

Parshas Chukas

This week's Parsha is Chukas-where we are taught the principal Chok- statue of the Torah- which is the Para Aduma. Meaning of all the statues which have no reason, the primary one we are taught about is the red heifer- for which the ritual practice has no reason other than for Hashem telling us to do this. Rashi explains- it is such a statute without reason, that we cannot try to ascribe reasons to it, other than accept it on its level.

The Alter Rebbe in a mamer on the parsha, explains that this Chok (for which the root of the word Chok is shared with "chakika" to scrape or inscribe) is actually a reflection on the leap of faith one ought to take regarding the entire Torah. Although for the category of mitzvot called Eidos, or Mishpatim (testimony for a historical event- such as the mitzvot surrounding eating matza on pesach, or laws relating to societal upkeep such as do not kill and do not steal, i.e., laws which "makes sense") may have reason ascribed to them, we actually don't perform them for any other reason (theoretically) other than because it is what Hashem commanded us. Meaning the entire Torah and its statutes and laws, whether rational or not, are kept because they are the rules of Hashem.

Rashi explains on "V'yikchu Eilecha" that it is eternally called in Moshe's name- as learned in the gemara, that parts of the future ash mixture (later in the Batei Hamikdash) included a part of the original mixture of Moshe. This is important to highlight the above, in that Torah's eternality is apparent. Even if time goes on, and certain adaptations according to

Halacha are introduced, baseline mitzvot do not change, and this is apparent in the link between Para Aduma and ascribing it to Moshe, as explained in Rashi.

Interestingly the Shechting of the cow, can be performed by a non-kohen. I posit that since the service of preparing the ashes includes a period of impurity for the preparer, in the event that there is a Kohen shortage- if he became impure for the day- an important service may have to be postponed, which ideally isn't supposed to happen. In that event, a non-Kohen can replace the Kohen- so when they become impure- the Kohen can still perform his services...This is just a thought- and requires further research on my part for the laws of Para Aduma- specifically surrounding who becomes impure and why (the above is based on Rashi on posuk 7- "el hamachane"). The fact that the preparer becomes impure is on the surface part of the Chok- non-rational explanation- as we see later as to which impurities the Para Aduma purifies- the death of an animal is not the same as the death of a human.

The fact that the Para Aduma had to be purely red, (according to Rashi- not even 2 discolored hairs or other blemishes) is because as Rashi points out, reflects the purity of the soul of a Jew (which was blemished by the Eigel Hazahav). Chassidus draws an allegory of silk to the soul of a Jew which shows even smallest impurity.

The next part of the Parsha tells us of the death of Miriam- for which the "entire nation assembled". Rashi tells us why the two parshas are juxtaposed- to tell us, just as Korbanos atone- so to the death of a righteous person. Miriam was so holy that she died with a kiss of death. Even though

Miriam passed away in the 40th year, and the Para Aduma command was given in the second year, the two follow each other. I think beyond the explanation of Rashi- we can see a moral model depicted here. One can think that impure somehow connotes a “lesser than” status. But, inadvertently becoming impure due to exposure to death- should not somehow compel others to judge each other based on assumption about their exposure to the impurity. Because- as we see with the passing of Miriam- the whole congregation was there, meaning there is a chance that everyone became impure- and Hashem provides a method through which we can become pure. We cannot judge our neighbor for their purported impurity-as there is a chance everyone can become impure (we saw this during COVID that people judged their neighbors for contracting the illness due to exposure to the virus- which is a false premise).

Who best didn’t judge people- Ahron HaKohen who also passed away in this parsha- and who’s soul was also taken by a kiss of death. The entire nation grieved- as Rashi explains 20:29- that Ahron was a Ohev Shalom and Rodef Shalom- he loved peace and ran after peace between people and couples. Ahron embodied that which we ought to emulate to be a pursuer of peace.

The Haftora from Shoftim 11:1-33 relates Yiftach- a mighty person who had been banished from his father’s house- and his siblings were not nice to him. The elders personally worked to appease him and get Yiftach to fight their war (this connection to the parsha is the pursuit of peace of Ahron). The simpler connection to the Parsha is that Yiftach wondered why the the Amoni king

was warring with the Jews, and it was due to the events of this parsha (Chukas) 20:14- where Moshe requested passage through their lands. The King of Ammon wanted to reclaim lost territory which he said was taken about 300 years earlier in this week’s Parsha. Yiftach explained why it was patently false and it ended up costing the Amonites. Even though Yiftach himself may have been a flawed character we still attribute a level of salvation to him and with it merit. I think in the pursuit of peace we ought not judge a person’s whole character if they have a role to play for the greater good of the nation.

Good Shabbos