the present world gives us a lot troubles in keeping Jewish Laws but Judaism is our way of life and nothing in that matter should change. Always when I feel worse I am thinking of Iyov and his way. That gives me strength to fight with my weakness.

You have asked me on finding match for transplant. For two years I still cannot find it, that is the problem. And now when I am getting worse and worse I am not quite sure if in then when it is found I still will be able to undergo the transplantation.

Previous two weeks I have spent in a haematologic center in Warsaw. Finally when I felt a little better I came back home to pass the exams on my Medical Studies and Choir conducting studies. I

do not know how long it will take me till I pass away but I want to do as much as it is possible in the meantime if only I can. You may be surprised how it is possible to study both things being so ill. That is easy. Knowledge and prayer these are two best things we have gotten from HaShem. Sometimes it is very difficult to work but do I have any other choice. In our work we can see the HaShem's creations miracles.

You have also asked me where I live in Poland. It is Bydgoszcz 400.000 people town, 270 km from Warsaw due North. It is the Pomeranian part of Poland. Unfortunately there is no Jewish community in here, as the matter of fact there are no Jews in here now. The nearest community, but very small, is in Gdańsk - 160 km due North from Bydgoszcz.

When I was in hospital someone have stolen me my Tallit Katan and now I cannot wear it every day but I still have my normal Tallit. People sometimes are odd. Who will need it if one's not Jew. There is no profit in having such a thing for Goyim. Well I cannot understand it.

Once again thank you for your warm and friendly mail.

With best regards,

Sincerely yours,
xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Letter #3:

Dear Rabbi,

It was good again to hear from you. Of course if you would like to use my letters in your parsha-insights I am giving you my permission. It is certain that you should leave out my name from it.

I miss much my visits in Israel. I haven't been there since Chanuka 5760 but unfortunately I cannot see any possibility to go there till I will feel better and still it seems to me that it won't be soon if ever. I still cannot understand that I could be an inspiration for anyone. I am just staying in strong trust in HaShem's good. I find sometimes myself in Psalm No. 55 (saying "Oh if could to escape like a dove) but soon after I know that nothing is more worth of singing than Psalm No. 100 (Sing to the Lord all the world, worship with joy.)

I hope to hear from you again.

With best regards,

Sincerely Yours,
xxxxxxxxxxxxxx

What a nation. What a person. I think I should be calling him Rabbi...

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

Copyright © 2000 by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author teaches at Neveh Tzion in Telzstone (near Yerushalayim).
