

A Blessed People. A Blessed Life.

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Parshas Chukas is one of the shortest sidros of the Torah, but it contains many messages for us that are especially poignant in our time. This year we have the added pleasure of also laying parshas Bolok this week, but we will concentrate our remarks on Chukas.

As the parsha begins with the laws of the parah adumah, it states, "Zos chukas haTorah – This is the decree of the Torah," a mitzvah for which there is no reason given.

Rashi famously explains that since the Soton and the nations of the world mock the Jewish people and ask them to explain this particular mitzvah and the reasoning for it, the posuk states straightaway that it is a chok, a mitzvah that was given with no explanation.

Ever since that Rashi was published, people have been trying to understand it. Typical questions include: Why is this mitzvah singled out for questioning by the nations? There are many other commandments in the Torah that are given without explanation. What bothers them about this one?

It is interesting that Chazal have another allegorical lesson derived from a posuk a few pesukim later: "Zos haTorah, adam ki yomus ba'ohel," whose literal translation is, "This is the decree of the Torah, a person who dies in a tent." The posuk goes on to state that when that happens, everything in the tent becomes tomei.

Chazal see a lesson there. They teach that the way the posuk is written, it is teaching that to excel in Torah, it is necessary to rid oneself of all physical needs. Someone who is encumbered by physical wants and desires is held down from succeeding in Torah.

We can combine the lesson of Chazal with Rashi's statement and explain that to be successful in studying and observing the Torah, we must disregard the thinking of those around us and persist with our Torah way of life, despite the many detractors. To be Torah Yidden, we tie ourselves to the chok, the bond of Torah living, which goes beyond considerations of human reason and logic. To be attached to Hashem means to be detached from the ways of the world and to recognize that it neither accepts nor appreciates us.

There are always people from our world who seek to explain our ways to politicians and influencers, in the belief that they can convince them that we are a decent, honest and honorable people. For some reason, it never works. There is superficial success, but deep down and when there are no Jews around, their discussions betray that they harbor devilish beliefs about us and despise us.

No matter what we say and how we live and portray ourselves, they will view us essentially as scheming, backward, dirty thieves. They don't want us in their towns and would rather we don't come around to their places.

Every once in a while, there is a zoning hearing and they say what they really think. All the Jews go nuts, crying about anti-Semitism, as if what transpired is an exception and not the rule. They forget that this has been going on since we became a people. They think that with so-called education and effective public relations, they can cure the symptoms of the age-old hatred. In years past,

they said that we killed their babies and poisoned their water. Nowadays, as the world has progressed, they aren't as crude, but they go on blaming us for all sorts of things.

Just last week, the so-called progressive government of the most advanced nation announced that it is cutting all scientific and technological relationships and development projects in the West Bank, referred to by them as land beyond the 1949 armistice line. Why? Because the murderous warring Jews stole the land from its rightful owners. Does that make sense to anyone who cares about history and the truth?

When it comes to Torah, it doesn't pay to try to explain things to the Soton and those who seek to aggrieve us. In a world of sheker, the truth carries no weight.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman would explain the posuk in Tehillim (119:142) of "Tzidkoscha tzedek le'olam" to mean that man cannot fathom the depths of Hashem's justice, for society and its concepts are ever changing. What is considered just in one generation is viewed as unjust in the next. But "veSorascha emes," the truth of Torah is everlasting. It neither changes for the times nor conforms to them.

Zos chukas haTorah. Torah is a chok. Torah is not about impressive dissertations, cutesy one-liners and clips, or a good PR firm. It is about following the will of the Creator as expressed in Torah Shebiksav and Torah Shebaal Peh. That's just the way it is.

The Medrash Rabbah (Bamidbor 19:1) teaches, "Zos chukas, this is the explanation of the posuk in Iyov which states, 'Mi yitein tahor m'tomei lo echod,

there is only One who can produce tahor from tomei, Avrohom from Terach, Chizkiyohu from Ochoz, Yoshiyohu from Amon, Mordechai from Shimi, Yisroel from nations who served false gods, Olam Haba from Olam Hazeh. Who did this? Who commanded this? Who decreed this? Only [Hakadosh Boruch Hu,] Yichudo Shel Olam.”

Avrohom, who spread belief in Hashem, came from the home of Terach, who was a priest to idols. Yoshiyohu, the righteous king who led the people to teshuvah, came from the home of Amon, the wicked king. And so on. Klal Yisroel was formed in the country of Mitzrayim, which was the lowest and most depraved of all the nations. Only the Yichudo Shel Olam can bring forth tahor from tomei.

Thus, concludes the Medrash, this is the same as we learned that those who prepare the parah adumah contaminate their clothing, while the parah adumah itself purifies clothing that had become defiled. Hakadosh Boruch Hu stated, ‘I have decreed a decree. You cannot disobey it.’

The nations don’t understand how good can come from bad, how the same parah adumah that purifies also creates tumah. On a rational level, it doesn’t make any sense. But if the Creator decreed it so, then that is the way it is, whether it complies with the understanding borne of prevalent thought or not. Through Torah, Hashem created the world, meaning that the world functions according to the rules of the Torah and not the other way around.

Those who deny Torah min haShomayim seek to make the Torah and its laws conform to the laws of the world and attempt to rationalize the rules of the Torah in a way that they and others can understand it. But that is diametrical to

our beliefs. The reason we eat kosher is not because it is cleaner or more humane. If anything, kosher is cleaner and more humane because Hashem formulated the laws of kashrus.

Millions of Jews were led astray by movements that sought to bring Torah up to date and in conformity with the times. By rationalizing Torah and making it "make sense," they twisted the entire Torah and led their followers astray.

For example, instead of teaching that melacha is forbidden on Shabbos because the Creator said so, they taught that work is forbidden on Shabbos because it is a day of rest. Thus, driving a car to shul is permissible, because it doesn't involve work and is for a good cause. Once these people declare that driving is not forbidden because of the various melachos involved but because of some reason or another, the forbidden action becomes attached to the supposed reason and excuses are quickly found to rationalize that which has nothing to do with reason or rationale. And so, millions of people were driven away from Yiddishkeit.

If kashrus is about compassion to animals, cleanliness and health, then if you live in a developed country with compassionate methods of slaughter and USDA inspections, who needs to eat kosher? The other stuff is just as good, plus it is cheaper.

Social deviancy is all the rage across this country, with millions taking pride in aberrant behavior. Those who rationalize the Torah go along with the conduct, fitting it into their understanding of the Torah's words.

To rationalize the Torah's commandments and apply human understanding to them and their concepts is to compromise them and corrupt the holy. Today, society thinks one way. Tomorrow, it will think a different way. Very rarely, if ever, do the thoughts of the hedonistic society jibe with the words of the Torah. To attempt to join them is to deny the eternal truth of the Torah and make it as temporal as a fickle society.

Critical thinking and analysis lacking yiras Shomayim, a sense of mesorah and humility result in individuals who destroy instead of build, obscure instead of reveal, and cause others to repel the Torah instead of drawing closer to it.

In our day, the forces of tumah are firmly entrenched. They are no longer hidden or dormant, but are as strong as ever. Anyone who cares can easily detect that the behavior is sinful and far removed from anything that a moral people such as ours can be associated with. As the laws of the country are changed to accept what until a couple of years ago was considered by all to be sick, we need to strengthen chinuch for kedusha and tznius. We need to maintain our distance from those who enable and promote such behavior, as we pity those who have fallen so low.

We need to delve into the teachings of Chazal and remember that as followers of the Yichudo Shel Olam, we can use our power of bechirah to become as holy as Avrohom Avinu ha'Ivri. Though his father was an av hatumah, Avrohom became an av hakedusha, the av hamon goyim, who taught about emunah and bitachon and spread holiness and morality to a world devoid of them.

We became a nation in the crucible of Mitzrayim, the most degenerate country with the most depraved population. Yet, because we cleaved to the Yichudo Shel Olam in such a hostile surrounding, we became a holy, moral, people.

Our world is full of temptations, but every period has its temptations and nisyonos. Millions couldn't resist working on Shabbos, and it's not for us to judge them; the temptation was very strong and very difficult to resist. Millions couldn't resist eating in treife restaurants and then brought non-kosher food into their homes. Millions couldn't resist the pull to acclimate their children to the wonderful free world. Yidden then watched as their offspring assimilated with the gentile culture and became lost to the Jewish people.

In hindsight and at a different time in history, we don't understand the pull and why so many were taken in by it. Didn't they know? Didn't they see where it would lead? But then, in our time, we have difficulty resisting the temptations of today and some think that they are insurmountable.

"Zos chukas haTorah." Do you want to succeed in Torah? Do you want to have a blessed life? "Odom ki yomus ba'ohel." Kill all those urges, temptations, and enticements that the physical world presents.

"HaSoton v'umos ha'olam monin es Yisroel." When the evil one and the nations extend a hand to you and seek to draw you to their way of life, don't debate them, don't get into conversations with them, and don't try to explain to them why what we do is right. Know that the Torah is a Toras Emes, as relevant today as the day it was given.

Those who follow it are blessed and lead a blessed life. They live their lives the way the Creator intended life to be lived. They grow and prosper as members of a nation with a holy pedigree. They are honest, moral and good, and will merit the coming of Moshiach very soon.