

# חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

## Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

by Dr. Joseph Geliebter

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### Parashas Chukas

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#### I

זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל־בני ישראל ויקחו אליך  
פרה אדמה תמימה...

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: "This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem has commanded, saying: 'Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and let them take for you a completely red heifer...' (Bamidbar 19:1-2)

Rashi comments: "This is the decree of the Torah: because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish people, saying, 'What is this mitzvah, and what reason is there for it?' Therefore, the Torah writes concerning it that it is a *chok* (decree): 'It is a decree from before Me, and you have no permission to question it.'"

Several questions arise. Why was this mitzvah addressed both to Moshe and to Aharon? Why does this section appear immediately after Parashas Korach? Why is such forceful language used: "*Gezeirah hee milfanai, ein lecha reshus l'harher achareha*"—"It is a decree from before Me, and you have no permission to question it"? This language recalls the wording found in *Eileh Ezkerah* (a prayer) in the Mussaf (Amidah) of Yom Kippur concerning the *Asarah Harugei Malchus* (Ten Holy Martyrs). The Seraphim cry out: "Is this Torah and is this its

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reward?” and the response from Heaven comes in identical language: “*Gezeirah hee milfanai*” – “It is a decree from before Me.” Additional questions arise concerning the placement of this mitzvah. The introduction states: “This is the decree of the Torah,” not merely of the Parah Adumah, but seemingly of all the *chukim*. Why is this lesson taught specifically here? Furthermore, the Parah Adumah was needed earlier, in order to purify those who had become *tamei meis* (ritually impure through contact with a human corpse) so that they could bring the Korban Pesach (Paschal Offering) in the second year after *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Why, then, was it recorded here, later in *Sefer Bamidbar*?

#### **The connection between the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer), Parashas Korach, and the attributes of the kehunah**

I would like to connect this with the teaching of the *Sfas Emes* on Parashas Korach that we cited earlier. He explains that the dispute revolved around which *middah* should govern the kehunah. Korach argued

that the attribute of strict *din* (justice, discipline) alone was the proper approach. Aharon HaKohen maintained that *chesed* (kindness) is essential to the kehunah. Ultimately, Aharon was chosen as the true Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Yet could Aharon also lead through the attribute of strict *din* when circumstances required it? At times Hakadosh Baruch Hu conducts the world through *middas hadin*. Accepting Divine judgment with complete *emunah*, as one accepts a *chok*, means embracing the principle of “*gezeirah hee milfanai*”, accepting without questions with simple faith alone.

The Chizkuni explains that the words “This is the decree of the Torah” and the mitzvah of Parah Adumah were actually given earlier, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, when the Mishkan was first erected, so that the people could become purified in time to bring the Korban Pesach. However, the section was recorded here because there were those who became defiled through contact with the dead following the dispute of Korach.

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We thus discover that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah was given on the very day the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was inaugurated. On that day Aharon began serving as Kohen Gadol, and on that same day his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, died within the Mishkan itself through an act of closeness to Hashem that had not been commanded. How did Aharon respond? "וַיִּדַם אַהֲרֹן" *And Aharon was silent.*"

He accepted the principle of "*gezeirah hee milfanai*," you have no permission to question it. He accepted the decree without questions and without complaint. He recited "*Baruch Dayan Ha'Emes*" ("Blessed is the True Judge") and continued his avodah (Divine service). In doing so, he demonstrated that he could lead not only through *middas hachesed* but also through *middas hadin*. Aharon was capable of accepting Divine judgment as a *chok*, without questioning it. In my humble opinion, this may explain why the Torah includes Aharon in the command: "וַיִּדְבֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר זֹאת הַקֶּזֶת הַתּוֹרָה" *And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to*

Aharon, saying: "This is the decree of the Torah." Aharon is the symbol of accepting *din* in the manner of a *chok*, a decree from before Hashem that one does not question.

### **The secret of the Parah Adumah as corresponding to the attribute of *din***

Why was the mitzvah of Parah Adumah chosen as the paradigm of a *chok*? Because it purifies from *tumas meis*, and every death stems from the attribute of *din*, "*gezeirah hi milfanai*." The process of purification from contact with death must likewise be wrapped up in the form of a *chok*, accepted without question. Just as the decree of death itself must be accepted with simple faith, so too the purification from its impurity must be approached with that same complete faith. This also explains why this section follows immediately after Parashas Korach. Hashem testifies that Aharon is worthy of leading the kehunah. It is prophetic that this *chok* was given on the day the Mishkan was erected, the very day that Aharon was installed as Kohen Gadol,

and immediately before he faced the great test of faith that proved his fitness: וַיִּדָּם אֶהָרֹן "And Aharon was silent."

### **The symbol for future generations**

Aharon is the true Kohen Gadol, both for his generation and as an example for all generations. He teaches us how to live with simple faith, to conduct our lives with *chesed* and *rachamim* (compassion), and also with acceptance of *din* when necessary, reflecting the *tiferes* of Yaakov Avinu needed to withstand all the challenges of *galus* (exile). Aharon appointed Elazar to burn the first Parah Adumah. Its ashes lasted until the end of the era of the First Beis HaMikdash. We can see the power of the hidden secrets within the *chok* of the Parah Adumah through the miraculous preservation of its ashes, similar to the flask of *Shemen HaMishchah* (Holy Anointing Oil) and the jar of *Mahn* (Manna). These allude to the hidden miracles that protect us during exile. Even when we stand before difficult decrees – "*gezeirah hee milfanai*" – we accept them without questioning them. And if Hashem wills it, in the merit of our complete

faith, He will send us Moshiach, speedily in our days, Amen.



## **II**

### **The secret of Bnei Yisrael accepting the Torah with the declaration of Naaseh v'Nishma**

The concept of a *chok*, which points to the virtue of the Jewish people's submission to the Torah, their accepting of a mitzvah even without understanding its reason – recalls the acceptance of the entire Torah at the time of *Mattan Torah* (the Giving of the Torah at Sinai), when Bnei Yisrael accepted all of its mitzvos without demanding details or explanations first. At *Mattan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael declared, "*Naaseh v'Nishma*," "We will do and we will hear." The emphasis lies in the fact that they placed *naaseh* before *nishma*. Through this they merited two crowns, corresponding to *naaseh* and *nishma*, as Chazal teach: "Rabbi Simai expounded: 'At the moment when Bnei Yisrael placed *naaseh* before *nishma*, six hundred thousand ministering angels came; for each and every Jew

they tied two crowns, one corresponding to *naaseh* and one corresponding to *nishma*" (*Shabbos* 88a).

### **The significance of the crowns corresponding to Naaseh v'Nishma**

This requires explanation. It is understandable why *naaseh* is so praiseworthy, for it represents accepting upon oneself to fulfill whatever is written in the Torah, whether one understands it or not, and without any conditions. But what is the special virtue of *nishma* after we have already accepted the Torah unconditionally?

It appears to me that *naaseh* extends to the *nishma* as well. In other words, our desire to understand and comprehend is itself only for the sake of fulfilling His will. We seek to contemplate His wisdom and internalize the Torah's teachings and values solely in order to draw ever closer to Him. This also explains why we received crowns as a *middah k'neged middah* for placing *naaseh* before *nishma*. A crown rests above the head, meaning above the intellect. Thus, the crown corresponds to *emunah*, faith, which transcends intellect. It is

easy to understand why we deserved a crown for *naaseh*, since we accepted the Torah with simple faith, in the spirit of "*Tumas yesharim tanchem*," "The integrity of the upright guides them" (Mishlei 11:3; see also Shabbos 88b). And in light of our explanation, it is equally clear why we deserved a crown even for *nishma*—for our entire goal in understanding, contemplating, and internalizing is not for our own benefit, but solely in order to fulfill the will of our Father in Heaven and to serve Him with the fullness of our intellect, in the spirit of "*Da es Elokei avicha v'ovdeihu*," "Know the G-d of your father and serve Him." Our pursuit of understanding is therefore not self-serving at all.

**Acceptance of the *chukim*: the revelation that even our *nishma* is in the category of *naaseh***

And this where the great *tikkun* (rectification) of "*Chukas HaTorah*" (the "*Decree of the Torah*" ) comes into play, namely, a mitzvah such as Parah Adumah, which is singled out by the halachah (Torah law) of אָדָם כִּי יָמוּת כִּי יָאָהֵל "when a man dies in

a tent," meaning that "a person should die (exert himself to the point of death) over the words of Torah." This is a level of exertion that extends far beyond personal comfort or the pursuit of intellectual pleasure. Its purpose is solely to fulfill the will of Hashem *yisborach*. This is especially true when considering that this is a *chok*, where there is inherently a limit to what can be understood, with more hidden than revealed. Yet despite this, we toil in Torah no less, and with the same degree of love that as in the study of *mishpatim* (laws) whose reasons are readily understood. For such a *nishma*, one truly deserves a crown as well.

**The concept of the Parah Adumah serving as a rectification for the *chet ha'Eigel***

Based on this, we can understand the teaching Rashi brings down from Chazal that the Parah Adumah serves as a rectification for the *chet ha'Eigel* (sin of the Golden Calf): "Let the mother come and clean up the filth of her child."

As we have explained, at *Mattan Torah* we merited two crowns

because we placed *naaseh* before *nishma*, accepting the Torah with complete faith. Through the *chet ha'Eigel*, we lost those crowns due to the lack of faith expressed in that sin. But then when we joyfully accept and devote ourselves with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice; total devotion) to *chukim* such as the Parah Adumah, which transcend human understanding, we demonstrate our faith in the mitzvos, and even our *nishma* becomes a form of *naaseh*, for we labor to understand even that which lies beyond our grasp, not for our own sake, solely to bring *nachas ruach* (deep satisfaction) to our Creator, may He be blessed.



### III

**Halachic purity and spiritual purity**

It is well known that we read Parashas Parah as a preparation for Pesach. It serves as a warning to purify oneself from *tumas meis* in order to bring the Korban Pesach. The concept of *taharah* contains both its halachic dimension and its spiritual reality, which accompanies the *kapparah*

(atonement). When a person sins, *chas v'shalom* (Heaven forbid), even in a manner that does not render him halachically impure, he nevertheless contaminates his soul. And when he does *teshuvah* (repentance), he merits purification from that sin, as it is written regarding Yom Kippur: *לפני ה' תטהרו* "Before Hashem shall you be purified." In the words of the Mishnah at the end of *Maseches Yoma*: "Rabbi Akiva said: Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Before Whom do you become purified, and Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven! For it says, *וְזָרַקְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם מֵיִם טְהוֹרִים* 'And I shall sprinkle upon you pure water, and you shall be purified' (Yechezkel 36:25), and it says, *מִקְוֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל ה'* 'Hashem is the Mikveh of Yisrael' (Yirmiyahu 17:13). Just as a mikveh purifies the impure, so does Hakadosh Baruch Hu purify Yisrael." There, the Mishnah is certainly not referring to halachic purification, but rather to spiritual purification that comes together with *kapparah*.

### **Aspects of atonement and spiritual purification in the Parah Adumah**

It seems to me that this spiritual purification is strongly alluded to in the laws of Parah Adumah. This should not surprise us, for the Parah Adumah also serves as a *kapparah* for the terrible sin of the *Eigel HaZahav*, as Rashi says in Parashas Chukas (Bamidbar 19:2): "This may be compared to the son of a maidservant who soiled the king's palace. They said: Let his mother come and clean up the filth. So too, let the cow come and atone for the calf" (see also Rashi to Bamidbar 20:1, s.v. *Vatamas sham Miriam*).

In my humble opinion, the fact that the Parah Adumah is red, and that during its burning a *tola'as shani*, which is likewise red, is cast into the fire, may allude to two sins that brought death into the world: the *chet* of Adam HaRishon and the *chet ha'Eigel*. Through the burning process they become ashes, which are white, alluding to the verse: *אִם-יִהְיוּ חַטָּאֵיכֶם כַּשָּׁנִים כַּשָּׁלֵג יִלְבִּינוּ אִם-יִאָדִימוּ כַתּוֹלַע* "Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall become white as snow; though they be red

like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Yeshaya 1:18). This resembles what occurred on Yom Kippur, when the *lashon ha'zehoris* (crimson thread) tied to the horns of the *sa'ir hamishtale'ach* (scapegoat) turned white.

It may also be suggested that spiritual purification is alluded to by the fact that the Torah calls it "[Parah] *Adumah*" which brings to mind the word "*Adamah*," earth. This brings us back to an idea we have already noted in several places: a person, "*Adam*," who seeks purification must view himself as dust of the earth. By returning to his origin, "*yesodo mei'afar*" ("his foundation is from dust"), he becomes purified from spiritual impurity through humility and submission to Hashem. This accords with the principle that simple earth does not contract *tumah*.

### **The Seder night at the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus of Egypt) embodied the concept of "Mikveh Yisrael Hashem"**

With this we can resolve the following question: In all future generations, a Parah

Adumah is required in order to become purified from *tumas meis*; only then may one bring a Korban Pesach. Yet, at the Pesach of Yetzias Mitzrayim there was not yet a Parah Adumah, which means we were still in the forty-nine gates of impurity. How, then, were we able to offer the Korban Pesach in Mitzrayim? Granted, regarding halachic impurity, there is the principle that "*tumah hutrah b'tzibbur*" ("impurity is permitted in a public offering"). But that alone is insufficient, for there was another requirement that was not fulfilled: the offering was not brought in the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) but in Mitzrayim, the very "nakedness of the world!"

To explain all of this with one idea that addresses both issues, we may say that, as is well known, all the plagues were simultaneously "a blow to Egypt and a healing for Yisrael." If, during *Makkas Bechoros* (the Plague of the Firstborn), Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought death upon the Egyptians, then the corresponding healing for "*Bni bechori Yisrael*" was victory over death and over *tumas meis*. This

becomes especially clear in light of Chazal's exposition of the verse: וְעָבַרְתִּי בָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה... וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים "And I shall pass through the land of Egypt on this night... and upon all the gods of Egypt I shall execute judgments." Chazal expounded, as is recorded in the Haggadah, that this was carried out by Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself and not an angel, not a messenger, and not a seraph. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu was present there Himself, then His revealed Presence was no less than at the Beis HaMikdash itself. In this way, the Mishnah's statement was fulfilled literally: "Just as a mikveh purifies the impure, so too Hakadosh Baruch Hu purifies Yisrael." Hakadosh Baruch Hu bestowed purification upon Bnei Yisrael while they reclined for the Korban Pesach.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes in Parashas Bo (12:30):

"And Pharaoh arose at night." The reason the verse emphasizes 'at night' may be explained in accordance with the words of the

*Zohar* that that night shone like day, like midday. I suggested an allusion to this in the verse, "And you shall tell your son on that day" – meaning that in the "telling" (of the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim) you should include the miracle of the night becoming day. And lest one think that this light shone equally for the righteous and the wicked, the verse says, 'And Pharaoh arose at night.' When Pharaoh arose to summon Moshe and Aharon, Hashem withheld the light from that wicked one, and it was night, meaning darkness, as in the verse (Bereishis 1:5), "And the darkness He called night."

It appears that we have merited to arrive at the same conclusion as the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: the daylight-like illumination experienced by Bnei Yisrael on the night of Pesach Mitzrayim was none other than the

manifestation of the Shechinah, which purified Yisrael. (See also *Chamudei Shai* on the *Haggadah*, where we cited the Maharal Tzintz concerning the concept of *Leil Shimurim*.)

### **The significance of reading Parashas Parah today**

What is the significance of reading Parashas Parah today, when we are all *tamei meis*, immersed in impurity, and in need of a new purification in order to be prepared for Pesach and for *geulah* (redemption)? The answer is that we read it precisely for that reason. As is known, when one recites the sections of *korbanos* (sacrificial offerings) with proper intention it is considered as though he has offered those *korbanos*. So too, listening to the reading of Parashas Parah accomplishes a corresponding spiritual effect, enabling us to become purified for Pesach and prepared for the complete redemption. This is a special source of encouragement for us here in *galus*, when we are not in the Beis HaMikdash and not in Eretz HaKodesh (the Holy Land). We hear about the power of the

Parah Adumah, a mitzvah whose entire process is performed outside the Mikdash, and we draw strength from it, and we do not despair of attaining purification and being redeemed, speedily in our days, Amen!



## **IV**

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: קַח אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעֵדָה אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְדַבְּרָתֶם אֶל־הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְנָתַן מִיַּמּוֹ וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן־הַסֵּלַע וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת־הָעֵדָה וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם

*“And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: ‘Take the staff and assemble the congregation, you, and Aharon your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth its water. You shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give drink to the congregation and their livestock.’” (Bamidbar 20:7-8)*

This episode of Mei Merivah, occurring after forty years in the wilderness, had a profound impact on the destiny of Moshe and Aharon. The pivotal issue was the manner in which they understood Hashem’s command, and this ultimately determined their fate.

Both were punished by losing the privilege of entering Eretz Yisrael. The story of the striking of the rock is very complex and difficult to understand. Many questions arise from it, and many commentators throughout the generations have attempted to resolve its difficulties. I will attempt to outline an approach by first raising several questions and then answering them as best as possible. With Hashem’s help, this will help us understand this episode.

### **What was Aharon’s sin?**

Let us examine the incident itself. Following the Divine command, Moshe indeed took the staff, as instructed. The Torah then states: וַיִּקְהֵלוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַקְהָל אֶל־פְּנֵי הַסֵּלַע “Moshe and Aharon assembled the congregation before the rock.” Moshe then says to the congregation: שְׁמַעוּ־נָא הַמְּרִים הַמְּוֹדֵהֵם הֲזֵה נוֹצֵיא לָכֶם מַיִם “Listen now, you rebels.” “Shall we bring forth water for you from this rock?” Then: וַיִּךְ אֹתוֹ הַסֵּלַע בְּמַטְהוֹ פַּעַמַּיִם וַיֵּצְאוּ מַיִם רַבִּים “He struck the rock with his staff twice, and abundant water came forth.” The punishment was decreed because

Moshe did not fulfill Hashem's command to "speak to the rock before their eyes." He was supposed to speak to the rock rather than strike it. Had the water emerged through speech alone, the miracle would have been even more astonishing and would have produced a far greater *Kiddush Hashem* (Sanctification of Hashem's Name). As a result of this deviation from Hashem's instructions, both Moshe and Aharon lost the privilege of entering Eretz Yisrael.

The first question is: What was Aharon's role, and what exactly was his sin? It is easier to understand the punishment of Moshe, since he was the one who struck the rock with the staff. But why Aharon? Aharon did not participate directly in the act. He was not the direct recipient of Hashem's instruction to speak to the rock. The Torah states: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying." Why, then, did Aharon receive such a severe punishment?

### **What is the significance of the staff here?**

Another question is why Hashem commanded Moshe to take the staff in the first place. We find a similar event forty years earlier in Parashas Beshalach. Bnei Yisrael complained that they had no water, and Moshe was instructed to take his staff: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲבֹר לִפְנֵי הָעָם... וּמַטֵּה אֲשֶׁר־הָיִיתָ בְּיַדְךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ... וְהִפִּיתָ בַּצּוּר וַיִּצְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מֵיִם "And Hashem said to Moshe: Pass before the people... and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile... and you shall strike the rock, and water shall emerge from it." (Shemos 17:5-6). In Parashas Chukas, Moshe repeated what he had been instructed to do in Parashas Beshalach forty years earlier: take the staff and strike the rock before Bnei Yisrael. Water flowed then, and water flowed now. It is possible that when Hashem said "Take the staff" in our parashah, it reminded Moshe of that earlier event. He therefore used the staff as he had in the past, rather than speaking to the rock. This raises the question: Why did Hashem instruct Moshe to take the staff if

he was not supposed to use it in performing the miracle? What purpose did the staff serve here? From Moshe's perspective, until now the staff had always been the instrument through which miracles were performed. In Egypt he used the staff to show miraculous signs before Pharaoh, during the plagues, at Krias Yam Suf, and in bringing forth water from the rock forty years earlier.

### **The event at the rock paralleled Maamad Har Sinai**

Here is what the *Meshech Chochmah* says regarding our subject: "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desired that here, through speaking to the rock, Bnei Yisrael would witness the Divine speech emerging from the throat of Moshe, in whom the Shechina resides, and how it affects the rock. They would see that which is normally heard. This would strengthen their *emunah*, in a manner similar to the exalted revelation of Matan Torah.

The *Meshech Chochmah* teaches that Hashem intended a great revelation of the Shechinah at the end of the forty years, for the

benefit of the new generation that was about to enter Eretz Yisrael. They were meant to see with their own eyes the Shechinah speaking through Moshe Rabbeinu. They would literally *see the voice*, just as Bnei Yisrael *saw the sounds* at Maamad Har Sinai. This was intended to be a public revelation of the Shechinah, in the spirit of the great revelation at Sinai that served as a preparation for the *bris* (covenant) Hashem forged there with the Jewish nation. So too *this* revelation was meant to precede the covenant in Arvos Moav. Hashem desired that His servant Moshe display this revelation before all of Klal Yisrael. But since he did not do this, and instead he struck the rock, Moshe deprived the new generation, the generation destined to enter the Land, of this extraordinary encounter with the Ribbono Shel Olam (Master of the World).

### **Aharon's role in that event**

Yet the question remains: What about Aharon? What was his role in this event, and why was he punished? We see that immediately

after this episode Aharon is commanded to ascend Hor Hahar and transfer the *bigdei kehunah* (priestly garments) to Elazar, and there he passes away. The Torah explicitly states: יֵאָסֵף אֶהָרֶן אֶל-עַמּוּי כִּי לֹא יָבֹא אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-נִתְּתִי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל אֲשֶׁר-מָרִיתֶם אֶת-פִּי לְמִי מְרִיבָה "Aharon shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land that I have given to Bnei Yisrael, because you rebelled against My word at the waters of Merivah" (Bamidbar 20:24). It seems to me that Aharon was aware of Hashem's command, even though the instruction had been communicated directly to Moshe Rabbeinu, as it says, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying." Moshe informed Aharon of what had been said, as it says, וַהֲקֵהְלָ אֶת-הָעֵדָה אִתָּהּ וְאֶהְרֶן אֶחָיִד וְדַבַּרְתֶּם אֶל-הַסֵּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם "Assemble the congregation, you and Aharon your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes."

Aharon therefore knew that the command was "you shall speak to the rock." Thus, responsibility rested upon him to ensure that Moshe would indeed speak to the rock. Since that responsibility rested upon him, it is as though he

himself had been commanded to speak to the rock. True, the revelation specifically required the speech of Moshe, through whose throat the Shechinah spoke, as explained by the *Meshech Chochmah*. Nevertheless, responsibility for ensuring that Moshe fulfilled that command rested upon Aharon. He was, so to speak, "a guardian who enters in place of the owner," since the obligation was his responsibility, and it was considered as though he himself had been charged with speaking to the rock.

The moment Moshe deviated from the command and struck the rock for the first time—even if he had reasons for doing so—Aharon should have intervened. He should have stopped him and said, "Moshe! You are supposed to speak to the rock!" Instead, he adopted the posture of: וַיֵּדָם אֶהָרֶן "And Aharon was silent." This, in my humble opinion, may have been Aharon's *chet*: he did not step forward with leadership at the moment when an unparalleled *Kiddush Hashem* could have been achieved.

### **An opportunity for Aharon to rectify his part in the *chet ha'Eigel***

At first glance, Aharon's *chet* seems less severe than Moshe's. If so, why was he punished as harshly? Furthermore, according to the sequence of events, he appears to have been punished first, since he died before Moshe. In my humble opinion, the reason is that this was a failure in the realm of *emunah*. They were meant to strengthen faith in Hashem through the tremendous *Kiddush Hashem* that would have resulted from speaking to the rock. This would have generated powerful *emunah* throughout Klal Yisrael. Aharon was being presented with a unique opportunity to rectify the *chilul Hashem* (desecration of Hashem's Name) associated with the *chet ha'Eigel*, in which he had been involved. He lost the opportunity, and because of his earlier connection to the *Eigel*, he was judged more severely, even though his immediate failing was less severe than Moshe's. He should have seized the opportunity to perform *teshuvah* (repentance) and repair the blemish in faith

and the *chilul Hashem* caused by the *Eigel*.

The Torah, out of regard for Aharon, did not wish to mention the *chet ha'Eigel* explicitly. Yet it is concealed within the present sin, which serves, in a sense, as a covering for the earlier one. For this reason, it seems to me that Aharon's death on Hor HaHar occurs specifically in our parashah. I later found a similar idea in the commentary of the Abarbanel, who likewise suggests that Aharon was, in essence, being punished for the sin of the *Eigel*, but the Torah spared his honor and refrained from stating this openly.

### **From a staff of miracles to a shepherd's staff**

We are still left to explain why Hashem commanded Moshe to take the staff. By instructing him to take it, Hashem seemingly created the possibility that Moshe would err and think he was meant to strike the rock as he had done forty years earlier.

I would humbly suggest that this stage of Sefer Bamidbar represents a transition between the generation that left Egypt

and the generation that would enter the Land. For the generation that left Mitzrayim, the staff was an instrument of miracles. The staff split the sea. The staff brought the plagues upon Mitzrayim. The staff struck the rock forty years earlier and brought forth water.

Now, however, Hashem says: קח אֶת־הַמַּטֵּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעֵדָה "Take the staff and assemble the congregation." The staff is now merely a shepherd's staff, used to gather the people and lead them forward into Eretz Yisrael. It has become a symbol of leadership alone: the staff of the *Raaya Mehemna*, shepherd of Hashem's holy flock, Klal Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu has risen to the level of performing miracles through his person alone, through the power of the Shechinah speaking from his throat, and the staff has become a mere symbol of leadership.

### **The humility of Moshe and the assistance of Aharon**

Moshe Rabbeinu, the humblest of all men, became angry with Bnei Yisrael and called them מורים "rebels." In doing so, he deprived them of the revelation that Hashem

wished to show them. Paradoxically, this may have stemmed from Moshe's very humility. It is possible that Moshe struck the rock because he felt unworthy of performing a miracle through his speech after becoming angry with Bnei Yisrael. He may have sensed within himself the teaching of Reish Lakish: "Whoever becomes angry: if he is a sage, his wisdom departs from him; if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him" (*Pesachim* 66b) (See also Rambam, end of Chapter 4 of *Introduction*

to *Pirkei Avos*, also known as *Shemoneh Perakim*), and he sensed that he had reverted to his original state of being "heavy of speech and heavy of tongue" with regard to the mission of speaking to the rock.

If this explanation is correct, it resembles Moshe's initial hesitation when he was first sent to serve as Hashem's spokesman before Pharaoh and Bnei Yisrael. Then too, Hashem enlisted Aharon to encourage Moshe and assist him in his mission.

After all these years, Hashem once again wanted Aharon to assist Moshe in carrying out this task. Aharon possessed a remarkable ability to pursue peace and master his emotions. He was richly rewarded for "And Aharon was silent," bringing about a great *Kiddush Hashem* through his quiet submission. This time, however, he was specifically required to speak up, as we explained. See also our essay for the Seventeenth of Tammuz, where we further discuss the subject of the striking of the rock.

## ב-י-ל-א ואמן Maharaḥ Eizentz

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

At the beginning of the parashah it says, וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: זֹאת הַקִּוּי הַחֹרָה, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying: This is the decree of the Torah that Hashem has commanded, saying."

Rabbeinu, the Maharal, raises the question: Why is the word "leimor," "saying," repeated again in the second pasuk?

Before we get to Rabbeinu's explanation of "leimor," we will first introduce his explanation of the pasuk itself. Rashi explains the words "*Zos chukas haTorah*" ("This is the decree of the Torah") as follows: "Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish people, saying, 'What is this mitzvah, and what reason is there for it?' the Torah writes concerning it that it is a *chok*: it is a decree from before Me, etc." However, it seems that Rashi's words require explanation. What answer is being given to the nations of the world?

Rabbeinu, the Maharal, illuminates Rashi's words in light of the story in the *Midrash Rabbah*:

A certain idolater asked Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai: These practices that you perform appear like a kind of sorcery! You bring a cow, burn it, crush it, take its ashes, and when one of you becomes impure through contact with

the dead, you sprinkle two or three drops upon him and say to him: You are pure!" Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him: "Have you ever seen a person into whom a *ruach tezazis* (a kind of evil spirit) entered?" He said to him: "Yes." He said to him: "And what do you do for him?" He replied: "We bring roots, smoke them beneath him, sprinkle water upon him, and the spirit flees." Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said to him: "Let your ears hear what your mouth is saying! So too, this spirit is a spirit of impurity... We sprinkle upon it the waters of purification, and it flees." After the idolater left, Rabban Yochanan's students said to him: "Rabbeinu, you pushed him away with a reed" (meaning, "You overcame him with a superficial answer"). "But what do you say to us?" He replied: "By your lives! It is not the dead that defiles, and it is not the water that purifies. Rather, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: 'I have engraved a *chok*; I have decreed a decree; you are not permitted to transgress My decree.'" As it is written: "*Zos chukas haTorah.*"

What we understand from this Midrash is that the correct perspective on Parah Adumah is that, in fact, we do not understand its reason at all. Nevertheless, we believe in the Torah and know that it is true even when we do not merit to understand. And this mitzvah was chosen by Hakadosh Baruch Hu to be given to us without a revealed reason.

The nations of the world, however, follow a different path. They do not believe in the Torah. They evaluate matters according to their own intellect, and whatever does not appear understandable to them, they mock. Therefore, to his students, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai told the truth: Know that Parah Adumah is a *chok*. But to the non-Jew, who does not understand what "Torah" is, he needed to "explain" a reason: just as the nations drive away impure spirits through smoking herbs, so too we drive away the spirit of impurity through the *mei chatas*, the waters of purification.

Now we can understand Rashi's words. The nations and the Satan argue to Am Yisrael (the Jewish nation): The laws of the Parah are not understandable! Hakadosh Baruch Hu answers: Correct. It is a *chok*. It is not meant to be understood, because you *believe* that it is true. This is *chukas HaTorah*. And now that we have understood the message in the pasuk "*Zos chukas HaTorah*" that we believe in the truth of the Torah's *chukim* even without understanding, we can go on to explain the word "*leimor.*"

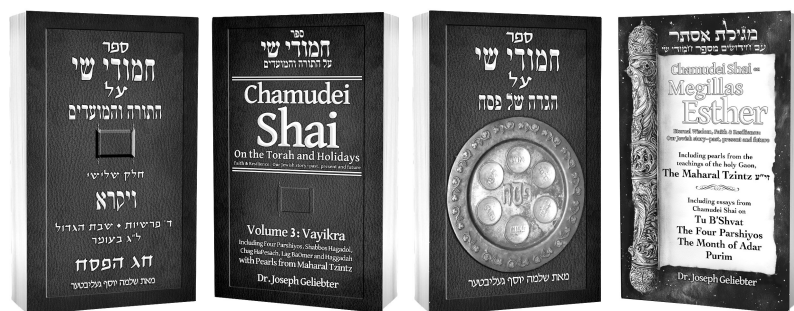
Rabbeinu says: There are two different ways in which the nations of the world relate to the Torah's *chukim*. First, in the ordinary course of things, the nations treat all halachos that are not understood by human intellect, which are called *chukim*, with contempt. They do not know the truth. Second, however, there is a state in which the nations believe in the Torah of Yisrael even when they do not understand it. This is described in Parashas Va'eschanan: כִּי הוּא חֲכַמְתְּכֶם וּבִינַתְכֶם לְעֵינֵי הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעוּן אֵת כְּלֵי־הַחֲקִים הָאֵלֶּה וְאָמְרוּ רַק עִם־חֲכָם וּבָחוּן הַגּוֹי הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה: כִּי מִי־גּוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֱלֹקִים קְרִבִּים אֵלָיו... וּמִי־גּוֹי גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ חֲקִים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים צְדִיקִים... "For it is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these *chukim* and say: Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has G-d close to it?... And what great nation is there that has righteous *chukim* and *mishpatim*?..." (Devarim 4:6-8). At the beginning of the pasuk it says "*chukim*" ("decrees"), and at the end it says "*chukim u'mishpatim*" ("decrees and laws"). The nations

contemplate the *chukim* of Am Yisrael. What are these *chukim*? Then, when they see that Hashem is close to His people and watches over them, and that the Jewish people are close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, they become filled with awe for Toras Yisrael. They say to themselves: "This nation is wise and understanding. We do not have sufficient understanding to grasp the *chukim* of the Torah, but they are *chukim u'mishpatim*, meaning, just as the *mishpatim* are true, so are the *chukim* true. Suddenly, the nations believe in the Torah.

All of this occurs when the nations see the *hashgachah* (Divine providence) of Hakadosh Baruch Hu upon His people, the Jewish people. But when Hakadosh Baruch Hu hides His face from Am Yisrael, the default state returns: the nations mock those laws of the Torah called *chukim* and assume that they are not true.

This is how Rabbeinu explains the word '*leimor*.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu blesses and commands His people, Yisrael, to be on a high level, a level at which Hakadosh Baruch Hu will be close to them and reveal Himself to them with *he'aras panim* (the radiance of His countenance). Then even the nations will believe in the *chukim* of the Torah, even if they do not understand them. And then when the nations ask Am Yisrael, "Why do you perform the Parah Adumah?" Am Yisrael will not need to give them reasons. Rather, they will answer them '*leimor*': it is a *chok* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Even if we do not understand it, we know that it is true. And the nations will accept this answer, because when they see the *he'aras panim* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu upon His people Yisrael, they immediately believe in the Torah.

We thus learn that when the Jewish people walk on the straight path and are close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and He shines His countenance upon them, then not only do they grasp the *chukim* of the Torah, but even the nations begin to believe in Toras Yisrael.



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