Points to Ponder

Chukas 5781

**זֹ֚את חֻקַּ֣ת הַתּוֹרָ֔ה This is THE decree of the Torah (19:2)** - Why is Parah Adumah selected as THE paradigm of a Chok in the torah? Shaatnez and Kashrus also are Chukim so why single Parah Adumah out? **Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** explained that the idea that ash from a red cow has the ability to cleanse someone from an impurity is something we will never fully understand. It is a metaphor for the Torah which has the ability to cleanse someone from the impurities of this world yet we do not know or understand why or how it works. We don’t fully get how it takes one who is barred from being in Hashem’s house to becoming one who is beloved there. What we DO know is that it exists and we are the beneficiaries of that existence.

**אֲשֶׁ֛ר לֹֽא־עָלָ֥ה עָלֶ֖יהָ עֹֽל That has no blemish and never had a yoke placed on it (19:2)** - The metaphor of the yoke is used in accepting Ol Malchus Shomayim because one attached to a yoke cannot deviate from the path from the driver’s designated path. The **Chozeh of Lublin** used to say that if one thinks he is without defect, it is because he has not accepted the yoke of Shomayim on himself. **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl** used to explain that one bound to the Torah does not allow himself to be complacent in his growth for that would be tantamount to making himself into his own god -- as there is no idolatry worse than self-adortion.

**זֹ֚את הַתּוֹרָ֔ה אָדָ֖ם כִּֽי־יָמ֣וּת בְּאֹ֑הֶל  This is the Torah when an Adam dies in the tent (19:14) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would explain that Atem Keruyim Adam V’Ein Umos Keruyim Adam because there is no plural for Adam. By Am Yisrael there is a concept of unity but not by other nations. It is not a racist statement.

**וְדִבַּרְתֶּ֧ם אֶל־הַסֶּ֛לַע לְעֵֽינֵיהֶ֖ם וְנָתַ֣ן מֵימָ֑יו And you will speak to the rock before their eyes and it will bring forth its waters (20:8) - Yalkut Shimoni** compares the hitting of the rock to the educating of children. When the child is young, the hitting helped him learn. When he is older, it is the words that make a difference. How does one learn or teach with a stone? **Rav Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** explained that initially when Moshe or Aharon taught Torah, it was not that they were teaching -- it was the Mishna itself or the Talmud itself that spoke. There was no limit to the length of value in what it could offer. The same was true with the stone -- when it started to offer drops of water, there was no limit what it too could offer -- all that had to happen was to let it turn into a well from which the waters would spring forth unlimited.

**לָכֵ֗ן לֹ֤א תָבִ֨יאוּ֙ אֶת־הַקָּהָ֣ל הַזֶּ֔ה אֶל־הָאָ֖רֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַ֥תִּי לָהֶֽם:Therefore you shall not bring this nation into the land (20:12)** - What was so bad about hitting the rock? Wasn’t Moshe supposed to hit the rock under different circumstances? Why was this the basis for such a stern punishment? Why was there a difference in the commandment from one time to another? **Rav Yosef Carmel Shlita** explained that in Sefer Shemos Moshe was told to take his staff which was used to perform Otot with him. There are a few Mitzvos that the Torah includes as Otot  -  Bris mila, The Sneh, Tefillin, Shabbos (which was first given in Egypt or at least in Mara (pre-Sinai) & Marking the doorposts in Egypt with the Korban Pesach. These are all connected insofar as that they are connected to the period before the giving of the Torah. The use of the staff for getting water from the rock was appropriate in Parashat Beshalach, which is before Sinai, and therefore it was the right system at the right time. After Sinai, Moshe is no longer to use the staff, as it is the time to use speech and only to use speech.

And if the snake bit the person, he would look at the copper snake and live (21:9) - Rav Elya Sveii ztl. Points out that the entire episode was designed to get the people to see their permanent Kesher with Hashem. He quotes Or HaChaim who notes that the people were supposed to learn a few lessons from the copper snake. They complained that hahsem didn’t bring them to the place where there was food, leaving them in the desert instead. The snake reminded them that this was a stop to get the people to rely on  Him alone, looking up to Him to provide.

**וְהָיָ֗ה אִם־נָשַׁ֤ךְ הַנָּחָשׁ֙ אֶת־אִ֔ישׁ וְהִבִּ֛יט אֶל־נְחַ֥שׁ הַנְּח֖שֶׁת וָחָֽי: He would look at the copper snake and live (21:9) - Rashi** notes that it isn’t the snake that makes one live or die but rather when the Jews look toward Shomayim, they are successful. If that is the case, why does Hashem need the snake in the first place? Why not tell Moshe to have the people look toward the heavens and that’s it? **Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita** explains that there is a Nachash above (the Yetzer HaRa) and one below. The one above causes sin and the one below cannot punish if not for the one above. So, the true means of overcoming the fear and danger of the Nachash below is to attach oneself beyond his or her sins -- shaking the shackle of sin free and attaching oneself to Hashem which brings Refuah.

**Haftara:**

**וַיָּשִֹ֨ימוּ הָעָ֥ם אוֹת֛וֹ עֲלֵיהֶ֖ם לְרֹ֣אשׁ וּלְקָצִ֑ין  And the nation placed him (Yiftach) upon them as a leader (Shoftim 11:11)** – There is a tremendous debate between Yiftach and the people going on here as to how much of a leader he was going to be. Was Yiftach really only interested in the Kavod? **Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz ztl.** explains that a leader cannot lead the people if they do not believe in him. If he is only a hired mercenary, then the people he will not back him. However, when the people accept him, they are really declaring their acceptance of his role of carrying out the will of Hashem on their behalf.