

פ' חקת תשפ"ה

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlit'a, Gaavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email ravsternbuchtorah@gmail.com

POST-WAR

In the aftermath of the war, Rav Sternbuch was asked what areas people needed to strengthen themselves in. He replied in Torah study, since Torah protects and saves us, and all blessings stem from Torah study. As for women, they should make sure not to waste their husband's time and take him away from his Torah studies. Girls should be focussing on faith.

UPPER SPHERES

"This is the statute (chok) of the Torah" (19:2)

Why does it say, "This is the statute of the Torah"? Would it not be more appropriate to say, "This is the statute of the *Poroh*"?

The *mitzvah* of *Poroh Adumoh* - the archetypal *chok*, a *mitzvah* whose reason is not immediately apparent - teaches us that, ultimately, all the *mitzvos* are really *chukim*, because any reason the human intellect can grasp is only one of myriad other reasons that are concealed from us. This is the *chok* of the whole Torah, i.e., the whole Torah is a *chok*, and ultimately, we keep the *mitzvos* because Hashem has commanded us to.

If we would be able to grasp the power of our actions in this world, how each *mitzvah* creates innumerable worlds, and each sin destroys worlds, we would be afraid of sinning. We would chase the performance of *mitzvos*, and be particular about every *dikduk bemitzva*. However, Hashem created this world in such a manner that we have no idea what is taking place in the upper spheres (much as a fetus has no inkling of the world outside its current state of habitation), so that we would have free choice to choose between good and evil. But if we, for our part, endeavor to imagine the effects of our actions in the upper worlds - for good and for bad - that would be very effective in motivating our behavior.

EIS ROTZON FOR BELIEVERS IN HASHEM'S GOODNESS

"This is the statute (chok) of the Torah" (19:2). Rashi: "Because the Soton and the nations of the world taunt the Jews, saying, 'What is this commandment and what purpose does it serve?' Therefore, the Torah uses the term 'statute.' I have decreed it; You have no right to challenge it."

The *Mogen Avrohom* (580:9) states that on the Friday preceding the *Shabbos* on which *Parshas Chukas* is read, some individuals have the custom to fast, because on that day, 24 wagons (some say 20) filled with *sifrei kodesh*, *Shas* and *poskim* were burnt in France. He notes that the fast day was fixed as always being on that Friday instead of on the date on which the calamity occurred - 9 *Tammuz* - on the basis of a *she'ailas chalom* that was asked.

That shocking event, whose purpose was to attempt to cause the Torah to be forgotten, produced a terrible *chillul Hashem*, with people asking, "Where is the Creator who permits such a terrible desecration of His holy Torah?"

The answer is, "This is the statute of the Torah". Hashem's conduct in the world (called "Torah") is a statute, which remains a mystery for now, and so it is no coincidence that this event occurred on the Friday preceding the *Shabbos* on which *Parshas Chukas* is read. That is the time to internalize the fact that we cannot ask questions about Hashem's conduct in this world and that

even such a terrible decree in which the Torah was burnt in public accompanied by joyous dancing took place for our good in order to rectify our sins.

Our persecutors during the *churban* in World War II also taunted us with questions about “where is your G-d?”, and in our generation too Jewish blood is spilt. Moreover, even in the Palace of the King here in *Eretz Yisroel chilul Hashem* is rampant. Successive governments enact laws against the Torah, about 80% of Jewish children are educated in heresy, and they seek to drive away the *shechino* from the *Kosel*.

Some say that on the Friday of *Parashas Chukas* the attribute of justice accuses those who are weak in their faith. On the other hand, for anybody who strengthens his *emuno*, joyfully accepting Hashem’s decrees on the personal and national level, and being convinced of Hashem’s goodness and knowledge of what is for our ultimate good, this Friday presents a special *eis rotzon*. It is within our power to turn a time of calamity into an occasion for joy, and by strengthening our *emuno* and praying to Hashem, we can accelerate the *geulo*.

DAMAGE CONTROL

“A red cow” (19:2). Rashi (following 19:22): “*This can be compared to the son of a maidservant who soiled the king’s palace. They said, “Let his mother come and clean up the mess.” Similarly, let the cow come and atone for the calf*”

This parable teaches us that all parents have to be responsible for their children, and if they must undo damage caused by them, all the more so do they have to ensure that their sons and daughters do not cause spiritual or physical damage to themselves or others in the first place.

Parents who send their children to a superior educational institution cannot just rely on that, but must also supervise who their children socialize with, and what their activities are after school, since they might be associating with bad company. Even children from the best families may be a bad influence over the child. It is a well-known fact that sanctity is hard to acquire, whereas one can become enmeshed in *tumah* very easily.

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL DISEASES

“Have them take for you a perfectly red unblemished cow” (19:2). Rashi (following his commentary on 19:22): *An allusion to the Jews, who were perfect, but became blemished. Let this come and atone for them so that they regain their perfection.*

During the *chet ho’egel* the Jews became “crippled”, and this disability was remedied by the *Poroh Adumoh* to the extent that they became “perfect”.

Every time a person sins he becomes blemished. This is because the soul derives its vitality from cleaving to Hashem, and when a person sins, this source of vitality becomes damaged, thereby “crippling” the *neshomo*.

Just as in the case of physical diseases, if someone does not look after his body this eventually takes its toll, and he becomes sick or even crippled, so too if a person does not look after the “health” of his *neshomo* by keeping Torah and *mitzvos*, his soul becomes affected accordingly, and eventually it becomes weak, to the point that he dies a spiritual death.

The form of a *neshomo* takes is based on a person’s deeds, and since those deeds differ from day to day, it is in a constant state of flux. We praise Hashem every morning for giving us a soul that is pure, and declare that “He will take it from me, and will restore it to me in the time to come.”

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Elyah Lopian said that one Friday night the Chofetz Chaim said that he had something important to say, and people came to his house to hear him speak. He said that that morning he had been very inspired when reciting *Elokai Neshomo* because the phrase “*u’lehachzira — and to restore it*”, with a *mapik hei*, indicates that in the future, at the time of *techias hameisim*, the *neshomo* will be restored to the body in exactly the same state as it was in this world,

i.e. the exact same soul that Hashem will take from a person upon his death is the one He will restore to him in the time to come, at *techias hamesim*.

Just like a person's body changes if it is not fed, so does the soul change if a person does not feed it with the appropriate nutrients, namely Torah and good deeds. Woe to the person who does not feed his soul properly while he still can, because the form and level of the soul upon a person's death will remain unchanged for all eternity.

Rosh Chodesh *Tamuz* is the time to start thinking about Rosh Hashonoh, because whoever starts preparing himself in good time for the Day of Judgement, will be privileged to be amongst the first to be judged on that day, and that time is the most favorable time to be judged, before Hashem exercises His wrath, just like in this world those who come earliest are the most likely to have their requests met.

NO ROOM FOR DESPAIR

Even though the ashes of the *poroh adumoh* were nothing more than a remnant of the original cow, and did not contain any trace of the cow's body, they were still holy, since they stemmed from *kedushah*, and when they were combined with water, the new, merged entity became sanctified to such an extent that it had a greater degree of *kedushah* than even *kodesh* itself.

This is a source of great hope for anyone with a Jewish soul. Even if outwardly every spark of *Yiddishkeit* has been extinguished and every trace of *kedushah* has seemingly become dried up, if the person has a strong desire to become purified by opening up his soul to the wellspring of Torah and connecting to the Source of purity, he is assured of success — beyond anything that seems possible in natural terms — in his efforts to ascend the rungs of *kedushah* and *taharah*.

Therefore, no one with a Jewish soul should despair, even if he is steeped in the forty-nine gates of *tumah*, because his *neshomo* derives from *kedushah*, which nothing can eradicate.

The ashes of the *poroh adumah* were mixed with water. This teaches us that even someone so steeped in sin and devoid of any good deeds that he feels as dried up as the ground, should not despair of attaining spiritual purity through the waters of *teshuvah*.

A perfectly red, unblemished cow is very difficult to come by, and it took much effort and determination to locate one. So too, there are many obstacles in the path of spiritual elevation, but one can succeed by investing the required effort and determination to achieve one's goals.

GREATNESS NOT ACHIEVED BY MIMICKING

This is the statute (chok) of the Torah. (19:2)

One of the seemingly irrational aspects of the *Poroh Adumoh* is the fact that it is *metaher teme'im* and *metameh tehorim* (purifies the impure and makes impure the pure). People's natures and temperaments differ from each other, as do their *shorshei haneshamos* ("sources of the souls" or inborn spiritual makeup). For this reason, the path adopted by one person in his *avodas Hashem* may be perfect for him, but totally inappropriate for another person with a different emotional makeup and spiritual level.

Each person has to engage in introspection to determine his specific character traits and positive qualities. This way, he will be in a position to know what his specific duties are in this world, and what types of *avodas Hashem* will assist him specifically in fulfilling his purpose in life. Hashem did not create us to be clones of each other, and the *Poroh Adumoh* teaches us that what serves as a source of *taharah* for one person may potentially be a source of *tumah* for another, based on each person's specific circumstances.

When Rav Sternbuch was thirteen years old, on his very first day at Rav Schneider's Yeshivah, Rav Schneider told his students that they had the ability to become as great as Rav Chaim Brisker. One boy objected that he was not capable of being a Rav Chaim Brisker, so what was he expected to

do? Rav Schneider replied that if he would fulfill his potential to the fullest extent the way that Rav Chaim did, he will have fulfilled his duty in this world.

In a similar vein, the Baal Shem Tov explains the statement by *Chazal* that many people attempted to follow the path of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai, who dedicated himself totally to Torah, and were unsuccessful. This was because they wanted to emulate him, instead of adopting a type of *avodas Hashem* that was appropriate for them specifically. Yearning for greatness is very important, but it cannot be achieved by blindly imitating someone else's conduct without taking our own unique circumstances into account.

JOY AT BEING HUMILIATED

"The kohen shall take a piece of cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson wool, and cast them into the burning of the cow" (19:6)

In spiritual matters one has to be strong and unyielding like a cedar, refusing to compromise our observance of the Torah in its original purity, and ignoring the objections of those who seek to breach it. On the other hand, one has to be submissive like a hyssop to the views of the *gedolei hador*, even when we do not understand their opinions. Finally, we have to be willing to endure humiliation and humble ourselves like crimson wool for the sake of Heaven.

When Rav Moshe Schneider was fundraising for his Yeshiva, and was humiliated by potential donors, he was proud of this, instead of becoming dejected. He said that Hashem loves those who humiliate themselves for the sake of *divrei Torah* and would cite the *Chazal* that the reason the father of Yechezkel ben Buzi had such a great son was that he humiliated himself for the sake of *divrei Torah*.

WHAT MADE RAV CHAIM BRISKER GREAT?

When a man dies in a tent. (19:14)

During World War I, many refugees fled to Minsk, finding accommodations in the local shul. Rav Yechezkel Abramsky testified that he saw Rav Chaim Brisker (who was already in his sixties at the time) standing in one of the corners of the shul for six consecutive hours immersed in his learning, completely oblivious to the tumult around him with people screaming and young children crying.

Rav Abramsky added that some people think that Rav Chaim was able to do this because he was a very talented genius, and was therefore able to disconnect himself from his surroundings, but the truth is that it stemmed from years of practice and determination to learn with *hasmodoh*. Rav Sternbuch also heard several times from the Brisker Rov that what people say about his father, Rav Chaim, that he achieved such high levels because of his talents is not true. In reality, he merited them by virtue of his great *hasmodoh* and toil in Torah.

Once Rav Sternbuch was at the Brisker Rov's house when a *Rov* came in and spoke with admiration about a certain *talmid chochom*, saying that he was a tzaddik. The Brisker Rov responded, "I don't know if he is a tzaddik, but one thing I do know: he is a *masmid*, and as far as I am concerned, the greatest form of *tzidkus* is *hasmadah* (*di greste frumkeit is hasmodo*)".

THE POWER OF ONE JEW

The tohor shall sprinkle on the tome (19:19)

The Yerushalmi (*Dmai* 3:4) says that in Yavneh they taught that one *tohor* sprinkles on several *teme'im*. Yavneh was a small place but its Sages ("Yavneh vechachomeho") had a profound influence on the entire nation. Thus, the Yerushalmi is teaching us that one *tohor* person, one person with G-d-given capabilities and tremendous will power, can have an incredible impact for the good on many others.