Chukas 2016

1.

Learning without distractions and interruptions

"This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent: Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated for seven days." (19, 14)

"זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אָדָם כִּי־יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל כָּל־הַבָּא אֶל־הָאֹהֶל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּאֹהֶל יִטְמָא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים."

The Gemara deduces from this pasuk an important concept. The Gemara (Berachos 63b, Shabbos 83b) states that the Torah only endures within someone who (metaphorically) kills himself over it (אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה). Meaning the Torah will only truly last and be remembered by someone who diligently learns. Similarly, the Rambam (hilchos Talmud Torah perek gimal) elaborately explains how the Torah truly exists within someone who makes sacrifices in order to learn seriously. (אין דברי תורה מתקיימין במי שמרפה עצמו עליהן, ולא באלו שלומדין מתוך עידון ומתוך אכילה ושתיה, אלא במי שממית עצמו עליהן ומצער גופו תמיד ולא יתן שינה לעיניו ולעפעפיו תנומה.) The question arises; the pasuk states "you shall live by it". The Gemara in Yuma (85a) darshens (expounds) this to mean you shouldn't do things that will endanger our lives. (וחי בהם" ולא שימות בהם.) How then do chazal encourage us to 'kill ourselves' over the Torah? The Chafetz Chaim beautifully explains by means of a parable. There was a big entrepreneur who many buyers flocked to. He was constantly preoccupied and busy with his successful business. He was so busy with his work that he didn't even have time to walk to Shul to daven with a minyan. Many years passed and he started growing white hair. He realized that he only has limited time left until he will perish. He decided to get ready for his trip to the next world. He began spiritually improving. He started to perform more mitzvos and learn for longer periods of time. He started to daven with a minyan in Shul and he would learn for two hours prior to going to work. By the time he got to work there were many customers who were waiting. His wife wondered and asked why he was late. He responded that he was burdened and needed to come late. This repeated itself for several days; he would come late, customers would be waiting, his wife would ask why he was late and he would give the same response. One day his wife followed him and saw that he was keeping these customers waiting because he was learning. She began to yell at him saying, have you gone crazy? This isn't fair to the customers. He responded 'listen please my loved one. Before I die what will happen? The malach hamaves (angel of death) will come to get me. Will I be able to say please wait, I need to deal with these customers? When I am learning, pretend that I am dead. This is the explanation of the Gemara that states the Torah only endures within someone who kills himself over it. **When one learns they must pretend that they are dead, dead from all of the other distractions of this world. Nothing else matters**.' With this story we are able to answer the original question. When one 'kills himself' for the sake of learning, he is truly living.

There is another story which shtims (coincides) perfectly with the aforementioned idea. The Nesosi hashas (chalek alef page 254) relates a fundamental story about Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margolis zasa"l, the Beis Ephraim. The Beis Ephraim's wife would take care of business matters in order that Rabbi Margolis would be able to peacefully learn. Sometimes, when Rabbi Margolis was eating, Rebbetzin Margolis would ask a business related question. One time there

was a very important entrepreneur who came. He was selling diamonds and offered a great deal. The potential profit was tremendous. However, this investment similar to other large investments that could potentially yield a large potential required a large sum of money to be immediately invested. The Rebbetzin decided that this was too big of an investment to invest in without first consulting with Rabbi Margolis. She therefore uncharacteristically sent someone to the Yeshiva to get Rabbi Margolis. (This was time sensitive, because the entrepreneur needed to relocate quickly.) Rabbi Margolis sent the messenger back to the Rebbetzin. The Rabbi said please tell her the following 'I apologize, but I can't interrupt the learning.' After he finished learning and returned home, he noticed that the Rebbetzin was sad. Rabbi Margolis immediately appeased her and said 'at the time when you sent a messenger to retrieve me in order to take care of the bossiness deal which would have interrupted the learning, I thought about a Gemara. The Gemara in Berachos that states the Torah only endures within someone who kills himself over it. **Alas, I finally understood the explanation of that Gemara. When one learns they must pretend that they are dead, dead from all of the other distractions of this world. The time that is allocated and designated for learning must be used for learning only.** If I were dead you would be unable to ask for my advice. Temporarily pretend that I am dead.'

2.

Is the para aduma really a chok?

The para aduma (red cow) is the quintessential example of a chok (mitzvahs that we perform without knowing the reason why we perform them). The question arises; are there any reasons what-so-ever explaining the mechanics of the para aduma? How could the para aduma metaher (purify) those who are tamei (impure), while simultaneously be metamei (make non pure) those who are tahor (pure)? Why did Hashem create chukim? Is there any purpose behind performing the chukim? Why did Hashem want to keep the reasons for certain mitzvos hidden? As we know nowadays we cannot perform the mitzvah of para aduma due to the lack of a beis Hamikdash. That being so, **is it possible to apply the lessons of the para aduma to our lives? If so, how can these lessons be applied to our lives?**

It seems that Rashi attempts to offer a reason for the para aduma. Rashi (19, 22) quotes a fundamental Medrash. The Medrash Tanchuma explains that the para aduma is analogous to the son of a maidservant who soiled the palace of the king. They said let this mother come and wipe away the excrement. Similarly, let the cow come and atone for the calf. (משל לבן שפחה שטינף פלטין של מלך. אמרו תבא אמו ותקנח הצואה, כך תבא פרה ותכפר על העגל.) With this we can understand **the purpose of the para aduma; to atone for the calf.** However Rashi doesn't explain how the para aduma simultaneously is metaher (purify) those who are tamei (impure) and is metamei (make non pure) those who are pure. Perhaps another Rashi (ibid) indirectly answers this question. He writes that the sin of the calf will last for many generations. There are several similarities between the calf and the para aduma. The calf was metamei those who were involved with it, so too; the para aduma was metamei those who were involved with it. Additionally, the ashes of the calf purified, so too; the ashes of the para aduma purified. Rashi is essentially indirectly providing us with the answer to the difficult question that even Shalomo Hamelech was bothered with; how could the para aduma metaher (purify) those who are tamei (impure), while simultaneously be metamei (make non pure) those who are pure? The answer is; **the para**

aduma is similar to the sin of the golden calf. On the one hand anyone who was involved with the golden calf became tamei, while on the other hand anyone who received the ashes became pure.

The Cheskuni (19, 12) offers another answer as to how the para aduma is metaher (purify) those who are tamei (impure), while simultaneously is metamei (make non pure) those who are pure. We find the concept of one matter making two matters. **Certain things have duel functions. For example**, fire has the ability to melt metals such as tin, and destroy. While fire can also harden certain items such as eggs. Similarly, certain medicines can cure sick people, while damage someone who isn't sick. Lastly, water typically serves as a substance that extinguishes fires. However water can also start a fire. For example, if water is placed outside in a glass cup and the sun shines through the cup, a fire could start.
The Keli Yakar (19, 21), explains that food does not become susceptible to tummah unless water falls on it. How is this possible? Water typically purifies, such as water in a Mikvah. How then can water serve as an intermediary stage enabling something else to become impure? Many times something doesn't get activated unless it interacts with its opposite. For example, the Gemara in Suka (52a) states that the greater a person is, the greater his yeitzer hara (evil inclination) is. The reason for this is that the yeitzer hara is the complete opposite of holiness. Therefore ones extreme holiness automatically activates an extreme yeitzer hara. This is also why before dawn is the darkest time; it's because light and dark are opposites. This is why food does not become susceptible to tummah unless pure water falls on it. The same applies to the para aduma. The pure water and the impure ashes are mixed together. The water purifies the impure person since the pure water is the opposite of this impure individual. He also will not be affected by the impure ashes since he is impure. He will only be affected by the opposite. However, the pure person who is involved with the para aduma will become impure because he will be affected by the ashes. Since the ashes are impure and the opposite of his pure state, the water will not help him since he is pure and aren't opposite etc.
The Nachlas Tzvi (pages 280-281) has a similar mehalech (approach). He starts by quoting Rashi who says that the Satan provokes us by saying this mitzvah is illogical and reasonless. Not only does the Satan say this, but Jews say this as well. Now let's analyze; that which the para aduma is metaher for those who are tamei, it isn't difficult to understand at all (since we find this result by other korbanos as well.). However, the para aduma simultaneously being metamei those who are tahor is difficult to comprehend. This anomaly can be explained based on medicine. **Many times the cure for someone who was bitten by a poisonous snake or drank poison is for him to drink another type of poison. If a healthy person would drink this poison, it would most likely be detrimental, perhaps even fatal. So too regarding the para aduma; even though it is metaher those who are tamei, it nevertheless is metamei those who are tahor.**

The simple explanation of the para aduma is that it is a chok. It is clear that the Chinuch also has this mehalech. The Chinuch (mitzvah 397) writes, even though I usually offer reasons for the mitzvos, regarding this mitzvah of the para aduma my hands have become weakened, I am afraid to open my mouth and say anything at all, even to attempt to offer a simple explanation. (אף על פי שמלאני לבי לכתוב רמזים מטעמי המצות וכו. במצוה זו רפו ידי ואירא לפצות פי עליה כלל גם בפשט.) The reason I am hesitant to offer a reason is because even Shalomo Hamelech was uncertain about this mitzvah. The Bamidbar Raba (19, 3) and Medrash Tanchuma (parshas Chukas) relate that Shalomo Hamelech said 'I was able to understand the entire Torah except for the parsha of para aduma. In

my eyes this parsha is incomprehensible.' (אמר שלמה על כל אלה עמדתי ופרשה של פרה אדומה חקרתי ושאלתי ופשפשתי (קהלת ז) "אמרתי אחכמה והיא רחוקה ממני." (Parenthetically, the Rabbenu B'chaya calculated that the gematria (numerical value) of "והיא רחוקה" is פרה אדומה. (341)) etc.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emes Leyaakov on the Torah pages 442-443) explains that **the main purpose of the para aduma is in order to have yiras (fear of) Hashem. Hashem wanted there to be chukim in order that we would fear Him. Every mitzvah that we do is because Hashem said that we have to do it, therefore we must perform the mitzvos. Any reason for a chok mitzvah that we attempt to logically figure out diminishes from the tachlis (purpose), focus and goal of the mitzvah.** This is why Hashem specifically chose the mitzvah of para aduma to be given at Mara, prior to Har Sinai. Only a select few mitzvos were given at Mara. It is easy to understand why the mitzvos of Shabbos and kivud av v'eim were given there; because of the vitality and applicability of these mitzvos, Hashem wanted them to be fulfilled as soon as possible. The fulfillment of these mitzvos would properly prepare us for receiving the Torah. Rather, what is the explanation of receiving the mitzvah of para aduma, which couldn't have been performed anyway due to the lack of the Ohel Moad? This could be answered based on Rashi (Beshalach 15, 25). We were given some of the mitzvos in order that we would be involved with learning about them. This would truly prepare us for receiving the Torah. Para aduma was specifically chosen because it uniquely possessed a powerful lesson that was nonexistent in other mitzvos; **we don't fulfill mitzvos because we intellectually understand them. Rather, we perform the mitzvos because Hashem told us to. Our learning about and doing the mitzvah of para aduma properly demonstrates that we perform mitzvos just because Hashem instructed us to do so. Since para aduma is the quintessential illogical chok, therefore this mitzvah in particular properly demonstrates our yeras Hashem.** This is the most fitting way to prepare for receiving the Torah. With this we could understand a fundamental Gemara. The Gemara (Berachos 63b, Shabbos 83b) states that the Torah only endures within someone who (metaphorically) kills himself over it (אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה). Meaning, the Torah will only truly last and be remembered by someone who diligently learns. The Gemara derives this from the pasuk regarding para aduma, "This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent: Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated for seven days." (19, 14) Why does chazal specifically derive this concept from a pasuk regarding para aduma? What does diligently learning have to do with the para aduma? Seemingly it would have been more logical to derive this from a pasuk pertaining to actual learning. The explanation is that, the deeper idea behind the Torah and para aduma are really the same; they are both above our comprehension. It is impossible to fully grasp the depth of the Torah, unless one 'kills himself' and rigorously toils over the Torah. (One will never fully understand the depths of the Torah and para aduma. However if one toils, they will at least find several reasons for the para aduma as mentioned above. Similarly, if one toils he will discover some of the depths of the Torah as well.)
Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emes Leyaakov on Avos pages 131-133) elaborates on this even more. The Mishna in Avos (perek hay) relates that Avraham underwent and passed ten tests. (עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ועמד בכולם להודיע כמה חבתו של אברהם אבינו עליו השלום.) (There is a machlokes (argument) amongst the Reshonim and mefarshim (commentators) on that Mishna as to what the exact tests were.) The Mishna refers to all of the difficulties that Avraham underwent throughout his life as tests. The Torah itself only uses the terminology and the word test once. The pasuk states that Hashem tested Avraham ("והאלהים נסע אברהם."). This pasuk was

by the akadas (the binding of) Yitzchak. The question arises; since there were nine previous tests that occurred, why does the Torah only use the word test by the akada? Furthermore, after the akada, Hashem said now I know that you fear Hashem ("עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלהים אתה."). Hashem is indirectly implying that prior to the akada Avraham was not considered a yeray Hashem. The question is, why not? Avraham had already undergone and passed nine tests. Seemingly Avraham had already demonstrated that he was a yeray Hashem. That being so; why didn't Hashem view Avraham as a yeray Hashem prior to the akada? The Torah itself doesn't refer to the first nine tests as tests because Avraham understood the reason for these tests. For example, when Hashem instructed Avraham to leave his land (לך לך); he understood that relocating was what was best for him. Dissimilarly, the last test, the akada, was illogical, unexplainable and senseless. Why would one be commanded to kill his only son? Avraham was unable to justify this test in any way. Therefore, specifically and only regarding the akada does the Torah refer to it as a test. All of the other nine tests were performed out of ahava (love), because Avraham understood how they would be beneficial. Conversely, the akada was out of yirah, since he didn't understand the test. With this we could understand the Yalkut Shemoni (Bamidbar 19) that relates Hashem revealed the reason for the para aduma solely to Moshe. The para aduma is all about yirah; therefore para aduma is the quintessential mitzvah that should be performed out of yirah. Furthermore, not only do we not know the reason behind the para aduma, but it is also against logic. Regarding Moshe the Gemara (Berachos 33b) relates that yiras Hashem is very easy for Moshe. The Gemara quotes a pasuk that says "What does Hashem ask from you? just to fear him". Is fearing Hashem so easy? The Gemara answers, yes. Regarding Moshe fearing Hashem is easy. The Gemara proves this point by means of an analogy. ("ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה", אטו יראת שמים מילתא זוטרתא היא והאמר רבי חנינא משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי אין לו להקב"ה בבית גנזיו אלא אוצר של יראת שמים שנאמר "יראת ה' היא אוצרו"? אין לגבי משה מילתא זוטרתא היא דאמר רבי חנינא משל לאדם שמבקשים ממנו כלי גדול ויש לו דומה עליו ככלי קטן, קטן ואין לו דומה עליו ככלי גדול) Therefore, Hashem was able to reveal the reason for the para aduma specifically to Moshe, since regardless Moshe would have proper fear of Hashem. Conversely, others who don't possess yiras Hashem yet, will remain unaware of the reason for the para aduma.

To properly crystallize the lesson that we can derive from the para aduma, let's relate one last idea. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz (Sichos Musser mamer 78 page 339) asks the following question. "This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem has commanded, saying: speak to the children of Israel and they shall take to you a completely red cow, which is without blemish, and upon which a yoke has not come." (19, 2) "זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה וגו." Seemingly the pasuk should have said this is the decree of the para aduma (red cow) since the para aduma is being discussed? This comes to teach us a very important point. **One who fulfills chukim is considered to have additionally fulfilled the entire Torah. Fulfilling mitzvos without understanding them testifies of the righteousness and correctness of that individual. It additionally demonstrates the proper and necessary emunah (belief) that individual possesses, which will enable him to perform all other mitzvos. This shows that he is giving himself over to Hashem.** One performing a logical mitzvah doesn't demonstrate the aforementioned. When we perform mitzvos, we need to perform them solely because we are commanded to perform them, not because they are logical. The reason why we don't murder others is because Hashem said we shouldn't, not because it's illogical and against everything humanity believes in; not to murder people.

The Gemara in Berachos (10a) relates Yeshayahu rebuking Chezkiyahu. Yeshayahu said why are you getting yourself involved with the secrets of Hashem? That which you are commanded and is good in the eyes of Hashem you have to do. (אמר ליה בהדי כבשי דרחמנא למה לך? מאי דמפקדת איבעי לך למעבד, ומה דניחא קמיה קודשא בריך הוא לעביד.)

Firstly, there are reasons behind the para aduma. But more importantly, based on all of the aforementioned we can learn a great lesson. We need to accept upon ourselves to perform all mitzvos, even though we do not know the truthful reason for the mitzvah. We must perform the mitzvos because Hashem said so, period. No questions. We need to perform these mitzvos out of yeras Hashem. This is precisely the point of chukim; in order that we will acquire yeras Hashem.