

Parshas Chukas – Avi Friedwald

ר"ח תמוז תשע"ד – 27 June 2014 – שבת פ' חקת

The beginning of this week's parsha talks about the Parah Adumah, which the Torah describes as a **חוק**, a mitzvah with no obvious reason. This is generally understood to be due to the fact that the ashes of the red heifer purify someone who is **טמא מת**, when the ashes are sprinkled upon him, whilst at the same time making the person who is doing the sprinkling impure (Gemara Nida Daf 9).

The later commentators have suggested various lessons that one can learn from the fact that the Torah has hidden the reason – and I will try to summarise some of these here:

1. The Parah Adumah teaches us a lesson which is relevant to all mitzvos (**זאת חקת התורה** – this is a rule for the Torah – not something limited to the Parah Adumah) – whether or not we understand the reason behind a mitzvah, we are still obligated to observe it. Furthermore, even mitzvos where the reason appears logical – we don't actually know if this was Hashem's reason, or if He actually had something different in mind. (**Sefer Apiryon** – brought in Yalkut Lekach Tov).

The **Darash Moshe** (also brought in Yalkut Lekach Tov) adds that the risk with doing a mitzvah because we understand the reason, rather than because Hashem commanded us is that we will choose not to do it, where we think the reason doesn't apply – and this might lead us to transgress.

2. By observing mitzvos that we don't understand, such as the Parah Adumah, we train ourselves to recognise that just as there are mitzvos we don't understand, so too, we may be unable to comprehend Hashem's ways – but this is due to limitations in our understanding. The medrash says that when Moshiach comes, we will find out the reason for the Parah Adumah – as there will be no more challenges for us to face – where we need Chukim to strengthen us. (**Be'er Yosef** – brought in Yalkut Lekach Tov)
3. The fact that the Parah Adumah is able to achieve two opposite states at the same time – purity and impurity – teaches us that it can be appropriate to use opposite middos (**בכל לבבך = בשני יצירתי**) at the same time when doing a mitzvah. For example – a person should be generous with his own money, but careful with other people's money (**קמצנות & פיזור**). Similarly, a person is expected to be humble when it comes to his own honour, but protective of others when they are not be given the respect they deserve (**ענווה & גאווה**). (**Darash Moshe** – brought in Yalkut Lekach Tov)
4. By doing a mitzvah purely because Hashem has commanded us, rather than because it is logical, we reduce the hold the physical part of the body has on us and make ourselves more spiritual. This enables us to understand spiritual things that we would otherwise not be able to understand. Moshe made his physical body totally subservient to his spiritual being – and therefore was the only person to whom Hashem revealed the logic behind the Parah Adumah (Bamidbar Raba 19:4). (**Sefas Emes** – brought in Tallelei Oros)
5. In order to reverse a bad character trait, one sometimes needs to do the total opposite first – even if they ultimately want to be somewhere in-between (Rambam - Shemoneh Perakim).

The Jewish people tried to create an intermediary to bring Hashem closer to them (making Him more comprehensible), by making the Golden Calf (Kuzari Maamar 1, Eshed Hanechalim on Medrash– Ki Sisa 42). In order to atone for this – they had to do a mitzvah where the reason is totally incomprehensible – to reverse the damage caused. (**R. Yehoshua Zelig from Minsk** – brought in **קהלת יצחק**)