Points to Ponder

Chukas/Balak 5780

**זֹ֚את חֻקַּ֣ת הַתּוֹרָ֔ה This is the Chukah of the Torah (19:2)** – Why is Parah Adumah called Chukas Hatorah? Why not Chukas HaParah? **Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita** explained that that every Mitzva has a source in it that is the root of something that is in every other Mitzva. Parah Aduma is the source for the parts of the other Mitzvos that are Chukim like Tzitzis.

**זֹ֚את הַתּוֹרָ֔ה אָדָ֖ם כִּֽי־יָמ֣וּת בְּאֹ֑הֶל This is the Torah when a person dies in the tent (19:14)** – The Gemara (Berachos 63b) notes that the words of Torah can only be kept by someone who literally kills himself for it. Torah does not demand martyrdom except in three cases so what do Chazal mean here? **Rav Dr. Reuven Bulka Shlita** suggested that the Torah is telling us that while others wander through life seeking meaning in it. The Torah **is** that very way of life. Without Torah, life is empty, meaningless, directionless, and purposeless.

**יַ֚עַן לֹא־הֶֽאֱמַנְתֶּ֣ם בִּ֔י לְהַ֨קְדִּישֵׁ֔נִי לְעֵינֵ֖י בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל Since you did not trust me to sanctify my name (20:12)** – Why is there no Kiddush Hashem in hitting the rock? **Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita** noted that the Yalkut Shimoni explains that V’Dibartem means to learn a Perek by the rock so that it would cry tears. Rav Chaim adds that based on the Yalkut, the Torah is teaching us that the Kiddush Hashem would have been to show the masses that Talmidei Chacham lack nothing.

**אֶעְבְּרָ֣ה בְאַרְצֶ֗ךָ Let me pass through your land (21:22) – Rashi** quotes the Tanchuma that despite not needing to secure a peaceful permission, Moshe sought one anyway. **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** noted that we see how important it is for someone to work on his middos. Moshe was not commanded to make peace with Sichon but his character demanded that he try to do so anyway. It was when Sichon said no and started the war, then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael needed to fight back.

**וַיִּשְׁלַ֨ח מַלְאָכִ֜ים אֶל־בִּלְעָ֣ם בֶּן־בְּע֗וֹר  He sent angels to Bilaam (22:5)** – What type of person was Bilaam? Was he a Novi or a Rasha? How could he have been both? Moreover, the mishna in Pirkei Avos (5:19) describes the contrast between the talmidim of Avrohom Avinu and the talmidim of Bilam ha'rasha. Why doesn't the mishnah draw a contrast between Avrohom Avinu and Bilam himself**? Rav Schachter Shlita** would remind us often that some of the commentaries point out that when one would look at Bilam you could be fooled to believe that he himself is the same type of person as Avrohom Avinu. Because he was a novi he dressed the part, acted the part, and spoke the part. You could only tell the difference between the two when you look at their talmidim. The mishna (Pirkei Avos 4:20) warns us, *"al tistakel b'kankan eleh b'mah sh'yesh bo* - one should not judge a person merely based on externalities." The same is true for picking a Rebbe to follow. Don’t look at his dress. Check out those who learn from him. When one is deciding whom to follow as his rebbe, in fulfillment of the instructions in the mishna (Pirkei Avos 1:6), "*asei l'cho rav",* one must judge whether the rabbi in question is the right person in his inner core based on the rabbi's talmidim.

**וַיִּפְתַּ֥ח יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶת־פִּ֣י הָֽאָת֑וֹן  Hashem opened the mouth of the donkey (22:28)** – Why did Hashem open the mouth of the donkey (having created it Bein HaShmashos on the Friday of creation – why was it so important)? **Rav Gifter ztl.** explained that the Torah is teaching us that people get so personally self absorbed that they distance themselves from Hashem. They think that they will ride through life on the material self-absorption (Chomer) throughout life. Hence Hashem created a mouth to the Chamor (donkey) right before Shabbos in order to reveal to a person just where reliance on chomer (materialism) really brings a person – not to Olam Haba – for it is not real but rather nowhere. So, prior to Shabbos which is a taste of Olam Haba, the Chamor (donkey) opens its mouth and speaks the truth.

**הֶן־עָם֙ כְּלָבִ֣יא יָק֔וּם וְכַֽאֲרִ֖י יִתְנַשָּׂ֑א They are a nation that rises like a lion (23:24) – Rashi** explains that this refers to the fact that as Jews we do not sleep late but rather rise like a lion to grab onto the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. **Rav Shaul Yisrael ztl.** noted that other nations in the world show their strength in their military superiority. We are different. We show our strength in the fact that everything we do, including our desires and thoughts, are dedicated to Hashem.

**Haftara: כִּ֣י אִם־עֲשׂ֚וֹת מִשְׁפָּט֙ וְאַ֣הֲבַת חֶ֔סֶד וְהַצְנֵ֥עַ לֶ֖כֶת What does Hashem ask of you, only to do justice, love Chessed and walk humbly with Hashem (Michah 6:8 ) – Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlita** noted how each of these traits is the opposite of the middos of Bilaam: Justice is the opposite of Bilaam’s wide soul that does whatever it wants. Loving Chessed counters Bilaam’s Ayin Hara that never wants to see something good in someone else. Walking humbly with Hashem is the opposite of Bilaam’s haughtiness.