

GOD IS NOT ONE OF US

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The parsha of Chukat emphasizes to us the inscrutable nature of our relationship to the Creator. God is not human in any form or understandable manner. Therefore God always remains beyond our reach and logic. This is emphasized to us in the commandment that appears at the beginning of the parsha concerning the parah adumah - the red cow - and its attendant details and requirements.

The rabbis have already warned us that this is the ultimate "choik" - the law of God that is beyond all human comprehension. It is the ultimate "just do it" area of Jewish life and ritual. And, though any human reasoning will not fathom the commandment of parah adumah - the red cow - itself, I think that there is an appreciation of an insight into why there should be such unfathomable laws and commandments in the Torah altogether.

A famous actor/comedian once said only semi-facetiously that "any club that would have me as a member is a club that I do not wish to belong to." Well, in a much more exalted fashion, Judaism states that any God who is completely understandable to me - a human being with all of the limitations inherent in so being - cannot really be my God.

It demeans the Jewish concept of the Creator of such a complex universe to state that such a Creator must be understandable to us. The prophet already stated this principle succinctly when he said that God's message to us is that, "My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are My ways your ways." The commandment of parah adumah - the red cow - drives that point home to all who study Torah.

If any human being was entitled to enter the Land of Israel and realize one's life's ambition, it was certainly our leader and teacher Moshe. And, yet, we see again in this week's parsha that this goal is denied to him. All of the commentators to the Torah attempt to deal with the problem of "why" To our human logic, the punishment does not really fit the transgression.

Moshe's exclusion from entering the Land of Israel has been debated over many millennia in the works of rabbinic scholarship. After all of the explanations and reasons and theories that have been advanced over the ages the question "why" still looms large. It is the second great "choik" - an event and decree beyond our understanding - that dominates the Torah narrative of this week's parsha.

We bow our heads in acceptance of Heavenly decrees in our personal and national life as well. The great Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern (Halperin) of Kotzk pithily summed up the matter as follows ""For the believer, there are no questions; for the skeptic and agnostic there are no answers."

Sooner or later in life we are blindsided by events over which we have no control or understanding. Even the wisest and most brilliant amongst us are left wondering as to "how" and "why." That is our fate as humans in dealing with the Creator and His ways and thoughts, so to speak. And that is the powerful and practical lesson of this week's parsha.

Shabat shalom,
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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