

The CHASSIDUS PERSPECTIVE with Reb Yoel Kahn

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SELFLESS ASSISTANCE

Parshas Parah begins with the words, “Zos *chukas hatorah* – this is the *chok* of the Torah.”

It is known that *mitzvos* are divided into three categories. *Mishpatim* are *mitzvos* we would have understood even if Torah would not have told us about them (for example, to respect our parents and to refrain from stealing). *Edus* are *mitzvos* we would not have devised on our own, but now that Torah has commanded us to do them, we are able to understand them. Finally, *chukim* are *mitzvos* we do not understand even once the Torah instructs us to do them; in fact, they run contrary to logic.

Among *chukim* themselves, certain *mitzvos* contain a certain measure of logic, and others less so. The most illogical of them all is the *mitzvah* of *parah adumah*. In fact, although Shlomo Hamelech was able to find an explanation for every other *mitzvah*, when it came to *parah adumah* he stated, “I attempted to acquire wisdom, but it is distant from me.”

This is the reason the verse states, “This is the *chok* of the Torah.” Seemingly, the verse should have stated, “This is the *chok* of the *parah*” (similar to the verse discussing the *korban pesach*—“zos *chukas haposach*”)? This is because the *parah adumah* is the epitome of *chukim*; it is the only *chok* of its kind in the entire Torah.

ENGRAVED CHUKIM

The Alter Rebbe explains that the word *chukah* is related to the word *chakikah*, engraving.

When writing on parchment, the letters are not formed from the parchment itself, rather they consist of ink that is added to the parchment. By contrast, when engraving in stone, the letters are created from the actual stone.

Similarly, all *mitzvos* are essentially Hashem’s will, and are beyond intellect. However, upon descending to the plane of actuality, certain *mitzvos*—*mishpatim*—“acquire” logical explanations as well (similar to parchment upon which ink is added). *Chukim*, however, remain in their pristine state as Hashem’s will that is higher than intellect (similar to an engraved stone upon which no other substance is added).

The same is true regarding the attitude of the Jew performing

the *mitzvah*. Every *mitzvah* should be performed with *kabolas ol*, an approach that is higher than reasoning and is sourced in the *neshamah*. However, with *mishpatim*, one is also motivated by an intellectual appreciation of the *mitzvah*. By contrast, *chukim* are fulfilled solely with *kabolas ol*; the essence of the Jew’s *neshamah* connects directly to the essence of Hashem.

This further explains the verse, “This is the *chok* of the (entire) Torah.” In truth, every *mitzvah* in the Torah is a *chok* and is higher than intellect. What makes *parah adumah* unique is that it displays the concept of *chok* in a revealed way.

There are two elements of *parah adumah* that seem to be odd:

1. Although the water of the *parah adumah* bring purity to those who are impure, they also bring impurity to those who were previously pure.
2. Unlike all other *korbanos*, which are sacrificed in the Beis Hamikdash, the *parah adumah* was burnt “outside the camp.”

These two elements express the idea of *chukah*—that it consists of Hashem’s will that is beyond intellect, and that it must be fulfilled with *kabolas ol* deriving from the essence of the soul.

How is this so?

PURIFYING A SPIRITUAL CORPSE

The Midrash states that when Moshe perceived *tumas meis*, the impurity imparted through contacting a corpse, his face became dark and he exclaimed: “How can such a person become pure?!”

Moshe was not surprised that other types of impurity can be cleansed. As long as the *tumah* derives from a live person, purity can be achieved, because a measure of vitality—synonymous with holiness—still exists. A corpse, however, symbolizes someone who has no vitality whatsoever; he lacks any type of *chayus* in Torah and *mitzvos*. How can such a person become pure?!

The Midrash explains the *parah adumah* by quoting the *posuk*: “Who can obtain purity from impurity? Only the One [Hashem].” Only Hashem, who is above any and all limitations, can bring purity even to someone who lacks any form of vitality.

We, too, must demonstrate a form of boundlessness and *bittul* that

defies logic. Furthermore, this approach must be actualized mainly by putting ourselves to the side for the sake of assisting another Jew, both materially and spiritually.

It may happen that we encounter another Jew who is a “corpse”—externally he appears to possess no *chayus* or *kedushah* whatsoever. From a limited, logical perspective, it may seem that he is a lost cause and nothing can be done. However, we must know that even such a person is connected to Hashem and is “alive”; it’s just that his *chayus* is deep down and cannot be seen. Our job is to endeavor to “purify” him, disregarding the harm that may come our way from doing so.

To bring purity to a lifeless “corpse,” we need the concept of *chukah*: a level of *bittul* that surpasses reason, and the Divine Will that is beyond logic and limitations.

OUTSIDE THE CAMP

This approach is expressed in the two irrational elements of *parah adumah*: it brings impurity to those who are pure, and is sacrificed outside the camp.

Most *korbanos* are brought as atonement for sins committed inadvertently. A Jew by nature would never sin even by mistake; if such a transgression does occur, it is a sign that his animal soul has undue power, and he must therefore bring a *korban*. However, the level of *kelipah* being atoned for is merely *kelipas nogah*.

By contrast, the *parah adumah* brings purity even to the three impure *kelipos* that are lower than *kelipas nogah*. This is why it is offered outside the camp, as it brings atonement even to those who are “outside” the camp of holiness. To accomplish this, it is necessary to harness a level Above that is also “outside the camp”—a level that is beyond limitations.

When it comes to us, we must put ourselves to the side and bring purity to another Jew, even if that will cause us to become “impure.” Furthermore: We know that through helping others, we gain as well. To quote the *possuk*, “Hashem enlightens the eyes of both”—both the poor man and the rich man (whether literally or figuratively).

Even if purifying the other will bring us spiritual harm, we must disregard that and assist him nonetheless.

However, this should not be what is motivating us. Our approach should be that even if purifying the other will lower us—as indeed is the case on an external level—we disregard that and assist him nonetheless.

(Obviously, the spiritual harm referred to here is of a type that is in accordance with Shulchan Aruch. If it is not, we must certainly avoid it.)

What gives us the power to act in such a way?

The *possuk* says that the Jews were to bring the *parah adumah* “*eilecha*,” to Moshe. This teaches us, says Rashi, that the *parah adumah* will always be known as “the *parah* prepared by Moshe in the desert.” Since an entity’s name expresses its

content, it follows that the *parah adumah* is all about Moshe.

Moshe represents the concept of *bittul*. He is the one who gives us the ability to help others without regard for ourselves, not because of the benefits we might receive.

KEEP SOME FOR YOURSELF!

It happens that a person is so engrossed in helping others that he forgets to tend to his own spiritual needs.

Here, too, we can learn a lesson from the *parah adumah*. The ashes of the *parah adumah* were split into three parts, one of which was to be kept *Imishmeres*—as a safekeeping. In other words, even when working on purifying others, we must keep some of the ashes for ourselves, so that we, too, will remember to remain pure.

This is the meaning of the verse, “If you see someone who is naked, you should clothe him, and you should not forsake your flesh.” If you see someone who lacks the “clothing” of *mitzvos*, you should see to it to clothe him. However, at the same time, you should not forget about your own “flesh,” and you should ensure that you, too, are pure.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1056ff



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