

Parshas Parah

Observing the Torah Only Because It Is the Will of Hashem

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This week, we read Parshas Parah. Rav Moshe Wolfson¹ says that it is the last parsha of the Hebrew months of the year. This is because Shabbos ushers in the new week, and next Shabbos will usher in the month of Nisan, which starts the *new* year. What's so special about Parasha Parah that we close out the Hebrew year reading it?

Rashi in Parshas Beshalach² says that when Klal Yisrael camped in Marah, Hashem gave them a few mitzvos: Shabbos, various monetary laws, and Parah Adumah (Red Heifer). Why was it necessary for these mitzvos to be given before the rest of the Torah? Rav Eliyahu Boruch Finkel³ explains that these specific laws were given before Kabbalas HaTorah because they are prerequisites to the acceptance of the Torah. For example, law and order (in business) is needed for a civilized society, and Shabbos is equal to all the mitzvos. But why was it needed for Parah Adumah to be given in advance?

Rav Finkel explains the uniqueness of Parah Adumah: It is a *chok*, a law without logic, as the Torah states, "*Zos chukas haTorah* - this is the *chok* of the Torah."⁴ Parah Adumah is a paradox: its ashes make pure those who are defiled, yet defile those who are administering the purification process. All the other mitzvos given at Marah were logical. Even the mitzvah of Shabbos has a certain logic, as Hashem created the world, an enormous task, and directed that we rest on the seventh day. But Parah Adumah is a *chok* - a law without apparent logic.

The greatest prerequisite to accepting the Torah is the concept of accepting Hashem's laws even when we don't understand the reason. We obey the Torah's laws just because Hashem directs that we do so. This even applies to keeping kosher. The *Toras Kohanim* says that a person should not say to himself that he will refrain from eating non-kosher food because it's unappetizing; rather, he should say that he would like to eat it, but he won't because Hashem says it's prohibited.⁵

We now have a greater insight into Hashem offering the Torah to the other nations before offering it to Klal Yisrael. The nations all asked what the Torah says; they refused to accept it without knowing in advance. But Klal Yisrael immediately responded, "*Naaseh venishma* - we will do and we will hear."⁶ Although Klal Yisrael already had a sneak preview of some of the mitzvos, which had some logic, they also had been commanded regarding the Parah Adumah, which is a *chok*. Therefore, they had no idea what to expect of the other mitzvos, which could also be *chukim*. This laid the foundation for their complete acceptance of Hashem's will - a great accomplishment!

Rashi in Parshas Chukas⁷ says that the Parah Adumah was a *tikkun* (a repair) for the *Cheit HaEigel* (Sin of the Golden Calf). Yet, isn't this contradictory to the Rashi above which says that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah was given *prior* to Kabbalas HaTorah?

The Beis HaLevi⁸ says that the Sin of the Golden Calf was committed with good intentions: The Jewish nation was looking for a replacement for Moshe as an intermediary, since they were afraid of facing Hashem's great Presence directly. Their sin was that they charted their *own* path on how to serve Hashem.

Therefore, Hashem once again gave the mitzvah of Parah Adumah, as its observance remedies where the Jewish nation went wrong. They had followed their own rationale of how to serve Hashem, rather than waiting for Hashem's direct commandments.

We celebrated Purim this week, and there is a concept within Purim that we celebrate it until we reach the level of "*ad delo yada*" - until we lose our own power to reason; we observe Hashem's laws because He says so. Rav Moshe Wolfson explains that indeed on Purim we do reach the level of *ad delo yada*. Hence Parshas Parah, which includes the laws of Parah Adumah, always comes after Purim.

May we always be ready to follow what Hashem says, regardless of any rationale we think lies behind it. It's a testimony that we are perfect servants of the Creator, believing that whatever He has us do, and what He does for us, is always for the best.

¹ Emunas Itecha - Parshas Parah

² Shemos 15:25

³ Mishulchan Reb Eliyahu Boruch Chukas 19:2

⁴ Bamidbar 19:2

⁵ Rashi Vayikra 20:26

⁶ Shemos 24:7

⁷ Chukas 19:22 "Parah Adumah"

⁸ Ki Sisa 31:13

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The Gemara in Pesachim (6a) writes, *שואלין ודורשיין בהלכות*, *הפסח קודם הפסח שלשים יום*, We ask and teach about the laws of Pesach thirty days (Shloshim Yom) before the holiday. This is learned from the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu informed Bnei Yisrael the laws of Pesach Sheini on Pesach Rishon, which is a full month beforehand. This halacha is codified in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 429:1). The Mishna Berurah (429:2) writes that this requirement begins on Purim day.

There is another Gemara that has a similar but slightly different requirement. The Gemara at the end of Megillah (32a) writes *משה תימן להם לישראל שיהיו שואלין ודורשיין בעניניו של יום*. *הלכות פסח בפסח, הלכות עצרת בעצרת, הלכות חג בחדש*, Moshe made a takanah, an established decree, for Bnei Yisrael they should ask and teach regarding the matter of the day; the laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Shavuot on Shavuot, and the laws of Sukkot on Sukkot. The Gemara seems to limit the requirement to study the laws of the Yom Tov only on the day of the Yom Tov itself. This Gemara seems to be at odds with the Gemara in Pesachim that requires one to study the laws of the Yom Tov a thirty days beforehand.

The Mefarshim offer different approaches to explain these two Halachos. The Ran (Megillah 2b) and Rashba (Megillah 4a D"H Mai) explain that the Halacha of Shloshim Yom does not actually mean that one needs to learn those laws 30 days before Pesach. Rather, it means that if one asks a question regarding the laws of Pesach within the month preceding it, he is not considered a person that has asked an irrelevant question (see Avos 5:7). This time frame is not an obligation, rather it is more like a license to inquire about Pesach related problems. On the holiday itself Moshe made a takanah that one should learn the laws of Yom Tov on Yom Tov.

The Mishnah Berurah (429:1) quotes the Beis Yosef who offers another explanation. He explains that there are indeed two separate obligations to involve ourselves with holiday laws, one before the Yom Tov and one in the Yom Tov itself. However, we only find the obligation of Shloshim Yom by the Yom Tov of Pesach. On Pesach there is a special need to prepare ahead of time. We need extra time to educate ourselves regarding the laws of grinding wheat and baking matzos, along with the laws of kashering our dishes and checking for chametz. If one does not do these things properly before Pesach, it is too late to make any corrections. This is not the case regarding the other holidays like Shavuot or Sukkot. Shavuot has no new mitzvos to prepare for. Sukkot as well, even though it has the mitzvos of sukkah and lulav, it is generally not too difficult to make a basic sukkah, and most lulavim and esrogim are kosher. Therefore,

these holidays do not have the extra 30-day preparatory time. Moshe Rabbeinu made an additional takanah that we should talk about the laws of the Yom Tov on the Yom Tov itself.

However, this takanah needs to be better understood. The point of reviewing the Halachos is so that one knows how to prepare for the Yom Tov. What can be gained by learning the laws on the day of the holiday itself? By then, isn't it too late to make any changes?

Rabbi Chaim Torchin *zatz"l*, in his sefer Kuntrus Chanukah U'Megillah (Megillah 3) explains that there is a different goal to the two requirements to review the Halachos of the Yom Tov. The halacha of Shloshim Yom is specifically for us to prepare ourselves for the practicalities of the Yom Tov. As we said, there are many new Halachos that one needs to be aware of to make sure his house is Kosher for Pesach. However, the takanah of Moshe Rabbeinu to review the Halachos on the Yom Tov itself is so that through learning the relevant halachos, we are remembering and expounding the essence of the day itself. Through learning the halachos of the Yom Tov, although it may be too late to actually apply them, we are bringing out the depth and meanings behind the holiday. The Rashba (*ibid*) hints to this idea as well, writing that the purpose of the takanah was so that we should publicly recognize the miracles which happened on that day. Through the study of the Halachos of the Yom Tov, we gain a deeper understanding of the Yom Tov itself.

There are other places that we find that through Halacha one can fulfill a deepening of the appreciation of a Yom Tov. In the Haggadah Shel Pesach we find two references to people learning the laws of Korban Pesach on the night of the Seder. We are instructed to teach the wise son all the laws of the Korban Pesach until the law of Afikomen. We also find that Rabban Gamliel and the Sages stayed up learning the laws of Korban Pesach all Seder night. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to delve deeper into the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim than to teach about the Korban Pesach? Rabbi Torchin brings in the name of the Brisker Rav that we see from here that through learning Halacha we can fulfill the obligation to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim. So too, when we learn the laws of a holiday on the holiday itself, we are not doing it just for practical applications, but rather to increase our appreciation for the holiday. The takanah of Moshe Rabbeinu that one must review the laws of Yom Tov on Yom Tov itself are not just so that we know how to perform the Mitzvos of the day more precisely. Rather, through learning the relevant Halachos, we gain a deeper appreciation for that Yom Tov.

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