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Yeshiva University Torah miTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Chukat

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The Reason that Isn't

Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt

An enigmatic detail of the *parah adumah* marks this ritual as the classic inexplicable *chok* of Torah law. Our sages [including Shlomo haMelech, "wisest of all men"] could not explain how the *parah adumah's* sprinkling waters purify their target, and yet others who come into contact with them contract impurity. (Niddah 9a)

It has been suggested that the inexplicable nature of this mitzvah is, in fact, what lies at its core. Fulfilling a command that is beyond human understanding demands a greater level of obedience to G-d. Such commitment, then, is the very goal of the mitzvah itself.

The nature of this mystery however, deserves some clarification. Contrary to popular belief, the sages believed that the details of the *parah adumah* procedure are **not** beyond explanation: "Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Chanina said: G-d said to Moshe, 'To you I reveal the rationale of the *parah [adumah]*, but to others it is a *chok*.' ... Matters which are hidden from them in this world will be revealed in the future..." (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:6) Our tradition informs us that any 'lack of a reason' for the *parah adumah* has an expiration date. An inherently significant rationale indeed exists, and one day we will attain it.

Without any presumptions of reaching this ultimate truth, we can still ask why G-d chose to structure the law's dynamics in such a complicated manner. Why decree a law that defies understanding for a significant portion of world history, and yet will ultimately be understood?

Rabbi Yosef Salant (Be'er Yosef to Chukat, first essay) claims that indeed, the *parah adumah's* 'non-reason' serves an important purpose, even though it will eventually outlive its usefulness. At times, we experience moments that defy understanding. To use a broad example, we are constantly at a loss to provide explanations when we witness the righteous suffering and the wicked prospering. Most sharply, we are confronted with this question in the context of death: how is it that an individual who lived his/her life nobly (and sometimes, briefly) could be taken from us? Our only answer – for the moment – is "Blessed is the true Judge." We are compelled to accept in good faith that this tragic occurrence is part of a Divine plan that will one day be fully appreciated.

The mitzvah of *parah adumah* – which revolves around death – is our 'ritual training ground' in internalizing this value of acceptance. When every encounter with death demands a procedure that defies our current understanding, that observance conditions us to accept similar struggles in our daily lives. The quintessential *chukat haTorah* trains us in coping with our *chukot hachayim*.

Why will a reason for this mitzvah be revealed eventually? Rabbi Salant explains that the training provided by this 'non-reason' will no longer serve any purpose. "The World to Come isn't like this world. In this world, upon [hearing] good news one recites 'Blessed is the Good who does good,' while upon [hearing] bad news one recites 'Blessed is the true Judge.' In the World to Come, it will all be [worthy of the blessing of] 'the Good who does

good.'" (Pesachim 50a) In the World to Come, we will finally have the perspective needed to appreciate the past and present difficulties experienced in life. Once those tragedies find their resolution, G-d will finally allow this elusive *chok* to be resolved as well.

Returning to the concerns of this world, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm suggests that for us, the *parah adumah* encourages an appreciation – albeit without a full understanding – of the complexity of life. Our society, with its wealth of trendy 'solutions', often denies this reality and instead rushes to develop simplistic explanations that lead nowhere. Problems are dealt with ineffectively; worse, superficial explanations become excuses for passivity.

The reality is that we cannot rush this process. We are far better off acknowledging the limits of our understanding, so that we can stand a chance of advancing closer to the truth. Until that point in time however, we should take comfort in the fact that indeed, for every difficulty, answers exist. The tension of knowing that our problems – our *chukot hachayim* – have yet-to-be discovered solutions should drive us towards finding them. May we succeed in doing so with the requisite sense of sincerity and humility.

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**MIDRESHET YOM RISHON CONTINUES!
SUNDAY MORNING TORAH FOR WOMEN**

10 AM AT BAYT, 613 CLARK AVE. W

MRS. RIFKA SONENBERG: OUR FATHER'S PORTION

R' YAIR MANAS: HAVE WE LOST THE ABILITY TO MOURN?



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The Torah repeatedly instructs us to safeguard honesty and avoid falsehood, and the Talmud expands upon this theme with warnings to honour our agreements. [See, for example, Bava Metzia 49a.] Nonetheless, is there anything wrong with backing out of a verbal pledge, which the participants knew was not legally binding?

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 47b-48a) discusses this question, in the context of a situation in which a consumer has paid money to acquire movable items. The talmudic passage makes clear that one who reneges at this point in a transaction is to be condemned, but the sages offer two different rationales:

- Rabbi Yochanan contends that biblically, the purchase is complete once one pays for the items. Although the sages enacted a new requirement that one actually pick up the item in order to acquire it, paying money has some force, and therefore one who backs out after money has been transferred is guilty of quasi-theft.
- Reish Lakish declares that payment is not a form of acquisition at all; we condemn someone who backs out only because he has acted in a manner that does not befit an ethical Jew. Once we commit ourselves, we are morally bound by this commitment, even if we are not yet legally bound.

It would seem that Rabbi Yochanan would say one may back out from commitments which have no legal force, but Reish Lakish would still object. [For more on the different rationales, see Ketzot haChoshen 209:9.] We follow the view of Reish Lakish.

What happens to someone who backs out? The Talmud (ibid.) records warns a

Jew who tries to back out of such a commitment: "The One who punished the generation of the flood, the generation of the dispersion, the citizens of Sdom and Amarah, and Egypt at the sea, will also punish one who does not stand by his word."

There is some debate among early authorities as to how this warning is meant to be issued; Rambam (Hilchot Mechirah 7:2) suggests it is stated in the third person as recorded here, Tur (Choshen Mishpat 204) cites a view suggesting it is worded directly at the party who is backing out, and Mordechai (Bava Metzia 308) indicates it is actually recited by the person who is backing out. The venue for this warning is also unclear; at various times it has been done in the local court, or in the synagogue during davening. The goal of the warning is clear, though: to cause a party to re-think his reversal, and honour his word. (Aruch haShulchan Choshen Mishpat 204:2)

The expectation that we will honour our words extends beyond sales. In a notable case from 1993, two Israeli political parties agreed to work together in separate elections, with Party A supporting Party B's candidate in one election, and Party B returning the favour in another election. Party A fulfilled its commitment, but Party B signed a competing agreement with a third political party. The case involves a complex set of legal entanglements, but as noted within the court's ruling, one point is clear: As Reish Lakish ruled, we are bound ethically even when we are not bound legally. [For more on the case, see Piskei Din shel Batei Din haRabbaniim b'Yisrael 18.]

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613 Mitzvot: #269

The Holy Kohen

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The kohanim are biblically designated as servants of G-d (for example, Devarim 18:3-5), and we are instructed to honour them as a means of honouring G-d. (Vayikra 21:8) This includes honouring a kohen with leading birkat hamazon (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 201:2), as well as refraining from asking kohanim to perform tasks on behalf of non-kohanim. (Rama Orach Chaim 128:45) However, Sefer haChinuch notes that a kohen who engages in certain sinful conduct may lose his special treatment. [See

Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:40-41 for more on this.]

The honour of kohanim is not seen as their personal prerogative; indeed, we are specifically taught to honour them even against their will. (Sifra Emor 1:13) However, authorities do permit a non-kohen to ask a kohen to perform a non-degrading task, if the kohen would also benefit; see Mishneh Berurah 128:175 for more.

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A Nation's Evolution

Hillel Horovitz

רבים המפרשים שניסו להבין במה חטא משה ולא נכנס לארץ. מדוע מדקדק הקב"ה עם משה עד כדי כך? ברצוני להביא התיחסות קצת שונה לעניין. וכך כותב שד"ל (שמואל דוד לוצאטו) בפרושו על התורה (במדבר כ', י"ב) וכל מילה נוספת מיותרת: "משה רבינו חטא חטא אחד והמפרשים העמיסו עליו שלושה עשר חטאים ויותר, כי כל אחד מהם בדה מלבו עוון חדש... אשר על כן מנעתי מהעמק החקירה בדבר זה מיראה שמה יצא לי פירוש חדש ונמצאתי גם אני מוסיף עוון חדש על משה רבינו."

לאחר חטא מי מריבה, כשהתברר שגם הי"דור החדש" שנולד במדבר עדיין לא הגיע למדרגה הרצויה, משה פועל כמנהיג בודד: "וישלח משה מלאכים מקדש אל מלך אדום..." (כ', יד). לעומת זאת, לאחר פרשת הנחשים, כאשר יש צורך לשלוח מלאכים לסיחון, נאמר: "וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון מלך האמרי..." (כ"א, כא-כב). מדוע כאן מצויין דוקא כי בני ישראל הם ששלחו?

כמו כן, תגובת העם לסירוב שני המלכים להתיר להם לעבור בארצם היא שונה. לאחר שניסיונות השכנוע כשלו ומלך אדום יצא לקראת ישראל - בני ישראל נטו מן הדרך. לעומת זאת, לאחר סירובו של סיחון - בני ישראל יצאו לקראתו למלחמה והכו אותו. מהי הסיבה להבדלים אלו? (ספר דברים "עונה" באמצעות הטענה שארץ שעיר נתנה לעשיו ולא לנו [ראה רמב"ן על אתר], אולם ספר במדבר לא מציינ עניין זה ולכן נענה תשובה המתאימה למבנה הפרשה כאן.)

ננסה להבין זאת באמצעות דבריהם של בני ישראל לאחר מעשה הנחשים: "ויבא העם אל משה ויאמרו חטאנו כי דברנו בדי' ובך, התפלל אל ד' ויסר מעלינו את הנחש..." (כ"א, ז) זוהי הפעם הראשונה שבני ישראל מכירים בחטאם ומוודים בו בפה מלא; תופעה זו לא התרחשה כלל בתלונות הקודמות על משה. גם לאחר חטאים גדולים יותר ועונשים כבדים יותר שראינו בעבר לא שמענו את העם חוזר בתשובה ומביע חרטה שכזו.

ניתן לומר שחרטה זו היא המפתח להבנת השוני בשליחת המלאכים לאדום ולסיחון. בין שתי שליחויות אלו נמצאת פרשת ה"נחשים". אותה חרטה שהביעו ישראל לאחר חטא זה, הפכה אותם סוף סוף לשותפים במעשיו של משה. נראה כי אותו דור שנולד במדבר למד לבסוף מטעויות העבר והבין כי עליו לעבוד עם משה ולא כנגדו.

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Torah in Translation
A Family's Early Shabbat
Rabbi Moshe Feinstein
Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 3:38
Translated by Adam Frieberg

When a husband accepts Shabbat upon himself while it is still day, is his wife also forbidden from performing *melachah*?

It seems obvious that she is not drawn after him; just as he cannot obligate her in vows that he has taken, even where they were meant to prevent violation of a law, and even where he said explicitly that she should be included, so he cannot prevent her from performing *melachah* when he accepts additional time to Shabbat. This is not only true when he accepts Shabbat without stating anything [regarding her], but even when he says explicitly that he is accepting Shabbat for both of them, this statement is worthless....

However, there may be reason to forbid her from performing *melachah* for the husband's sake, such as cooking for him. This stems from the law the biblical verse (Shemot 23:12), "your maidservant's son shall be refreshed," regarding which the Talmud (Yevamot 48b) discusses the case of an uncircumcised servant who is not yet obligated in mitzvot for himself. This person may perform *melachah* for himself, but not for his master... This rule is not derived from the prohibition against asking a non-Jew to perform *melachah* for you on Shabbat (*amirah l'akum*); that is a rabbinic prohibition, while "your maidservant's son shall be refreshed" is a biblical prohibition...

The fact that one who has accepted Shabbat [before dark] may ask his friend or a non-Jew to perform *melachah* for him is because this could only violate, at worst, a rabbinic prohibition [if he were to ask the person to do it on Shabbat itself]. However, regarding an uncircumcised servant there is a biblical prohibition against having him perform *melachah* after Shabbat has been accepted, and even before dark.

The same will apply for one's wife, whose *melachah* is acquired for her husband... Granted that there is room to distinguish, as a woman has the right to say, "I won't take food from him and I won't work for him," and so her *melachah* will not be acquired by him for this... still, as long as she has not said this, her *melachah* is acquired by him

[All in all], it is appropriate to be stringent, and she should not perform *melachah* for her

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was born in Uzda, Belarus, on the 7th of Adar, 5655/1895. He was born into a rabbinic family, descendants of Rabbi Yom Tov Lipman Heller. Rabbi Feinstein served as Rabbi of Luban for sixteen years, during which time he wrote prolifically, sending responsa to communities far and wide and to the Torah giants of the day. He also led his community despite the crushing persecution of the Communist regime.

Rabbi Feinstein fled the Soviet regime in 1936, barely escaping a pogrom in which his home was destroyed. Along with his wife Sima and three children (another died of whooping cough), Rabbi Feinstein came to New York and became rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Tiferet Yerushalayim in Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Recognized across the broad spectrum of Orthodoxy as the generation's leading halachic authority, Rabbi Feinstein was consulted on every major issue of his day. His widely circulated responsa include positions on the role of Jews in a non-Jewish society, the status of Reform and Conservative approaches to Judaism, and the evolving roles of women in the Jewish community.

Rabbi Feinstein served as president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, and he chaired the Moetzes Gedolei haTorah of Agudath Israel of America for the last quarter-century of his life. Rabbi Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Feinstein were first cousins once removed, and they spoke frequently. Rabbi Feinstein wrote a warm approbation for a sefer published in honour of Rav Soloveitchik's eightieth birthday.

Rabbi Feinstein passed away on Taanit Esther 5746/1986, but his writings remain a part of every significant halachic debate of our day.

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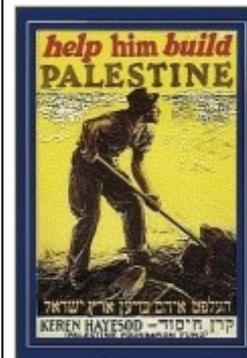
husband's sake [once he has accepted Shabbat], for most early authorities contended that performing *melachah* during the time added to Shabbat is biblically prohibited, and because distinguishing between her case and that of the servant is less logical. However, her *melachah* which does not relate to the husband should not be prohibited on account of his acceptance of Shabbat.

This Week in Israeli History
7 Tammuz 1920
Keren Hayesod Founded
Rabbi Yair Manas

7 Tammuz is Shabbat

On the seventh day of Tammuz, 5680 (June 23, 1920), at a conference in London, the World Zionist Conference established Keren Hayesod ["The Foundation Fund"]. Following the 1917 Balfour Declaration, this organization was founded to serve as the fundraising arm of the Zionist movement. According to its manifesto, "[T]he time has come to concentrate efforts for the establishment of a Jewish national home."

A short time after its founding, Keren Hayesod began fundraising operations all across the world, beginning in Europe, but soon



expanding to North America and elsewhere. In 1921, Chaim Weizmann and Albert Einstein went to the United States, with Keren Hayesod support, in order to raise money to build a university in Israel. This trip resulted in The Hebrew University being established in 1925. Also in 1921, Keren Hayesod helped found Bank Hapoalim.

After the founding of the State of Israel, Keren Hayesod developed new communities to absorb Holocaust survivors and other immigrants from Islamic countries. In the 1950's, Keren Hayesod established urban settlements, such as Sderot and Eilat, to absorb new immigrants.

In 1956, the Knesset passed a law making Keren Hayesod the official fundraising arm of the State of Israel. Eleven years later, Keren Hayesod raised \$150 million to help Israel after the Six-Day War, and then \$300 million to help Israel after the Yom Kippur War.

Today, Keren Hayesod operates in 47 countries. In 2012, Keren Hayesod spent \$129 million on (1) Aliyah, Absorption and Rescue, (2) Strengthening Israeli Society, and (3) Jewish Peoplehood.

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What is the source of our haftorah?

The book of Shoftim (Judges) describes the events that occurred between the time of Yehoshua and the era of Shemuel. The first two chapters of the book depict the outcome of Yehoshua's wars, what was conquered and what was not. The next fifteen chapters review the careers of various *shoftim* (judges, leaders or saviours) who followed Yehoshua, leading the nation and protecting it from its enemies.

The main message of the book of Shoftim is explicitly stated and repeated many times. In virtually all of the book's stories, trouble befalls the Jewish nation because of their failure to keep the mitzvot; the people repent and ask for G-d's help; G-d exhibits mercy and sends a *shofet* to deliver them; after a short period of peace, the nation returns to its sins.

According to the Talmud (Bava Batra 14b), Shemuel recorded Shoftim.

What is the message of our haftorah?

Our haftorah tells the story of Yiftach. Yiftach was not a respected citizen; he lived in the margins of society, with others like him. (Shoftim 11:1-3) At that time, the Jews living in the Gilad region found themselves in a war against the Ammonites. Israel's elders turned to Yiftach, recognizing his military abilities, and asked him to lead them in war. (11:4-6) Yiftach

conditioned his agreement to lead them in the war upon their acceptance of him as their leader even after the war, and so it was. (11:6-11)

After his appointment as Israel's leader, Yiftach sent messengers of peace to the Ammonite king. The Ammonites demanded back land that was conquered by Moshe in our parshah. Yiftach refused, explaining that the land had not been taken from the Ammonites but from the Amorites. (11:12-27)

The Ammonites were not convinced, and war followed. As Yiftach went out to war, he took a vow:

"If You will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand... whatever comes forth... from the doors of my house towards me... I will offer up as a burnt-offering." (11:30)

Yiftach won the war, but the first to greet him at the door was his daughter. [This occurs after our haftorah ends.] Yiftach tore his clothes, as he saw no way out of the vow he had taken. The prophet tells us that Yiftach "did to her as he had vowed." (11:39) [See commentators there for different opinions as to whatever Yiftach actually sacrificed her.]

What is the link to our parshah?

The plain connection to our parshah is the story of Moshe's conquests, and

their consequences hundreds of years later. However, we might point out another connection: the tragic dimension.

The story of Yiftach is the story of a man who succeeded, by force of will and determination, in raising himself from the lowest parts of society to the leader's throne; this is a moving story of triumph. However, the same determination and steadfastness brought upon him the worst tragedy of all – the loss of the life of his beloved daughter.

The story of Moshe, all differences between these two figures notwithstanding, can be described in similar phrases. Moshe is an outsider to Jewish society, and he rose to become the leader; Moshe defends the people time after time, both from external dangers and from the anger of G-d; then, on the threshold of victory, just before completing his mission by entering with his people into the Land of Israel, Moshe falls.

Thus, the deep connection between the parshah and the haftorah is not only in the historical events, but also in the historical essence at their foundation: a hero's tragic inability to completely fulfill his mission.

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Highlights for June 15 – June 21 / 7 Tammuz - 13 Tammuz

Many of our shiurim are on summer hiatus, but opportunities remain!

Shabbat, June 15

7:45 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Reasons for Mitzvot, Or Chaim

After Hashkamah Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Bnai Torah

10:20 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

11:30 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Or Chaim

7:20 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daf Yomi, BAYT

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Avodah Zarah: Sherry Casks I, BAYT

Sunday, June 16

9:15 AM Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Zichron Yisroel, Hebrew (Shacharit 8:30 AM)

10:00 AM Midreshet Yom Rishon BAYT, women

Mrs. Rifka Sonenberg: Our Father's Portion: The Daughters of Tzelafchad

Rabbi Yair Manas: Have we lost the ability to mourn for Jerusalem?

6:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachah in Israel, **Hebrew**, 4 Tillingham Keep, **mixed**

40 min. pre-minchah R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachah in Israel, **Hebrew**, Clanton Park, **men**

Monday, June 17

8 PM Hillel Horovitz, Melachim II, Bnai Torah **not this week**

9 PM Hillel Horovitz, Rav Kook, Bnai Torah **not this week**

Tuesday, June 18

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daniel: Battle of the Angels, Shaarei Shomayim

8:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Rambam's Laws of Kings, Shomrai Shabbos, *men*

Wednesday, June 19

8 PM Chabura Night at BAYT

- Hillel Horovitz: Journey through Judges: Ch. 9-10

- R' Mordechai Torczyner: Medical Halachah

After Maariv Chabura Night at Shaarei Shomayim

Thursday, June 20

10:15 AM Laws of Berachot, BAYT, *women*, with R' Aaron Greenberg, R' Daniel Korobkin, R' Mordechai Torczyner

6:00 PM at BAYT

OUR EVENING OF TRIBUTE

8:00 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Sotah, Clanton Park **not this week**