

Chukas - Rabbi Lerner - June 9, 2013

The Mitzvah of Parah Adumah

19:2: *This is the decree of the Torah (**Chukas HaTorah**), which Hashem has commanded, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come.*

When was this mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael and why is it here in the middle of sefer Bamidbar? **Chizkuni**: the pasuk says **Asher Tzivah Hashem** - which God **has commanded** to them - this suggests that someplace in the past God had commanded this mitzvah; but we do not see where in the Torah this was previously mentioned openly. **Sforno**: Where was this mitzvah commanded? We see it from Beha'alochecha 8:7 at the consecration of the Leviyim where the pasuk says **Hazey Aleyhem Mai Chatos** - this refers to the parah adumah which brings about some form of atonement. But this reference could just be for consecration of only the Leviyim for a special task. There is an earlier source: in Beshalach, at Marah, the people complained about a lack of drinking water; Moshe cried out to Hashem, he threw a branch into the water, and it became sweet; In 15:25 and again in 15:26 it talks about mitzvos and chukim that were given to Bnei Yisrael - **Som Lo Chok Umishpat**. **Rashi**: in Marah Hashem gave them mitzvos to be preoccupied with - the mitzvos of Shabbos, Parah Adumah, and the notion of setting up judicial courts. But, even though they were given the mitzvah there, they had never fulfilled it yet. We see this in our parsha in 19:4, where the command is for Elazar the Kohen to take the blood with his finger and after slaughtering it outside the Mishkan he is then to sprinkle it toward the Mishkan - he is to be far away from the Mishkan when he slaughters it, something very abnormal and even prohibited in most settings - all animals were slaughtered in the Mishkan until the Jewish people arrived in Eretz Yisrael. This command clearly could not have been done at Marah. While they were given the mitzvah early, there was no way they could implement it earlier because they did not have the requirements - they had no Mishkan; it was given early just to study it; and perhaps the same with the laws of Shabbos and courts.

Abarbanel: the first seven days of the Miluim, Moshe did the avodah; the first day that Aharon took over was on the eighth day, Rosh Chodesh Nisan - that is when the Mishkan was activated and that is when the Parah Adumah was prepared in order to purify all of the people who wished to approach the Mishkan. Therefore, there had to have been a Parah Adumah at that time to allow the avodah in the Mishkan. That first cow and the prepared ashes lasted nearly the entire 40 years in the desert - it was prepared on that Rosh Chodesh Nisan, nearly a year after coming out of Egypt. At the end of the 40 years, in Chukas, there is a new story with a new Parah Adumah - this was the second one; there would be a need for more purifications because of the upcoming wars where perhaps some Jews will die, making those who attend to them Tamei, and they would certainly be touching many dead Canaanites which would make them Tamei (although only by direct contact when it comes to the bodies of goyim, while with Jews there is Tumas Ohel) - only Jews have the concept of Tumas Mes - goyim are not Tamei. Hashem knew that on the threshold of war they would need a lot of the ashes to suffice for their needs of purification - that is why they are commanded now to prepare another one. Many of the masses of Jews became Tamei from the previous crises, where many Jews died for their sins (Taveirah and others). They therefore had to be ready to prepare another cow. But the command is given to Elazar rather than Aharon, which would imply that it is after Aharon dies that they had to make this - it was to be prepared at the very end of the desert experience.

Rashi: what does it mean this is the **Chukas HaTorah**? The nations of the world will comment - will harass us and make fun of us - about this particular Mitzvah which makes no sense - it is paradoxical, making the Tamei Tahor, and visa versa. This is the ultimate model, paradigm, for an arbitrary decree that makes no sense and is inscrutable. The Midrash said that Shlomo understood all of the reasons for mitzvoths until he got to this last one, and he could not figure it out. It is the symbol of a chok, for all others.

Ohr HaChayim: why introduce this topic by calling it Chukas HaTorah - no other is referred to it as that? Why not Chukas Tumah or just Chok? We know that the **Rambam** says that there is no such thing as Tumas Ohel for a goy, only a Jew. Why are their bodies not metamey an Ohel? We are different from Goyim because we accepted the Torah - this makes us different, and that is why this is called Chukas HaTorah - that is why it only applies to us; we are the Am HaTorah, the nation that accepted the Torah. **Rav Schechter:** there are things used for mitzvoths that have no residual, inherent kedusha even though they were used for mitzvoths - like a lulav - these are Tashmishay Mitzvah. But Tashmeshay Kedusha, that contain writing of Hakodosh Baruch Hu, like Tefillin, Torah, Mezuzah, Seforim - these have inherent kedusha; His words and ideas are holy; this is the difference between us and them - the Goyim might do 7 mitzvoths of Bnei Noach, but that is like Tashmishay Mitzvah; we however are like Tashmishay Kedusha, much holier. The **Rav** quotes the **Bais Halevi** that Torah Sheba'al Peh was written into Moshe's brain and he transmitted it to us - the Torah is written into our brains, making us holy, making us greater than Tashmishay Kedusha - we are Kedusha itself because the Torah is written into us, making us holy. Why are we also Tamei BeOhel? It spreads to the air, because we are supposed to be not only holy, but we are supposed to spread it out, to disseminate the Torah; we have an aura about us when we live the right kind of life - we are all about the air, what kind of vibes we send out into the world. When we die, the opposite happens - kedusha is replaced with Tumah. We have a mission of Tikun Olam, and we are to influence others, radiate out Torah to all; when we die, this vacuum is filled with Tumah.

19:22: *Anything that the contaminated one may touch shall become Tamei, and the person who touches him shall become Tamei until the evening.* **Rashi:** Parah Adumah is like a Mashal, an analogy to a palace maid whose baby makes a mess on the floor of the palace; the officers and ministers say let the mother clean up the filth of the baby. Similarly, let the mother - the cow - come and bring kaparah for the baby - the Egel. This is from **Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan** in the **Tanchuma**. There is a clear linkage between the Egel and the Parah Adumah. **Beis Halevi:** when Moshe is thought to have died on Har Sinai, the people panicked and told Aharon to make a new leader for them - their fundamental mistake was that they felt a need to forge a new connection to God by themselves, something a human cannot do. The flaw in what they were doing was that they thought they could figure out how to connect to God through their own means; and they ended up with this terrible sin. They wanted an intermediary to God as a replacement for Moshe, but only Hashem could set this up. Religion cannot be set up through human intelligence; we cannot figure out connections to God through our logic. What the Midrash is telling us is that they built the Egel based on human reasoning, with human logic - that is the death knoll - humans cannot figure it out - the antidote is the Parah Adumah, something we cannot fathom in the least - connections to God are beyond our comprehension, and the sin of the Egel, a faulty result of human reasoning, is atoned by a heavenly command beyond human reasoning. **Nachshoni:** the Parah Adumah is emblematic of all mitzvoths - there are deeper meanings to all mitzvoths, with deep elements that we cannot figure out. The **Vilna Gaon** tried to bring a proof about this - we know that on shabbos one is not allowed to read by

candlelight because he might accidentally tilt the candle for better lighting, an Issur DeOraisa. When chazal said this in the Mishna, they did not give a reason; later a Braisa came and gave the explanation, that it might lead to someone tilting it and sinning. Reb Yishmael came along and said he is very pious and careful, and he could read on Shabbos because he would be careful not to tilt the candle; and it happened that once he was reading and was just about to tilt it to improve the light, and he just caught himself in time - he then blurted out "How smart are the words of the sages." This is from the Gemorrah in Shabbos. The **Vilna Gaon** said what he meant to say was how smart were the rabbis of the Mishna, who did not give a reason for not reading by the light; by giving a reason, people try to rationalize and will come closer to sinning; it is better not to give a reason, because people then think they can get around the problem, or it won't apply to them.

Rav Kaminetsky: in Sefer Hachinuch, there are many reasons attempted and given for every mitzvah; but for this Mitzvah of Parah Adumah, the Chinuch says that even though there are many possible explanations, when it comes to this mitzvah "my hands are weak - I will not give a reason for this mitzvah; if Shlomo did not, I certainly won't suggest a reason." **Rav Kaminetsky** - what if he had given a reason - what would have been the problem? We hold that when reasons are given, we can paskin halachos based on them, and we might make wrong deductions based on our own reasonings. Why didn't the Chinuch give a reason for this mitzvah? Shlomo said every single mitzvah is like Parah Adumah - no matter how smart we are, we never come up with the whole reason - as a symbol of that, the Chinuch was not even going to give it a try for this mitzvah.