

PARSHAS CHUKAS

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

Although the Torah is not a history book, nevertheless, it is difficult to understand why the law of the Red Heifer, Parah Aduma, was delayed for almost 40 years. We know that the first Red Heifer was sacrificed at the time of the erection of the Tabernacle in the first month of the second year of the Exodus from Egypt. There are numerous spiritual and religious reasons for the delay, but we will see why this law appears now, just prior to the entry of the Tribes of Israel into the Promised Land.

Just as there is a fundamental difference between Love of G-d and Fear of Him, so there is a distinction between the study of Torah and the observance of its mitzvot. We honor a king when we examine, study and strive to understand his laws and policies. So, in our Ahavat HaShem it is fitting and correct that we study Torah and search for an understanding of the mitzvot, so as to draw closer to Him and glorify Him. However, fear of the king and acceptance of his rule, need to be in contrast to this. His subjects do his will and obey him, without question. So too, the observance of the mitzvot, G-d's will, must be carried out in perfect faith, without any analysis or search for a reason. We do the mitzvot whether we understand the reason for them or even when we do not; even when we do understand, nevertheless we observe them only because this is the will of the King. 'Why do we sound the Shofar? Because He commanded it' (Rosh Hashanah 16b). 'The one who is commanded is greater than one who is not'. When actions are done because they are obligatory, it shows greater devotion to HaShem and fear of Him than the same thing done without a command. The latter is simply implementing our own feelings, wisdom or wills.

HaShem gave us mitzvot that are divided into Eiduyot [memorials of events, like the Exodus from Egypt on Pesach], Mishpatim [social laws] and Chukim [ordinances]. They constitute one entity and are indivisible yet each of them makes their own special contribution to our kedusha, Divine worship and behavior. It is an error to see the ordinances as commandments that have no reason; this would make G-d an arbitrary and capricious lawgiver. What is true is that the reason is hidden from human intelligence, so that in their observance, the Chukim are simple and faithful obedience. While there are other ordinances in the Torah such as shaatnez, kilaim and kashrut, these are radically different from the Parah Adumah. It is the only chok, that contains in itself two contradictory features; its ashes purify a person who is tamei, yet at the same time, a pure person becomes tamei. Since Moshe has prophecy and spiritual levels that are unique and radically different from all the other prophets, only to him was given the understanding of the Red Heifer.

Because the commandment of the Parah Adumah is the most outstanding of all the ordinances, it is the most suitable vehicle for teaching the simple, perfect and unquestioning faith needed for religious observance. It is this vehicle that is essential for possession of Eretz Yisrael and therefore its laws were postponed till the entry into that Land began.

The Land of Israel is upon the earth, like the Kingdom of Heaven above. Possession of the Land of Israel needs therefore to be done in perfect faith and without question or analysis. The very promise of the Land was made to Avraham because of his pure, simple and unquestioning actions. When he is commanded to go to another land, there is no mention of which land or how it is to be recognized; yet he and Sarah leave their homes to fulfill the Divine wish. Before the final covenant regarding the Land, sealed with the commandment of the Brit Milah, he is told, 'Conduct [lit. walk] yourself before My Presence and be thou 'tamim' perfect'.

The Spies, however, did not conduct themselves according to this Abrahamic trait. They wished to see, examine and evaluate the nature of this Promised Land and the feasibility and the risk of their entry into it. They were unable to carry out the Royal command in simple and unquestioning faith, so they forfeited the Land. Now 40 years later, a new generation stands poised to enter the Promised Land and a special educational and spiritual message is required to enable them to take possession of this land in perfect faith. So the ordinance of the Red Heifer was now given to them.

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Dr. Tamari is a renowned economist, Jewish scholar, and founder of the Center For Business Ethics (www.besr.org) in Jerusalem.