



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Chukas

July 8, 2022

A Taste of Torah His Loving Decrees

by Rabbi Yisrael Kellner

This week's parsha begins with the mitzvah of *Para Aduma*, the Red Heifer. The Torah refers to this mitzvah as "the *chok* (decree) of the Torah. (Chukas 19:2)" The Medrash explains that a *chok* is defined as a mitzvah whose reasoning we do not understand, and *Parah Aduma* fits this description. In fact, when Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) says (Koheles 7:23), "I thought I could become wise, but it is beyond me," our Sages teach that Shlomo was referring to the mitzvah of *Para Aduma*. The aspect that is beyond comprehension is the paradoxical fact that when the ashes of the *Para Aduma* are mixed with water and sprinkled upon a person who is *tamei* (spiritually impure) due to contact with a deceased human body, the person sprinkling becomes *tamei* while the person upon whom the water is sprinkled is purified.

The Medrash further says that Hashem did, in fact, reveal the reasoning behind the mitzvah to Moshe, and at the time of the Final Redemption, Hashem will reveal the reason to all. The question is, why did Hashem hide the reason specifically for this mitzvah from everyone but Moshe? Furthermore, why does the Torah define this mitzvah as "the *chok* of the Torah" more than any other *chok*?

Rashi cites a Medrash that teaches that this mitzvah of the *Para Aduma* was, in fact, an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, but we have to understand the connection between that terrible sin and this mitzvah. Rabbi Yosef Salant (1885-1981) in his work *Be'er Yosef* asks further that the first time this mitzvah was performed in the desert, the commandment was that Elazar, son of the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) Aharon, was to do it. If this mitzvah was an atonement for the Golden Calf, why didn't Aharon himself do it, since he was the one who actually made the Golden Calf? Furthermore, wonders the Ramban, the process of offering any future *Para Aduma* was to be done by the *Kohen Gadol* himself; why was this first one offered by the son of

the *Kohen Gadol*?

Rabbi Salant offers an insight which provides a basis to answer these questions. Rabbi Salant explains that this idea of Hashem concealing the understanding of a mitzvah is to encourage us to perform the commandments simply to fulfill Hashem's will and not because we understand them. This is the ultimate goal of mitzvah performance, but this idea applies not only to mitzvos but also to any situation that we encounter in life - to accept the circumstances fully without any understanding or explanation as to why this is occurring. The *Orchos Tzadikim* writes that if we view Hashem as our loving Father, and that He truly loves us and is interested only in our good, then it won't be difficult to accept His decrees without understanding them, whether in the realm of mitzvos or situations we may find ourselves in, for we know that it must be good for us.

This, says Rabbi Salant, is why the Torah gave us this decree of *Para Aduma* - to help us gain this awareness and state of mind. He continues that *Para Aduma* is needed when one needs to purify after becoming *tamei* through contact with a dead person. This usually occurs after burying a family member or friend, and often involves additional purification of the vessels that became *tamei* through contact with the body. Hashem arranged this because when a loved one passes, there is a lot of room for questioning Hashem's ways. It is precisely during this challenging time that the Torah seeks to ingrain in a person this concept that all of Hashem's ways are just and perfect and are done with love, care and concern for our wellbeing.

With this explanation, we can understand how this *chok* is an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The underlying issue that led to the Golden Calf was the Nation's unwillingness to accept the situation Hashem had placed them in,

Stories for the Soul

To the Point of Death

Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch (1894-1955) was in the United States in 1940 on a mission to prepare for the emigration of the Telshe Yeshiva of Lithuania to the United States when the Nazis occupied Vilna and wiped out the entire Jewish populace of Telshe. He and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Katz, remained in America, and they founded the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio in 1941.

Despite being extremely busy with running the yeshiva, Rabbi Bloch maintained strict times for his own learning, which were inviolable except for emergencies. There was one practice he accepted upon himself (known as a *kabbalah*) under all circumstances - to study Torah for at least an hour a day.

During his final illness, he was hospitalized. Following his last major operation, he was critically ill, with tubes attached to various parts of his body. He could not move and he could hardly talk. Family members and students were with him in the hospital. The second night following the surgery, he struggled to utter a single word to the man who was there with him: "*Lernen* (learning)."

The man opened a *chumash* and recited the Torah portion of that week along with Rashi's commentary. From time to time, Rabbi Bloch's eyes would turn to the clock on the wall. When a half hour had gone by, he said, "*Genug* (enough)." Extremely fatigued, he closed his eyes. Some time later, he looked at the clock, and again said "*Lernen*." Once again, the man recited the Torah portion with Rashi. After another half hour, Rabbi Bloch said, "*Genug*," with a smile of satisfaction. He had completed his

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Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION LIVE & LEARN LEARNING PROGRAM AT THE WEST DENVER KOLLEL TORAH CENTER

The Live & Learn Learning Program for seniors is held Tuesdays at the West Denver Kollel Torah Center. Coffee and pastries at 10:30 am, two classes of 45 minutes each from 10:40-12:15 (including 5 minute break between classes), and lunch (including take-home option) at 12:15. For more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Tuesday nights on Zoom, 8:15-9 pm, for men and women.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

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Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: When is cold water halachically preferable to warm water?

Answer: When washing *mayim acharonim*. According to the Maharshal, one is supposed to use cold water, not warm water, for washing *mayim acharonim*. Other opinions, however, say warm water is okay,

but not hot water. The Mishna Berura (181:7) says that one may use warm water if no cold water is available.

This week's question: Why would a person's sensitivity to being dirty halachically require hand washing?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part LIV

Rabbi Shapiro's creditor, the Bank of Poland, had insisted he take out a life insurance policy, which could cover his debts in the event of his passing. Rabbi

Shapiro took out a very large policy from Prudential Life Insurance for 200,000 zlotys - a value of well over \$10,000,000 in today's monetary value.

A Taste of Torah

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instead responding to a crisis based on their own intellectual perception of what needed to be done. They believed Moshe to be dead, so they sought a replacement for him. This came in the form of a Golden Calf, even though they had been commanded not to create any image under any circumstances without the express command of Hashem.

By following the *chok* of *Para Adumah* despite our lack of understanding, we are in fact rectifying that specific sin by following Hashem's decree totally free of our intellectual involvement, relying instead on Hashem's compassion and love and concern. This also explains why we will be able to understand the reason behind this *chok* at the time of the Final Redemption, because at that time, we will no longer need this lesson and we will have this clarity of Hashem's ways without it.

This is why *Para Adumah* is referred to as "the decree of the Torah," because this approach is, in reality, necessary for all the Torah's commandments. All mitzvos should be

fulfilled out of our total reliance on Hashem and our love for him, and not based upon our understanding of them.

With this idea, Rabbi Salant explains why Aharon wasn't the one to perform this procedure, even though in the future generations it was done by the *Kohen Gadol*. The entire concept of accepting Hashem's will without questioning it was already mastered by Aharon when his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, died on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), and he was in total acceptance of Hashem's will. It was therefore preferable that his son Elazar be the one to internalize this lesson through offerign the *Para Aduma*.

When we realize and feel Hashem's loving kindness, then we will be in total acceptance and be able to retain total calmness when something occurs in our lives that we can't understand. Every occurrence that we encounter in life is also a *chok*, a decree from Hashem, and it must therefore emanate from His intense love for us.

Stories for the Soul

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hour of learning.

The first verse in this week's parsha says, "This is the statute of the Torah - a man who will die in a tent." (Bamidbar 19:2) Our Sages interpret this verse homiletically to refer to the tents of Torah, and explain

that one's devotion to Torah study must extend to the point that he gives his life for it. Not that one must necessarily endanger oneself for the study of Torah, but the Torah teaches us how integral Torah study is in the life of a Jew.

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