

BEGINNINGS ARE IMPORTANT / THE MON KEPT US CONNECTED TO HASHEM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #951 – The Body Works Exhibit Good Shabbos!

Beginnings Are Important

Parshas Chukas deals with the laws of the *Parah Adumah* [Red Heifer]. "You shall give it (the *Parah Adumah*) to Elazar the Kohen; he shall take it outside the camp and someone shall slaughter it in his presence." [Bamidbar 19:3]. The *Parah Adumah* required slaughtering, as would any other sacrificial animal. Subsequently, they burnt it and gathered the ashes. The process of purification from *Tumas Mes* (impurity resulting from contact with death) involves sprinkling water mixed with the resultant ashes upon the impure person.

Today, in the absence of the ashes of a *Parah Adumah*, we all have the status of *Tameh Mes*. As the Ramban writes in this week's *parsha*, "We will not be able to purify ourselves from *Tumas Mes* until the coming of our righteous Mashiach, may he come speedily in our days."

Targum Yonason shares a very interesting comment on the above quoted *pasuk* "and someone shall slaughter it in his presence". The Targum Yonason writes that when the Kohen slaughters the *Parah Adumah*, before proceeding with the burning of the slaughtered animal, he must first check to verify that the animal was not suffering from any of the 18 physical conditions that render an animal *treife* [non-kosher; literally 'torn']. The *Mishna* [Chullin 3:1] lists 18 types of bruises, blemishes, diseases, or injuries that render an animal *treife*. Today, other than inspecting for holes in the lungs we do not check for the other physical ailments listed in the *Mishna*. We rely on the halachic principle of *rov* [majority] to presume that the animal is kosher (assuming there are not any problems with the lungs).

This comment of Yonason ben Uziel seems problematic because the Talmud states just the opposite. In fact, the Gemara [Chullin 11a] derives the halachic principle of relying on majority from the very fact that they relied on this practice to assume the kosher status of the slaughtered *Parah Adumah*! This seems to contradict the Targum Yonason, who says they did not rely on *rov* but rather checked for all 18 potential *treifos* with the *Parah Adumah*!

I saw in a sefer that this is not a contradiction. Targum Yonason ben Uziel only means to say that when they slaughtered the very first *Parah Adumah* in the Wilderness, they needed to check it completely for the 18 *treifos*, but in subsequent generations, when they made other *Parah Adumas*, they did not need to check because they relied on the principle of *rov*. The Gemara in Chulin is speaking about all the other *Parah Adumas* throughout the generations; the Targum is only speaking only about the very first *Parah Adumah*, which was slaughtered in front of Elazar *HaKohen*.

However, what is the difference?

We are in the month of July; it is still before the 17th of Tamuz. We are thus now in the prime wedding season, which correspondingly means we are in prime "*Sheva Brochos* season". There are *Bar Mitzvos* throughout the year. The following is a great insight for anyone who has to speak at a *Sheva Brochos* or a *Bar Mitzvah* or a *Chanukas HaBayis* [new house dedication] or any other major milestone marking a new status in life.

The significance of the teaching of the Targum Yonoson ben Uziel is profound. Why did they need to check the very first *Parah Adumah* comprehensively to make sure it was 100% kosher? It is because beginnings are very important. The first time someone does something sets the tone for all subsequent iterations of that activity. This is why, for instance, the Torah says that when a person gets married "he shall be 'home free' for one year to make his wife happy" [Devorim 24:5]. There is a special *halacha* in the Torah called "*Shanah Rishona*" [the first year of marriage]. That is why it is a prevalent custom – and I think it is a good custom – that many people (even though they may have no intention of learning full time for an extended period) start off a marriage, the first year at least, with the husband learning in Kolel for a year. Beginnings are important.

That is also why it is very important to make a *Bar Mitzvah* correctly. I saw an interesting custom in the *sefer Yalkut Yehudah*. Typically, at a *Bar Mitzvah Seudas Mitzvah* [the festive meal on the day of a boy's 13th birthday] the *Bar Mitzvah* boy leads the *Birkas HaMazon* [Grace after Meals or "*bentching*". In a sense, this is "his first mitzvah". Until now, he could not lead the *bentching*. This is his first opportunity to do so, and he takes advantage of that opportunity. The practice is that a formal *bentching* is done "*al ha'Kos*", over a glass of wine. The person who "leads the *bentching*" recites the *Borei Pri HaGofen* - blessing on the cup of wine, at the conclusion of the *Birkas HaMazon*. The *halacha* only requires the person leading *Birkas HaMazon* to take a single sip of the wine after reciting the *Borei Pri HaGofen*. The Belzer Rebbe, zt"l (R. Aharon of Belz), however, had the custom that when a Bar Mitzvah boy led the *bentching* on his Bar Mitzvah for the first time, he would insist that the boy drink the entire glass of wine. He should do it right! This is his first *bentching*. Let him do it in the optimal fashion.

Beginnings are very important. They are the foundation of everything that follows – be it the beginning of a marriage, the beginning of a life of *mitzvos*, or beginning of the institution of *Parah Adumah*. Whatever it is, beginnings are always important and they should be treated as such.

We Want Money In The Bank and Food In The Freezer

The second insight I would like to share also involves an interpretation of a comment from the Targum Yonoson ben Uziel, again brought down in the *sefer Yalkut Yehudah* from Rabbi Yehudah Jacobowitz of Lakewood.

Later in the *parsha*, the *pasuk* says, "They journeyed from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds to go around the land of Edom, and the spirit of the people grew short with the road. The people spoke against G-d and Moses: 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this wilderness? For there is no food and there is no water, and our soul is at its limit with the insubstantial food.'" [Bamidbar 21:4-5]. The people became agitated. They complained about the journey, about their thirst and about their hunger. Specifically, they complained that they were sick and tired of the *mon* (*nafsheinu katzah b'lechem haklokel*).

This is an old complaint. It already appeared in *Parshas B'Shalach* and then again in *Parshas B'Ha'Aloscha* and now again in *Parshas Chukas*. They are complaining about the *mon*. The *pasuk* continues: "G-d sent the snakes, the burning ones, against the people and they bit the people; and a large multitude of Israel died." [Bamidbar 21:6]. Why did the Almighty choose to punish the people with snakes for this particular sin? Various plagues took place throughout the sojourn in the desert. Why did the Almighty specifically send snakes on this occasion to demonstrate His wrath with the people?

Targum Yonoson ben Uziel writes that G-d told the Jews that when he took them out of Egypt, he gave them *mon* from Heaven; and they complained about that. Yet the snake must eat dust every single day of its existence [Bereshis 3:14] and yet it does not complain. Let the snakes that eat dust and do not complain come and punish my nation Israel who complains about their *mon* from Heaven.

There could be an even deeper message here. The Alshich, among other commentaries, writes that the reason Israel complained so much about the *mon* had nothing to do with its taste. Chazal say the *mon* tasted like anything a person wished. Their issue with the *mon* was that they could only procure a day's supply at a time. They could not order a year's supply of it, or even a month's supply, or even a week's supply. It is much more reassuring to receive a salary monthly, bi-weekly, weekly, etc. However, a day worker who must worry each day -- am I going to be paid today or am I not going to be paid today? -- such a worker has aggravation.

The people complained, "We don't like the system". We do not like having to being paid every single day. It makes us too dependent. We go to bed every night with empty cupboards and wonder -- will there be *mon* tomorrow? Who knows? We want money in the bank and food in the freezer.

Why in fact did G-d set up the system that way? The *Medrash* says that the *Ribono shel Olam* had an

agenda for setting up the system like that. The *Medrash* gives the analogy of a king who gave his son a year's worth of allowance. Throughout the entire year, the son never bothered having any contact with his father. After all, why did he need his father? His father is just an ATM machine! As long as the son had the money sitting in the bank, he had no need to have contact with his father. The *Medrash* says that the Almighty did not want such a relationship with His people. He wants to deal with us on a daily basis and He wants us to need to deal with Him on a daily basis. Therefore, the *mon* came a day's supply at a time, each and every morning.

Specifically this aspect of the *mon* that the Jewish people did not like was the very reason for the system. There is a purpose behind the system: You need to keep in touch. You need to know that you are dependent. "The eyes of all look to You with hope; and You give them their food in the proper time." [Tehillim 145:15].

This is how many commentaries explain the difference between the curse of Adam and Chava on the one hand and the curse of the snake on the other hand. After the sin of Adam and Chava, G-d told Man "by the sweat of your brow you will eat bread" [Bereshis 3:19]. You need to work for a living. Chava was cursed "in pain you shall bear children" [Bereshis 3:16]. However, the curse to the snake was "Dust shall you eat all the days of your life." [Bereshis 3:14]. The world asks – what kind of curse is this? The serpent has it good. Dust is very plentiful. He will never be lacking what to eat.

The answer is, no, the serpent has a terrible fate. Adam must work for his living so he must keep in touch with the Almighty. He must have an ongoing relationship with Him. Every day he must go out and work for a living. He does not know if it will come or when it will come. This is a curse, but it is a curse with a hidden blessing. A woman must endure the difficulties and pain of pregnancy and childbirth. It is a curse, but it is a curse with a blessing attached because during the entire period that a woman is pregnant – as we all know – she must pray, she must beseech the Almighty that her child be healthy. She must "keep in touch". The real curse is "you shall eat dust all the days of your life." No relationship to G-d. There is always dust. You will always have what to eat. We think it is great. It is not great because there is then no relationship.

That is the message of the attacking serpents to *Klal Yisrael* after they complained about the *mon*. "You are complaining that you need to get the *mon* every single day? I know better! I eat dust every day of my life. I have no relationship with my Creator. This is not a blessing. It is a curse. Therefore, of all the creatures that the Almighty could have plagued them with, it was the snake – as the Targum Yonoson ben Uziel says – who knows what it means to have food constantly available. The snake is the one who is going to inflict punishment on *Klal Yisrael* for complaining about the *mon*.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chukas is provided below:

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