

THE PARAH PARADOX

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chukas / Balak

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion Chukas / Balak: Tape # 107, Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva -- Do Sons Inherit? Good Shabbos!

We Must Understand: Not Everything Can be Understood

In this week's parsha we learn of the mitzvah of the Parah Adumah [RedHeifer]. Rash"i quotes the Chaza"l that this mitzvah is known as the quintessential "chok".

This mitzvah is, in fact, a tremendous paradox. The Parah Adumah was used to be me'taher people who were Tameh Meis. People who have the impurity of Tameh Meis have no way of achieving purity other than by means of the Parah Adumah. Yet, on the other hand, any person who had anything to do with the preparing or the carrying or the sprinkling of the Parah Adumah became ritually impure, himself. The paradox of the Parah Adumah, thus, is that it makes those who are impure, pure and those who are pure, impure.

Our Rabbis tell us that the verse in Koheles [7:23] "All this I tried to understand with my wisdom; I said I will figure it out, but it is still distant from me" refers to Solomon stating that he understood the entire Torah, except for the chapter of Parah Adumah which remained elusive --despite all his inquiry.

The Medrash further states that G-d told Moshe, "To you I will explain the paradox of Parah Adumah, but to every other human being I will always hide its mystery." However the Medrash does say that in the Messianic Era, G-d will finally explain to us the mystery of Parah Adumah.

We see from over here that G-d made a deliberate and conscious effort to keep the mystery of Parah Adumah hidden from us. Shlomo [Solomon] with his wisdom, should have been able to

understand Parah Adumah. But G-d said, "I've got to keep this a secret. There is a reason. I will tell it to Klal Yisroel in the distant future. But for now, no one can understand Parah Adumah."

Why? Does G-d want to prove that he is smarter than us? Is this a game where G-d dangles something in front of us, teasing us with our inability to figure it out?

The Be'er Yosef offers a powerful insight. The reason G-d hid the understanding of Parah Adumah from us, is to teach us a vital lesson. The lesson is that there are things in life that are inexplicable. We must learn the lesson that things will happen in life that we will never be able to understand. We will come across things that will be terrible paradoxes, things that have apparently no rhyme and no reason.

What is this area of paradox that parallels Parah Adumah? It is the area of Tzadik v'ra lo and Rasha v'Tov lo. Just as Parah Adumah is a paradox that makes absolutely no sense, so too, there exists a paradox in life that we meet time and time and time again.

Logic would dictate just the reverse: A person is righteous, he is a noble Jew and unfortunately he suffers. Another person is wicked, he does everything that is forbidden and he is wealthy and prospers and has honor. Does this make sense? It's a paradox!

However, for some reason, that is the way that G-d made His world. We will have to deal with that issue and problem. So, G-d educated us in paradoxes. What is that education? Parah Adumah.

This is a tremendous education. Today, we think of Parah Adumah as an obscure mitzvah. We learn about it in the Chumash. We don't really know what it is talking about. There is a tractate in the Talmud called "Parah". Yet, there are few people who study it.

However, during the time of the Temple, the laws of Parah Adumah were extremely relevant. They were as relevant to the Jews then, as much as the laws of Aveilus (mourning) are relevant to us. If we will live, and not (G-d forbid) die before our parents, we will all have to deal with the laws of mourning. They are universal.

Unfortunately, the laws of Aveilus touch all of us. They have relevance every day of the year -- from the solemnity of a Yom Kippur to the exuberance of a Purim. Even Jews who have no connection to anything else, have a connection to the laws of Aveilus.

That was the reality of the laws of Parah Adumah in the time of the Temple. Invariably, one came into contact with dead people; one went to funerals; one became tameh. Then what? One could not eat Kodshim Kalim; one could not eat Ma'aser; one could not go to certain places in Jerusalem until one became Tahor.

Therefore, Parah Adumah was certainly something that happened many times a year and was often a daily occurrence. Every single time, a Jew would be faced with the same paradox. He walks in tameh and walks out tahor while the Kohen would walk in tahor and walk out tameh. It does not

seem to make sense, but at least the Jew would be exposed to and get accustomed to a paradox.

The Jew would learn that there are some things in this world that don't seem to make sense. That is why G-d hid the reason for Parah Adumah from us and it is also why in the future He will explain Parah Adumah to us.

The Talmud in Tractate Pessachim [50a] quotes the verse "In that Day G-d will be One and His Name will be One" [Zecharia 14:9] and asks, "In this world, G-d's Name is not One?" The Gemara answers that in this world we make the blessing "...dayan ha'emes [the True Judge]" on bad news and the blessing "ha'tov v'ham'ey'tiv [the Good and the Doer of Good]" on good news. However, in the Future World we will make "ha'tov v'ham'ey'tiv" on everything.

Rash"i explains that in the future there will be no bad news because then we will understand that even the bad is good. In the future, the paradox of "Tzadik v'ra lo" will no longer exist. Therefore, in the future we will be able to hear the reason for Parah Adumah, because by then we will have learned our lesson.

There is a fascinating Shibolei HaLeket which the Magen Avraham cites in Chapter 580. He writes "concerning the tragedy which happened, because of our multitude of sins, in our day 5004 (1244 c.e.) in which 24 containers of Sifrei Torah, Neviim, Medrashim, Gemaras were publicly burnt..." When did this occur? "...on Friday of the week in which the Torah portion was 'This is the Chok of the Torah...' (Chukas)".

The Yahrtzeit of that terrible burning was the Erev Shabbos of ParshasChukas. The Shibolei HaLeket states (brought by the Magen Avraham) that some individuals have the custom to fast on Friday of Parshas Chukas as an atonement and a memorial to that terrible tragedy. The Shibolei HaLeket asks, why was the calendar date of this tragedy not preserved? How many days into Tammuz did it occur? Normally, Fast Days are associated with the calendar -- the 17th of Tammuz, the 9th of Av, the 3rd of Tishrei, etc. We've never heard of a Fast Day pegged to a day of the week!

The Shibolei HaLeket says they asked in dream and were told that the Fast Day commemorating this event had to be pegged to the Erev Shabbos of Parshas Chukas. This tragic event is connected to reading of Parshas Chukas. This tragic event, the paradox of Sifrei Torah being burnt, which makes no sense, whatsoever, has nothing to do with a date. It has to do with Parshas Chukas.

The lesson is that there are things which we will never understand -- Sifrei Torah being burnt... or Jews being burnt ... or Tzadikim suffering. That is why this Fast Day is pegged to Parshas Chukas.

Glossary

chok -- a mitzvah that seemingly has no reason for it

me'taher -- to make ritually pure

tameh (meis) -- ritual impurity (resulting from contact with dead)

tahor -- ritually pure

Chumash -- Five Books of Moses (from the word 'chamesh' -- five)

Kodshim Kalim -- (Food) entities having a lesser level of sanctity (than certain other entities that could only be eaten within the Temple Courtyard)

Ma'aser -- Tithes

Kohen -- Priest (in charge of Red Heifer ritual)

Nevi'im -- (books of the) Prophets

Yahrtzeit -- anniversary of a sad event (usually a death)

Tzadik(im) -- Righteous (plural)

v'ra lo -- and it's bad for him (i.e. -- they suffer)

Rasha -- Wicked

v'tov lo -- and it's good for him

Personalities & Sources: Shibalei HaLeket -- Halachic compendium by R. Tzidkiyah HaRofei of Rome (c. 1230-c.1300)

Magen Avrohom -- R. Avraham Gombiner (1634-1682) of Kalisch, Poland; name of his basic commentary on Shulchan Aruch -- Orach Chaim.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Baltimore, Maryland.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion Chukas / Balak (#107). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: #107 is: Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva -- Do Sons Inherit? The other halachic portions for Parshas Chukas / Balak from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

- Tape # 018 - Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim
- Tape # 063 - Intermarriage
- Tape # 152 - Halachic Considerations of Transplanted Organs
- Tape # 153 - Matrilineal Vs Patrilineal Descent in Determining Jewish Identity
- Tape # 199 - Stam Yeinam: Non Kosher Wines
- Tape # 200 - Reading Someone's Mail and Other Privacy Issues
- Tape # 245 - Skin Grafts
- Tape # 289 - Use of Unethical Medical Research

- Tape # 290 - Pas Akum
- Tape # 335 - Postponing a Funeral
- Tape # 379 - The Jewish "Shabbos Goy"
- Tape # 380 - Bishul Akum I

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

Yad Yechiel Institute

PO Box 511

Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511

Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through Project Genesis On-Line Bookstore: <http://books.torah.org/>
