

Chukas 2013

1.

Chukim

Nachlas Tzvi page 381

“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)

"זאת חקת התורה אשר צוה יקנוק לאמר דברו אל-בני ישראל ויקחו אליהם פרה אדמה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא-עלה עליה על."

Seemingly the pasuk should have said this is the decree of the para aduma (red cow) since the para aduma is being discussed? The reality is most of the Torah and mitzvos are chukim. We do not understand the real reason for many of the mitzvos; they are similar to incomprehensible commandments. We are nevertheless obligated to observe these mitzvos. For example, we are unaware of the reason for the prohibition of shatnez. (Even though reasons for this prohibition have been offered, nevertheless we don't know the real reason behind this prohibition. What's so bad about wearing semar (wool) and peshtim (linen) together?) Regardless of our knowing the real reason or not, we must keep this mitzvah. If one wears semar and peshtim together he violates a Torah commandment. Therefore, the pasuk uses the word Torah as opposed to para aduma, in order to refer to this concept that most of the mitzvos of the Torah are similar to chukim.

There are many areas of Torah that we think we properly learned. We tend to convince ourselves that we truly understand a specific area that we learned in depth. The reality is; that we merely scratched the surface. Our minds are shallow. Even the Jewish leaders of the generation have yet to comprehend the true depths of the Torah. The same applies to davening. The importance of understanding the words and meaning of davening cannot be overemphasized. The lack of understanding of the prayers that we recite daily is a plague that has afflicted our generation. Many nonreligious Hebrew teachers view this as pathetic. This can perhaps even be a chillul Hashem. How can one have proper kavana (intent), if they don't even know what they are saying? These teachers will ask 'what's the point of them praying if they don't even know what they are saying?' It's a good and valid question. The truth is; one technically and halachically speaking only needs to know the translation of several parts of davening. Everyone is halachically obligated to know the first pasuk of Shema, first paragraph of Shemonah Esrei and the pasuk of poseach in Ashrei. (See Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berurah seanim 51, 63 and 101) However realistically and preferably one should know the meaning of the whole davening. Minimally, one should know the meaning of the main parts of davening such as the whole shemonah Esrei and the berachos before and after Shema. But one will say 'this is boring.' Or another will say the classic claim 'I don't have time.' The answer is five minutes a day that's all. **Before Shacharis everyday sit down with an interlinear siddur and a regular Hebrew siddur. Write down every word in the Hebrew siddur that you don't know. Drastic improvement in understanding davening will speedily occur.** What does this entire important seeming tangent

have to do with the previous topic? Simple, even those who Baruch Hashem do understand the meaning of davening, do not fully comprehend the true depths of its meaning. The Chafetz Chaim (Beur Halacha siman 101 sif 4) explains the importance of davening in Hebrew, the holy language. He explains that no less than 150 old and wise Anshe Kenesas Hagedolah (members of the great assembly) established the text of davening. Some of these distinguished men were actually prophets. Very deep and incomprehensible secrets are hidden within these powerful words. Even though we are unable to have the proper intent that these sacred words deserve, nevertheless when we utter these words we fulfill our obligation of davening. When we say these words an immediate kedusha (holiness) is activated that positively affects the upper celestial spheres.

On the one hand we must strive to understand davening at the level that we are able to. On the other hand we must realize that we will never fully understand the depths behind these lofty words. The same applies to Torah and mitzvos. We must attempt to learn Torah and perform the mitzvos to the best of our abilities. We are encouraged to try to find reasons for the mitzvos, even the chukim. However, we must simultaneously know that the real reasons for the chukim are concealed.

2.

Excuses

Penenim Meshulchan Gevoah page 166 quoting the Bas Yitzchok (Rabbi Yisroel from Salant)

“Why have you brought the congregation of Hashem to this wilderness to die there, we and our animals?” (20, 4)

"ולמה הבאתם את קהל ה' אל המדבר הזה למות שם אנחנו ובעירנו."

The question arises; why were they worried about their animals? Let's paint a picture and try to imagine this situation better. They think that they are on the verge of death due to starvation. Why would they care about the welfare of their insignificant animals? The Medrash Raba (Noach (33) and Emor (27)) explains that Alexandros mukdon says that sometimes when we sin Hashem will withhold rain from descending. This is also discussed in the third perek of mesechas Tanis. However, sometimes even though Hashem has decided to prevent the rain, he will nevertheless change his mind for the animals, in order that they will not die. Hashem has mercy on the animals. This mercy will only exist and be applied when specific people sinned and the decree for no rain was only because of them. Conversely, when the decree for no rain is placed on an entire location then He will not change his mind and it will not rain. What about the animals? They can simply travel to another location that has rain. The Jews in the desert were complaining that there was a lack of rain. They attempted to defend themselves by saying that their sins didn't cause the lack of rain, rather the location. This is why they mentioned their animals. They tried to use their animals as a legitimate excuse. Meaning, from the fact that their animals were in danger, this implied that the location itself also caused a lack of rain.