

BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

In examining this week's parsha, one is struck by the inexplicability of all of the subject matter in the parsha. From the most famous chok - a rule without rational explanation to it - that of the red heifer, the parah adumah, which serves as the beginning of the parsha, to the shortcomings of Moshe in smiting the rock to bring forth water and his punishment of not being able to enter the Land of Israel, one is troubled by the mystery of it all. Why? If the Torah is meant to be studied and intellectually analyzed by the Jewish people, if it is somehow within the reach of humans to understand the Torah's laws and values, then why this onslaught of laws and events that defy any human logic?

It is obvious that the Torah is teaching us a very basic lesson. Not everything in life is logical, understandable, rational or given to any sort of human understanding. The Torah intends to teach us that its system of values and behavior is oftentimes beyond human comprehension. The ability to accept this difficult and oftentimes humbling assessment is a test of faith and belief. And the Torah and Judaism generally rest upon this basic foundation, if necessary even a form of blind faith and belief. Understanding and studying Torah is a mitzvah - an obligation upon all Jews. However, following and believing Torah even when we do not understand and know its rationale is no less of a mitzvah.

The truth is that life itself in all of its manifestations is beyond our rational abilities to understand or predict. We are regularly blindsided by events that are unexpected and sometimes devastating. There is a capricious nature to life and its events that forecloses any rational explanations or logical theories. The very nature of life itself is purely a chok - a type of commandment and/or occurrence that leaves us baffled and without answers or explanations. On a small personal scale these events may be viewed as fortuitous or tragic but they are all unexpected and irrational. On a larger scale events such as the Holocaust are prime historical examples of a chok in its ultimate form.

We do not understand the severity of Moshe's punishment as recorded in this week's parsha. We also do not understand the reasons that led to six million innocent Jews being destroyed. When such things occur, both on a personal and national level, we are left bereft and perplexed. The Torah records that Aharon's response to the death of his two sons in the Mishkan was silence. Silence translates itself into the realization that God's ways are beyond human comprehension.

We can only accept but never will we understand them. And that is why the prophet stated that the basic tenet of Judaism is "The righteous live by faith alone." Chukat is the parsha of faith alone. This is why this parsha is so important for us to appreciate and absorb. Faith is somehow the only effective

weapon against the mysteries of life that befall us.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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