

PARSHAS CHUKAS: UNDERSTANDING THE LAW

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

The halachos (laws) of the Parah Adumah (the Red Cow) are introduced to us as a *âchukim*', the type of mitzvah whose reason is hidden from our understanding. The Parah Adumah is often used as the defining example of a *chok*. In fact, Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men, alluded to the difficulty in understanding these halachos with the stirring words, "Amarti achkimah, v'hi rechokah memeni; I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me." (Koheles 7:23).

One of the aspects of the Parah Adumah that is difficult to understand is the fact that it is *âmetaher temeim* and *metamei tehorim*' (purifies those who are ritually impure, while making *tamei* those involved in the process of *taharah*). However, aside from this particular halachic component of the Parah Adumah, there is a great deal that we do understand about the Parah Adumah.

SOME INSIGHTS

Rashi (Bamidbar 19:22) quoting the Midrash, explains that the Parah (a fully-grown cow) was offered to repent for the *egel hazhav* (which was a calf); similar to a mother who was called into a palace to remove stains left by her child. Rashi (19:22) offers additional insight into several aspects of the Parah Adumah.

- * The Jews needed to contribute to the cost of the Parah to do *teshuvah* for the fact that they eagerly rushed forward to donate their jewelry when the *egel* was formed.
- * The Parah was red to remind the Jews of their sin (see Yeshaya 1:18)
- * The Jews removed the *âyoke* of Hashem' when serving the *egel*; therefore the Parah was not permitted to have ever been under a yoke (see Rashi and Midrash for other pointers)

WHY, THEN THE TERM *âCHOK*'?

The Beis Halevi points out these comments of Rashi and wonders why, then, is the Parah Adumah listed as the quintessential *âchok*'? We have a clear message that the Parah is being offered as repentance for the *Egel*. That is quite logical. Why is this *mizvah* listed as a *âchok*'?

He follows this with a more powerful question. Why does it say a general term, "*Zos chukkas HaTorah*; this is a *chok* of the Torah (Bamidbar 19:2)?" It should say that this is the *chok* of the Parah Adumah? The general term *chukkas haTorah* seems to imply that this is the *chok* of all of the Torah. What is the deeper meaning behind the Parah Adumah, and why does it occupy such a prominent role as the defining *chok* of the Torah, he asks.

A PROFOUND MESSAGE

The Beis Halevi answers these questions by offering a profound understanding of Hashem's mitzvos - His legacy to the B'nei Yisroel.

Hashem created the world - the heavens and the earth. Each mitzvah that a Jew performs brings meaning to Hashem's world and fulfillment to creation. What if one could understand the workings of Hashem, asks the Beis Halevi? Could he construct his own mitzvos? Surely not!! The Beis Halevi maintains that this type of flawed thinking resulted in the sin of the egel. When the Jews thought that Moshe did not return from Heaven, they wished to create their own intermediary to Him - with tragic results. Their goal was well-intentioned, but their desire to create their own intermediary resulted in many other deviations from the path of Hashem.

REPENTING - AND GROWING

Therefore, the perfect teshuvah (repentance) for the egel, which resulted from well-intentioned deviation from the commands of Hashem, was for the Jews to perform a mitzvah whose reasons are so hidden from us. The Beis Halevi points out that all the comments of the Midrash note similarities of the Parah Adumah to the egel - but do not offer us insight into the mitzvah itself!

This is perhaps what Shlomo Hamelech alluded to. "I wished to become wise (and understand the meaning of the mitzvos), but it is beyond me." Shlomo realized from the example of the parah adumah and its connection to the sin of the egel, that although we can and should delve into the meaning of the mitzvos, we can never think that we are able to tinker with their applications.

This would explain the phrase "Zos chukah haTorah" - for in fact, this is an overarching theme of the entire Torah. We accept all the mitzvos of Hashem - some are understood on some levels, and some are hidden from us.

All must be followed as we seek to become worthy of our role as Hashem's Chosen People.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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