

# REMAINING MYSTERIES

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Birth and death are truly the great mysteries of life. Regardless of how advanced our scientific and medical knowledge, the secret of life remains a secret. We can initiate the process of life and we can end it. We can with increasing frequency help a struggling or damaged life to heal and become viable. In the last 50 years science has unlocked more technical aspects of the life process than ever before in human history. Yet, the granting and taking of life is as mysterious as ever before. It is the ultimate "Chok" (decree).

Immediately following Korach's rebellion and soon after the disaster of the Miraglim (spies), the Torah focused on the laws of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer). Classified as the quintessential Chok, the Red Heifer confounds rational understanding as to the manner of its efficacy. Rashi (19:2) quotes the Medresh Tanchumah, (G-d states) "It is a decree before me and you do not have permission to question it." The message is clear, whether we understand or not, whether we think we understand or not, the entire Torah, not just the Parah Adumah is a decree that we must accept and perform.

The fact is that our obligation to do G-d's commandments is mandated solely on the basis that we believe that G-d gave the Mitzvos. Individual understanding or initiatives are secondary to the simplicity of performance. Rashi is teaching from the Tanchumah that our attempt at understanding all the other non-chukim (non-decrees) assumes permission from G-d to do so. If G-d did not grant permission to question the reasons for His Mitzvos we would not be allowed to do so!

When it comes to understanding the Mitzvos there are two types of questions.

**A)** Questions that are focused on the how and when.

**B)** Questions focused on why the when and how.

Take Kashrus as an example. The Torah clearly states why G-d separated between Kosher and non-Kosher animals. (Vayikra 11:45) "...Be holy because I am holy." (Eat only kosher because it separates you from all others just as I am separate from all.) We understand why G-d commanded Kashrus. We understand how to keep Kosher. We do not know why G-d designated certain animals to be Kosher and others to be not Kosher.

The same is true with Parah Adumah. We know how to do the process of the Parah Adumah. We know when G-d commanded us to do the process of Parah Adumah. We do not know why the process works the way it does to accomplish removal of Tumah (impurity).

In truth, it is the same for all the Mitzvos. We know the how, and when, and we attempt to know why the process of each Mitzvah works; however, after all is said and done we do the Mitzvos because G-d so commanded.

The Parsha begins by presenting the ultimate Chok of Parah Adumah. It reflects on the passage of life and the need for the living to go on living. Daily, humanity experiences the mystery of life and death, and yet, we are no closer to unlocking its mystery. The mystery remains while life continues. The process continues even though there are no answers. So too with all the Mitzvos. Whether we understand them or not, whether we will ever understand them or not, the process continues even as does the mystery.

(Note: The deaths of Miriam and Aharon. Hitting the Rock, and accomplishing what appeared to be G-d's intent; yet, being wrong. Bilam and Moshe - the mystery of free-will and prophecy.)

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