



Rockwell questions racism: are children evil?

ESTD 1997

As a religion whose leader Moses married a woman of color, and whose messiah descends from a convert, why do many Jews still value labels and externalism...over Judaism?

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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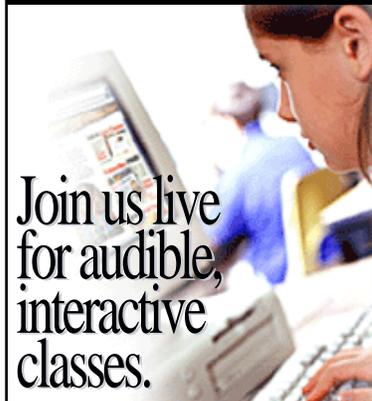
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Weekly Parsha

Chukat

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"This is the law of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying, "Speak to Bnai Yisrael and they should take for you a completely red cow that has no blemish and has never born a yoke" (BeMidbar 19:2)

Rashi is probably the most widely studied commentary on the Chumash. There are many

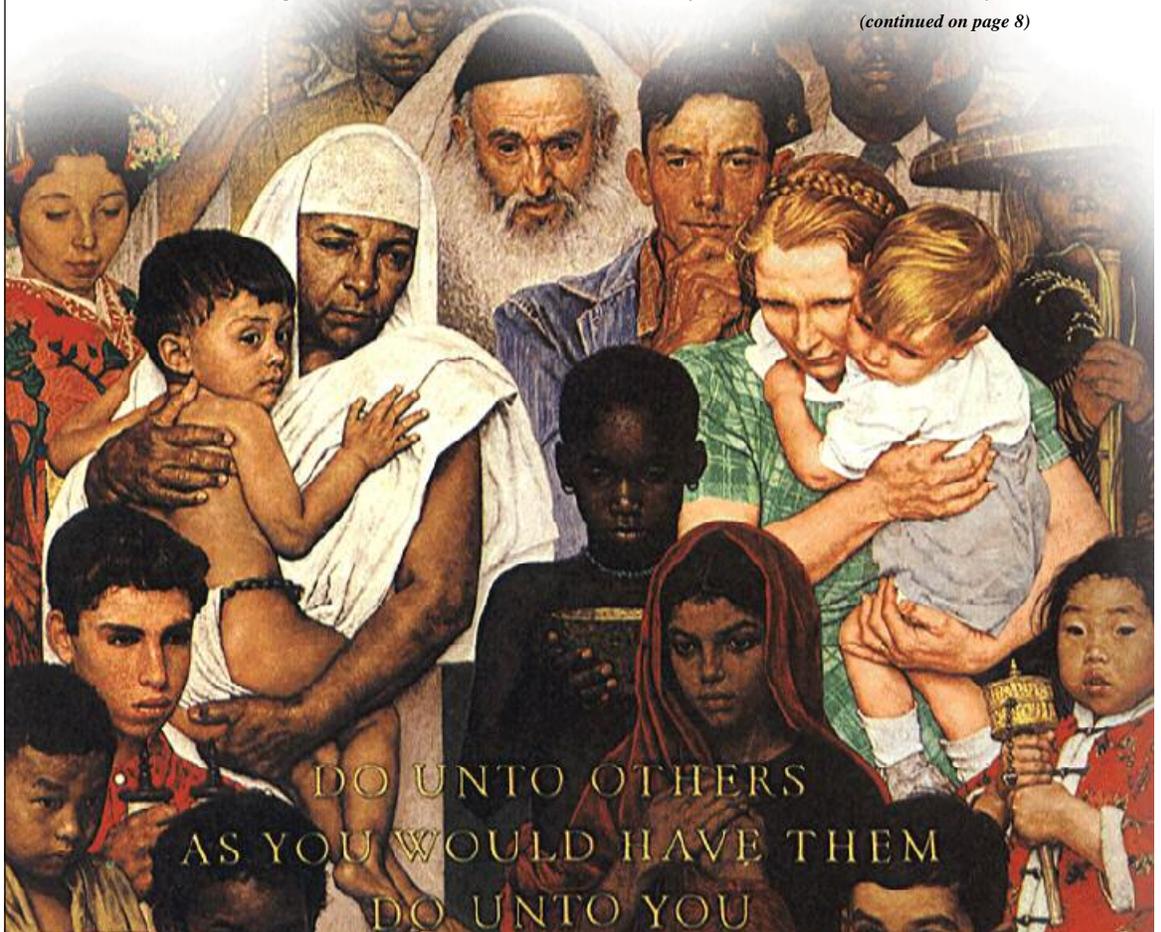
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COSTUMES VS. CHARACTER

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I am still disturbed at the women and young girls who study in Yeshiva in Israel, and come home seeking a boy with a certain dress code, not seeking a boy with impressive acts of kindness, intelligence, and the true values. And even if they do seek the latter as well, they do

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Norman Rockwell painted not only images, but ideas. Here, quoting "V'Ahavta Rayacha K'Mocha", Rockwell expresses the vanity of external dress and how we must adhere to values, not veneer.

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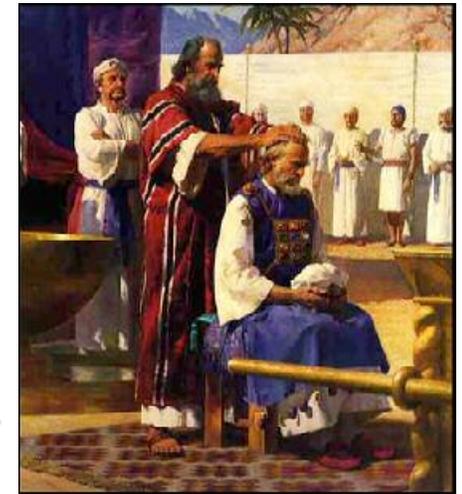
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ANGEL of DEATH II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Jessie: In Parshas Chukas, (Numbers, 20:29) it says the entire congregation saw that Aaron had died. Rashi comments: "When they saw Moses and Elazar came down and Aaron didn't come down they said, "Where is he?" He said, "He died." The Jews said, "Is it possible that he who stood against the Angel of Death and stopped the plague (in Korach) can be defeated by the Angel of Death?" Immediately Moshe asked for mercy and the ministering angels showed them Aaron lying dead in a bed. They saw and they believed."

Questions: What is this Medrash trying to teach us? Why would they not believe that Aaron had died? Why did this sort of vision demonstrate that he did die? Why did Moshe need mercy for this demonstration?

Mesora: As always, good questions, and succinct Jess. I believe the first thing we must posit is this: when Aaron stayed the plague, it was necessary to teach the Jews that Aaron and Moses were not murderers. However, this miracle of Aaron standing between the dead and the living during that plague was in part, incorrectly interpreted: that Aaron "the man" possessed some greater power over death. (The Jews saw Aaron standing between the living and dead, and no more people died) Nonetheless, God enacted this miraculous feat were Aaron stayed the plague, so as to correct the false notion harbored by the Jews that Aaron and

Moses were murderers, as the Jews formerly accused. So God thereby corrected the false notion of the Jews, that Aaron and Moses killed the "just" congregation of Korach. In fact, Korach's congregation was evil. So Aaron and Moses were not killers of "innocents". Aaron demonstrated their innocence by saving the Jews with the incense. However, this act to which you refer, was perceived as Aaron being "above death", since he stayed the plague of death.

Now, as Moses and Elazar descended the mountain, without Aaron, the Jews were confused and thought, "Aaron beat death in the previous plague, how can he possibly die?" Moses too realized the problem, and saw a solution: beseeching God to intervene, through prayer, but not as you may think. God agreed and responded. The only solution, as Moses anticipated, was that Moses help demonstrate that Aaron had no power over life and death. Perhaps, since Aaron himself was not the cause of the corrupted, immortal reputation maintained by the Jews, hence, he could not be the one who might correct this reputation. Meaning, in order that the Jews realize that Aaron was not immortal, the very Source of life – God – must step in to teach that man is not inherently immortal, and man (Aaron) possesses no power over life at all. When the Jews realized that Moses was praying to God to correct their false, immortal view of Aaron, they now realized from where their wrong assumption of Aaron's

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immortality originated: it was from “God’s” miracle of staying the plague, Aaron was a bystander simply following orders. The Jews either see Moses pray to God, or better, they see God somehow unveil Aaron’s true mortality, which results in the Jews’ realization that it was not Aaron who had any power whatsoever over the lives of the saved Jews, but it was God all along. Thus, this Midrash teaches that Moses prayed to God, conveying that Moses knew that God was the cause of the Jews’ salvation, and not Aaron. The Jews, by witnessing Moses’ prayer, or God’s intervention, were enabled to rid themselves of their false assumption and accept Aaron’s mortality, as if the “ministering angels showed them Aaron dead on a bed.”

Nonetheless, the Jews still required Divine assistance to return to the correct view. God intervened and somehow allowed this concept of Aaron’s mortality to penetrate these misled Jews. I don’t believe they actually “saw a bed with Aaron lying in it”. This means they were somehow relieved of their previous, erroneous notion of Aaron’s immortality. Somehow, God addressed this: God’s “ministering angels” conveys this. It means that something other than the actions of the Jews themselves was required to correct the false notion of Aaron’s immortality. In contrast to other cases where prayer is an act of ultimate desperation and beseeching God to intercede, perhaps here, Moses prayer may very well have been a demonstration that God is the source of life, not Aaron. The very “act” of Moses praying to God was what was required to dispel the false idea of Aaron’s immortality, and not so much performed for the need of a response from God.

A similar case is as follows. One angel is “punished” as he ascribed the miraculous phenomena of overturning Sodom to himself, and not to God. The Rabbis wrote that statement to teach a problem with ascribing miracles to anything but God. I would explain the two Rashis (Gen. 19:22) as teaching us exactly that:

(Gen. 19:22) “(The angel said to Lot) Hurry, escape there, for cannot do anything (destroy Sodom) until you come there.”

Rashi 1: “This is the punishment of the angels, on account that they said ‘for we are destroying (Sodom)’, and they ascribed the matter (destroying Sodom) to themselves. Therefore, they did not move from there until they righted, and they said the matter was not under their control.”

Rashi 2: “Two angles are not sent for one mission.”

What does Rashi 1 teach? The angels didn’t truly talk, ascribing phenomena to themselves. However, the Rabbis have license to write these Midrashim – stories – teaching us fundamentals. Perhaps here, the Rabbis desired to teach a new lesson; that God alone caused the destruction of Sodom. Somehow, there was room for misunderstanding the cause of Sodom’s destruction. An angel – a “force of nature” like fire – will sometimes appear as a purely natural event. But as Rashi said, the punishment of that angel was that “it didn’t move from that place until it admitted that it had no ability of its own to perform the destruction”. The angel – the destructive force that overturned Sodom – didn’t necessarily talk. When the angels said, “we are destroying Sodom”, this means that the force of nature causing the destruction, seemed natural, and not due to God. But this idea would forfeit the entire lesson, that God punishes the wicked! Nature (angels) appeared to “claim sole responsibility” for Sodom’s destruction, with no will of God. Therefore, its appearance required correction, in some manner. There was something about what took place in Sodom, that onlookers might ascribe a natural disaster to Sodom, thereby forfeiting the lesson that it was in reality, a Godly punishment. Hence, no deterrent for future generations would exist. Angels, or natural forces, can only function by the will of God, and not independently.

The “natural” appearance of Sodom’s destruction had to somehow be corrected so a warning to others and subsequent generations would exist. The fact that the angels “remained until they corrected themselves”, means that within this disaster ordained by God, there was some element which clearly indicated that it was of Divine origin. What that was, I do not know, but it was part of the disastrous process, as it was the angels – these forces – which also corrected the previous error.

Through these Midrashim, the Rabbis teach that although a false idea could be perceived in both – Sodom’s destruction, and Aaron’s salvation – God insured that both false ideas were corrected.

I would add that regarding Aaron, the people had to first see Moses praying to God, thereby priming their minds to accept a subsequent, metaphysical lesson (Aaron on the bed). Without the first step of the Jews entertaining the idea that Aaron was in fact mortal, perhaps the Jews would not have related to the subsequent, metaphysical lesson.

In turn this teaches that when God educates man, as effectuated via the vision of Aaron dead on the bed, God works within the confines of man’s mind, and does not force upon man that which he is yet unready to accept. ■

comments of Rashi that are well-know and widely quoted. Unfortunately, in some cases these comments are quoted so frequently that we neglect to consider them carefully. As soon as we hear the beginning of the comment, we finish the quote in our minds and do not even think carefully about Rashi’s observation. The first comment of Rashi on this week’s parasha is one of those oft quoted texts, which may need more attention than it normally receives.

Before considering Rashi’s comments, let us first carefully study the pasuk it is intended to interpret. The pasuk above introduces the laws of the Parah Adumah – the red heifer. This animal is slaughtered and completely burned. The ashes of the heifer, with other ingredients, are required for the purification. Severe forms of spiritual defilement are treated with these ashes.

The passage describes the mitzvah of Parah Adumah as chukat ha’torah. In the translation above, this has been rendered to mean “the law of the Torah.” But this translation is an oversimplification. The term chok – as in chukat – is used widely in the Chumash. The term generally has three meanings. In most instances the term is used to identify the permanence of a mitzvah or law. In fact, the Torah clearly makes this connection by frequently using the term chok in the phrase chukat olam – a p e r m a n e n t c h o k. For example, the Chumash tells us the observance of Pesach is a chukat olam – a chok for allgenerations.[1] Here, the term chok communicates this idea of permanence.

In some instances the term chok refers to a right or portion assigned to a person or group by some authority. For example, there was a chok in Yosef’s time that the leaders of Egypt were awarded by Paroh a portion of land.[2] Similarly, the Chumash tells us that after the death of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe instructed the remaining kohanim that despite this tragedy they must still eat their chok – their portion – from the sacrifices offered that day.[3]

However, there are some instances in which neither of these translations seems appropriate. In these cases, the term chok seems to communicate that the law is a decree from Hashem. For example, in explaining the laws of Pesach Sheynee – a Pesach sacrifice brought by those who could not offer the sacrifice at its normal time – Moshe explains that the Pesach sacrifice must be offered according to all of its chukotav – according to its chok.[4] In this instance it is clear that the term chok does not mean “portion” and does not seem to be a reference to the permanence of the law for all generations. Therefore, in this instance and in other cases in which the first two translations do not apply, Targum Unkelus renders the term to mean “decree.”

So, what is the meaning of the term chok in our

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passage? Clearly it does not mean “portion” and there is no obvious reason to assume that the term is a reference to permanence. It is not surprising that Targum Unkelus renders the term to mean “decree.”

It is now possible to more accurately translate our pasuk as “this is the decree of the torah.” However, the meaning – and even the translation – of the pasuk is still somewhat unclear. There is another problem. What does the term torah mean? The term torah is used occasionally in the Chumash to refer to the entire corpus of law contained in the Chumash. However, this not the usual manner in which the term is used. Generally, the term refers to a set of detailed laws regulating a specific process. For example, the Chumash introduces the laws regulating the offering of the Mincha sacrifice with the phrase “this is the torah of the Mincha offering.”[5] In fact when the term is used to refer to the entire corpus of law contained in the Chumash it is likely that the term is being employed in a similar manner. The term Torah – used in this context – refers to the entire system of detailed laws regulating the various elements of our personal and national lives.

So, what does the term torah mean in our pasuk? It seems unlikely that the term refers to the entire corpus of law. If that were the reference, then pasuk would mean this is the decree of the entire Torah – implying that there is only this one single decree in the entire system of law outlined in the Chumash. However, there are many decrees included in the Chumash! Therefore, Rashbam rejects this explanation of the term torah in our passage. He suggests that the term torah refers to the detailed laws presented latter in the parasha concerning the transmission on tumah – spiritual defilement – by a dead body.[6] According to Rashbam it seems that the meaning of our passage is that there is an element within the laws of tumah and taharah – spiritual defilement and purification – that must be regarded as a decree. This element is the mitzvah regarding the Parah Adumah – the red heifer.

This raises an obvious question. Why is the mitzvah of Parah Adumah singled out from the laws regulating tumah and taharah and referred to as a decree? This seems to be the question that prompts Rashi’s comments.

Before we can consider Rashi’s response, we must consider a preliminary issue. As explained above, the term chok has three alternative meanings. The term often communicates the permanence of a mitzvah. Sometimes the term refers to a portion or right awarded by an authority. In other instances – as in our passage – it means “decree.” It is unlikely that the Torah would use one term in three completely different ways. Is there some common denominator between these three usages of the term chok? It seems that the term chok always makes reference to a law that

rests on authority. A law is permanent because it comes from Hashem. A portion or right that is awarded by authority derives its significance through the sponsorship of the authority that bestows the right or portion. A decree is – by definition – a law that is based on the authority of the body of king that establishes the decree.

This gives more meaning to our passage. The pasuk is communicating that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah – in some sense – is to be understood as resting on and dependant upon the law-giver. In this case the law-giver is Hashem. In other words, in describing this mitzvah as a decree, the Chumash is communicating that appreciation of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah requires that we recognize the authority – Hashem – who has decreed it. What special characteristic of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah demands this recognition?

Finally, we are ready for Rashi’s comments. Rashi explains that the Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish people regarding this commandment. They ask, “What kind of mitzvah is this and what is its reason?” Therefore the Chumash tells us that is a decree from Hashem. We are not permitted to cast suspicion upon it.[7]

It’s clear from Rashi’s comments that there is some odd element in the mitzvah of Parah Adumah that is destined to evoke ridicule. What is this element? Many commentaries suggest that this ridicule would focus on a specific odd law regarding the Parah. As we have explained, the ashes of this Parah are used in the purification process from severe forms of tumah. However, in their preparation the ashes actually transmit tumah. In other words, one who comes into contact with and handles the ashes during their preparation is himself defiled. So, these ashes which are a source of defilement are somehow able to restore purity![8]

However, this does not seem to be the issue that concerned Rashi. Rashi bases his comments on a text from the Talmud. In his commentary on that text, Rashi explains more fully the difficulty in understanding the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. He explains that Parah Adumah is one of the commandments in the Torah for which there is no apparent explanation or apparent benefit. He explains that this characteristic evokes the criticism of the he Satan and the nations of the world. They argue that the Torah cannot possibly be true! How can the Torah be true if it commands us to perform mitzvot that have no apparent benefit? To this criticism the Chumash responds that these mitzvot are decrees from Hashem and rest upon his authority [9]

Let us now summarize Rashi’s comments. The Torah alerts us that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is a decree. Rashi explains that this alert is important because this mitzvah is one of a group that have no apparent rational or purpose. This characteristic

will expose these commandments to criticism and ridicule. The Satan and the nations of the world will challenge the truth of a system of law that includes commandments that have no apparent purpose. We are to respond that these commandments are decrees from Hashem and therefore, rest on His authority.

Frankly, it seems unlikely that the wily Satan and hostile nations of the world will be much impressed by this argument. These critics obviously do not accept the authenticity of the revelation at Sinai. Yet, we are advised to respond to their disparagement with the reminder that the mitzvot are Hashem’s decrees!

Again, Rashi’s comments on the Talmud provide a clearer understanding of his intention. Rashi explains that the term “Satan” is a reference to the yetzer harah – our own internal evil inclination.[10] In other words, Rashi is describing an internal dialogue. The response that Rashi and the Talmud are suggesting is not intended for the person the scoffs at revelation. Instead, it is designed to respond to our own internal doubts. When others criticize mitzvot like Parah Adumah that have no apparent reason or when we ourselves are misled by our own internal desires, we are to remind ourselves that these seemingly arbitrary commandments are decrees from Hashem and rest on His authority.

Still, Rashi’s comments are difficult to fully understand. Rashi is describing an internal debate that may take place within us. But the nature of this debate remains unclear. If a person is experiencing doubts about the truth of the Torah, how will one be rescued with a reminder that these troubling mitzvot are Hashem’s decrees?

Klee Yakar provides an important insight into this issue. After quoting Rashi’s comments, he explains that the criticism described by Rashi is not at all unreasonable. He explains that we have every reason to expect the mitzvot to make sense. The Chumash tells us that if we observe the commandments the nations of the world will admire us. They will praise us as a wise and understanding nation.[11],[12] This insights suggests a clearer understanding of the internal dialogue described by Rashi. Klee Yakar suggests that we are to conduct ourselves in a way that demonstrates the deep wisdom of the Torah. However, this very obligation evokes a problem. How are we to conduct ourselves as intelligent and wise individuals if we are required to observe commandments that have no obvious meaning? It is natural to be troubled by this paradox. In fact, to not be concerned with this issue, suggests that one is not committed to the obligation to conduct one’s affairs intelligently. It is inevitable that a person who takes this obligation seriously will experience a deep level of confusion. How do we respond to this confusion?

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Talmud

Now, let us reconsider the response discussed by Rashi. There are two important marks of intelligence. First, it is incumbent upon us to try to understand and appreciate the wisdom of the mitzvot. We cannot regard ourselves as wise, intelligent individuals if we close our minds to contemplation. But there is a second element of wisdom. We must have humility. True wisdom should generate a sense of humility. Humility demands that we recognize the limits of our own insight. A humble person recognizes that there are some mysteries that he cannot resolve. Just as there are elements of the created universe that defy human understanding, it is reasonable to assume that there may be elements of the revealed law that are not completely within human grasp. Therefore, by recognizing the source of the Torah we can resolve our confusion. ■

- [1] Sefer Shemot 12:14.
 [2] Sefer Beresheit 47:22.
 [3] Sefer VaYikra 10:13.
 [4] Sefer BeMidbar 9:12
 [5] Sefer VaYikra 6:7
 [6] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.
 [7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.
 [8] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 9:2.
 [9] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Yoma 67b.
 [10] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Yoma 67b.
 [11] Sefer Devarim 4:6
 [12] Rabbaynu Shlomo Ephraim Lontshitz, Commentary Klee Yakar on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.

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DESTROYING IDOLS

*Whose idol?
 When does it
 become an "idol"?*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Malka: What constitutes an idol to be destroyed? I'm really curious, is it because it's a graven religious image? Because nobody actually worships these things, it's more like a siddur where you treat it respectfully and that's it.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: It depends; if a gentile created the idol, then as soon as it was created, it requires destruction. But if made by a Jew, then it requires destruction only after it was worshipped.

Zach: Wow, I guess I have a lot of idols to destroy in my own home . . . I suggest we be a bit more sensitive to others' beliefs. Further, I am curious who really worships an "idol" in our society, today? For example, in

Hinduism, it is thought that the common mind of humans cannot comprehend the abstractness and transcendence of the nameless and formless versions of God, thus these myriad of symbols, images and "idols", as you call them, are just that, only symbols, and they are not substitutes for God. Your use of the term "idol" is careless, insensitive, and inflammatory.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: Zach, Who said I was addressing Hinduism? It may apply, and it may not...but I did not single them out. So your response is invalid. Where one worships the object or attributes powers, then he/she violates idolatry. Rabbit's feet, religious objects, horseshoes, red bendels, lucky pennies/stars, statuettes, and many cultures...the list goes on where people attribute luck and power to brute, physical objects. Maimonides classifies idolatrous rites in his work the Mishneh Torah...required study for Gentile and Jew alike. You will have to search out where and when people violate the "attributing of power" to mere, physical creations, violating Torah codes and adhering to idolatrous tendencies

Kell: I'm confused. Why would a Jew make an idol? And why would it matter who made the idol?

Moshe Ben-Chaim: Aside from the fact that Jews made the Golden Calf, the question is concerning the "theory" of the law, not the practical application. When a gentile creates an idol, it is at its creation - not only later worship - that it requires destruction. The reasoning is that a gentile has no system (Torah) with which he might be tempted to refrain from idol worship once an idol is formed, and adhere to a "command". Thus, once he makes an idol, he will straightaway worship it. But a Jew has a "last chance", a means of refrain, so his idol is not prohibited as "idolatry" until worship. Only then does it achieve that status.

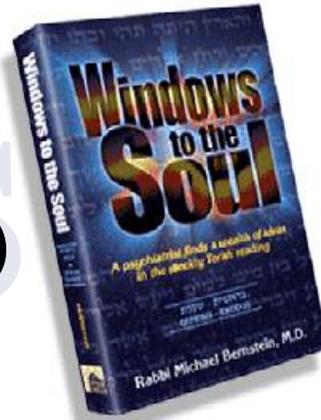
Kell: More confused now...if a Gentile has no system (Torah) then why would it matter if they worship an idol.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: Good point, my error in clarification. A gentile doesn't have a "complete Torah" system, is what I should have said. But he must follow his 7 Noachide laws, which include a prohibition on idolatry. Now of course, you will ask, "If he has laws, then how is he different than the Jew?" The answer is, we are discussing a case when the gentile is an idolater, and has expressed idolatrous behavior. Therefore, we state, once he forms an idol, we know he will worship it, so it already achieves its status as an idol even upon completion, regardless of worship. Whereas a Jew's idol does not achieve a status of a real "idol" until worship, for he may refrain based on his previous adherence displayed to Torah. ■

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Taken from "Windows to the Soul"

Chukas



RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

The Total Picture

Contradiction and mystery characterize the laws of the parah adumah, the red heifer (19:2), "This is the decree (chukas) of the Torah which God has commanded saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel that they take for you a completely red heifer . . .'" The Torah commands that we burn the red heifer and use its ashes to purify the ritually impure who have come into contact with corpses. Paradoxically, ritually pure people that touch the ashes become impure.

As quoted by Rashi, the Midrash states (Tanchuma 7), "The nations taunt Israel, saying 'What is this point of this commandment?' Therefore, it is written as a chok, a divine decree. You may not question it." Although the Midrash discusses the parah adumah, Rashi explains (Leviticus 18:4; Yoma 67b) that the concept of chok applies to all decrees that invite derision or internal doubt. Typical examples are the prohibition against eating the flesh of the swine and the prohibition against wearing shaatnez, garments of wool and linen combined.

Apparently, according to the Midrash, chok decrees may invite the ridicule of the nations. Yet we find a totally different perspective in the Torah itself (Deuteronomy 4:5-8), "Behold, I have taught you decrees and laws, as God, my Lord, has commanded me, which you are to do within the land you are approaching to take possession of it. And you shall safeguard and perform them, for this is your wisdom and insight in the eyes of the peoples that shall hear all these decrees, who shall say, 'This great nation is surely a wise and insightful people!' For which great nation that has a God close to it as God, our Lord, is whenever we call out to Him? And which great nation has righteous decrees (chukim) and laws as this entire

Torah that I place before you this day?" Here, the Torah states clearly that the nations will marvel at the wisdom and insight of our "righteous decrees (chukim) and laws." How do we resolve this contradiction?

The answer may lie in the phrase "in the eyes of the peoples that shall hear all these decrees," the emphasis being on "all," on seeing the decrees in the context of the Torah's totality. An outsider who focuses on an individual law, such as the prohibition against shaatnez, may find it arcane and absurd. If, however, he considers the entire scope of the Torah, with its integrated system of individual and community life that transcends the material world and engenders social harmony and a close relationship with God, he would find its wisdom and insight compelling.

The encounter between Pharaoh and Joseph provides an indication that the qualities of wisdom and insight only emerge when an approach is all encompassing. After Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams without hesitation, Joseph offers an unsolicited comprehensive solution to the problems Pharaoh's dreams foretold. Pharaoh responds by immediately selecting Joseph for the job, stating (Genesis 41:39), "There is no wise and insightful man like you." Pharaoh uses the exact same words chacham v'navon Moses does to describe the Jewish people who follow all the Torah's precepts.

These resonant words connect these two passages and bring two thoughts to mind. Pharaoh did not consider Joseph wise and insightful because of his observance of the Torah's statutes. Even today, when so many Jews have unfortunately lost their ties to their ancient moorings, they are still considered wise and insightful people. This manifest characteristic

may trace back to our cultural inheritance from Abraham to be seekers of total truth.

Furthermore, Jewish observance in its totality offers us the perfect path to internal and external harmony. A partial measure of the Torah's success in its effects upon us is reflected in the observant community's significantly lower rates of divorce, crime, drugs, school dropouts and other social ills. Historically, it has also been true that other nations and cultures have found the vibrant Jewish community life attractive. Clearly, the observance of the Torah's laws in their totality (kal) make us wise and insightful.

Although the Midrash states we have no right to question the decrees (chukim) or search for their rationale, many commentators, Rashi included, do offer various explanations for them. How do we explain this?

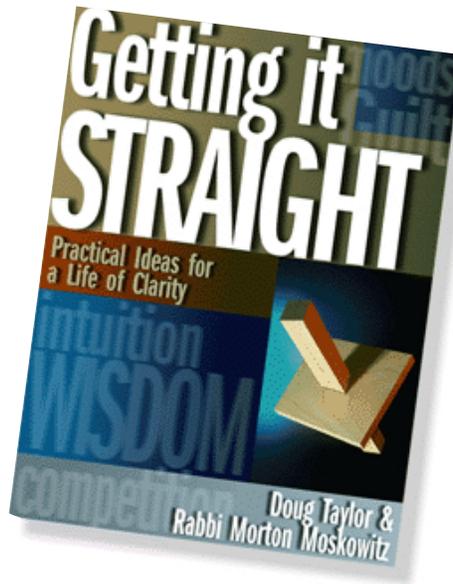
Apparently, we must draw a distinction between ascertaining God's ultimate purpose in issuing the decrees and reaping benefits from their study. It is impossible to penetrate the infinite and inscrutable divine wisdom behind His decrees, just as it is impossible to know God who is one with His knowledge. We are obliged to desist from such speculation in humble recognition of our limitations as finite creatures. Nonetheless, we may derive profound concepts and insights from the study of these decrees, and we may ascertain some of the benefits in the observance of God's law. These are what the commentators seek to discover.

In this light, we can perhaps discern another teaching in the seemingly contradictory law that the parah adumah purifies the impure and contaminates the pure. The contradiction of this law mirrors the paradox of the relationship between our physical and spiritual sides; its very perplexity challenges our tendency to see the physical as the final reality. ■

Taken from "Getting it Straight"

Evaluation

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ



I felt awful.

And the worst part was, I didn't really have a good reason.

Oh, I knew the cause. A business deal I'd worked on for months had fallen through. A big one. I'd hatched the idea, bottle-fed it, and watched it grow with promise. Then, just as I was on the verge of putting it all together, the other side backed out. It had nothing to do with me; their financial condition had turned south.

On top of losing the deal, I felt like a hypocrite. Several months ago I had counseled my friend Bart, a sales rep, when he had cried on my shoulder after losing a big one. I told him to recognize that some things are outside of our control. But somehow, my own advice didn't make me feel any better.

In desperation, I called my friend, the King of Rational Thought. As usual, his response caught me totally by surprise.

"Do you compete in business?"

"Uh, well, yeah, of course. Everyone does," I replied.

"Do you feel better about yourself when you're winning the competition or losing it?" he asked.

"Well, when I'm winning, of course," I said. "Losing isn't much fun."

"And how do you view yourself when you're winning?"

I thought about it. "I guess I see myself as a winner; someone who's succeeding; someone who's making it."

"What about when you're losing?"

"You mean, like now?"

"Like now."

I thought some more. "I guess I feel like a loser; a failure."

"Take notes," he said. "You've just said that you feel like a winner when you're winning and a loser when you're losing. So how are you

evaluating yourself?"

I shook my head, phone and all. "Sorry. You'll have to help me out. I don't get it."

"You're evaluating yourself based on others," he said. "If you bid on some work and you don't get it, you feel like a loser. Conversely, if you get the work, you feel like a winner. So you're evaluating yourself based on the prospect's decision. True?"

"Ohh-kay," I said slowly. "But so what?"

"So your system is flawed," he replied. "Aren't you the same person whether your proposal is accepted or not?"

"Well, yeah."

"Yet you evaluate yourself differently."

I held the phone to my ear for a full minute without moving, digesting it. He had a point. I still didn't feel better, but I had to admit, he had

a point.

"So what's the answer?" I asked finally.

"What do you think?" he tossed back.

"I think I need a different approach," I said. "Maybe a different method of evaluation."

"Could be," said the King of Rational Thought. "Or better yet, why not give up self-evaluation altogether?"

I stared at the phone. "Huh?"

"Why not give up self-evaluation altogether?" he repeated. "The only important thing is your actions. You're mixing - as most of us do - you with your actions. Your actions are the only things you can do something about in all of this. So look at them instead. Forget evaluating yourself. Just look at what you did. You've already said that you did everything you could to get the deal. So, it fell through. That's life. The reason you keep feeling bad is that you keep evaluating yourself - not your actions, but yourself - in light of the result.

"Just imagine," he continued, "what your life would be like if you stopped evaluating yourself. You'd be rid of blame, probably lots of useless guilt, and a bunch of other emotions that don't benefit you. The only important question is, did you do the right thing? If so, great. If you made a mistake, then analyze how and why, and learn how to do it right the next time. If you'll do that, you'll start to feel better.

"And," he added, "you'll enjoy life a lot more."

I tried the King's advice and, a week later, I called Bart.

"Hey Bart," I said enthusiastically. "I've got some more great advice for you. You know how you were really bummed out about that big sale you lost a few months ago? Well, let me ask you a question. Do you feel better when you're winning sales, or losing them?..." ▣

(Costumes continued from page 1)

Ego vs. Torah

not say so; clothing takes precedence in their descriptions of desired mates. All too sad, girls in their 30s and 40s have not abandoned this practice of seeking the costume, as opposed to the person. They sometimes pass their childbearing years unwed, childless. I recently spoke with a frum, girl 33 years old, seeking a shidduch, who too is blinded by such immaterial issues, as if they are at the core of Judaism. I did not hold my tongue, but patiently and politely rebuked her for her focus.

These misdirected young Jews seek things that are not commanded, and are even punishable, as we learn in Zephaniah, one of the Prophets. The Navi Zephaniah (1:8) states that God punished certain Jews for dressing "strangely". Radak in his final "Yaish Omrim" teaches their sin: these Jews dressed "to appear more righteous than their brethren, and their ways are evil". Not just wrong, but "Evil". Zephaniah clearly teaches against the practice of using our garb to convey our relatively greater piety. One actually loses his or her piety when attempting to flaunt it.

One may dress as he or she feels, since laws regulating clothing are limited to cross-dressing, modesty, and idolatry. Now, if God did not command us to wear specific garments – which reason dictates is meaningless – then we are wrong to add to God's words. One cannot argue that such a practice is a "Rabbinic" law or even a custom, for a "custom" must regulate a "law", not something free-floating. One cannot start a custom to wear green on Thursdays for this reason; as such a custom is unattached to any Torah or Rabbinic law. So dressing in black, white, yellow or orange is up to the individual, provided no cross-dressing, idolatry or modesty is violated. Such dress will not come under the jurisdiction of Torah, just as what vegetable I eat today also is not governed by Torah.

However, the conscious act of wearing "specific" clothing to distinguish one's self, is a violation, and is not part of Torah. One who is truly righteous is

humble, and does not seek an audience, or applause for his good deeds: "And humbly shall you walk before God". (Micha, 6:8) God is his only concern, for only God determines truth and delineates what is real, and what is of value. His sense of reality is not human applause, but God's word alone. A truly righteous person will not concoct new ways of "being frum", as he is afraid of violating the prohibition of adding to the Torah. A truly righteous person knows that God did not overlook anything when He completed His limited Torah – limited to 613 laws. Such a righteous person also knows the Rabbis were enabled to set fences around the Torah laws, with no ability to manufacture new laws. Righteous men and women never follow the ignorant masses that violate Torah philosophy, as these Jews violated in Zephaniah's times.

Being more religious than God was in practice during Zephaniah's days, and is still alive and healthy, misleading more and more Jews. But unfortunately, these misled Jews of last generation, are now today's teachers. Instead of young Jews seeking good reasons to marry, they search for faults, refusing candidates, while emphasizing how righteous they are "for they will not date someone who does dress a certain way." As Zephaniah said, "their ways are evil".

We should seek the good in others, "Dan es kol adam l'kaf zechus", and not seek ways to self-aggrandize ourselves and our religiosity, when doing so is wrong, and passes up fine young men and women based on criteria that violate Torah.

I doubt these over religious young Jews would accept those who the greatest Jews married: Boaz married a convert Ruth; Moses married a black, Midianite woman; and Joshua married former harlot, Rachav. But these great individuals set examples of "true" Torah ideals: judge the person, not who they used to be, or what they look like. God also selected Ruth's descendants, Kings David and Solomon, as they were righteous. It mattered none to God that

David, Solomon and Ruth had no "yichuss", or lineage. Abraham our forefather also had no yichuss, as his father served idols, Abraham himself served idols. Yet, God views the current state of the person, not immaterial issues like lineage and skin color or someone's past. We are supposed to mimic God's ways. Moshiach too is a descendant of Ruth, the Moabite. I fear this will be a rude awakening for many, but what people need is exactly this: to awake.

Students are not thinking for themselves. As Rabbi Bachya, author of "Duties of the Heart" teaches, "Vayadata Hayom, Vihashaivosecha al Livavecha", "And you shall know it today, and place it on your heart". (Deut. 4:39) This is recited each day in Alenu. Rabbi Bachya teaches that we are to learn from here that we first listen to the traditions of the Rabbis "And you shall know today", but then, we must reason for ourselves if what we hear is sensible, "and place it on your heart". Rabbi Bachya teaches that one who fails to fulfill the second step, and blindly accepts traditions, is doing a "disgrace". Now, if in the areas of Torah, one must use his mind and reason for himself, why would he be exempt in other areas, such as seeking a mate? Therefore, even if a teacher tells a student to seek a boy based on external garb, something upon which the Torah does not command, then, single men or women would be acting disgraceful to follow such a teacher's directive, if his or her mind tells them that seeking garments in place of Torah virtues is the crooked path.

The fundamentals of Judaism have been replaced in schools and yeshivas with a "manufactured Judaism", not even Judaism at all. If one wishes to find a Jewish mate who adheres to true Torah values, he/she must study the Torah, and not simply follow what ignorant Jews claim to be Torah. If you cannot accurately identify a Jewish idea, then you cannot seek it out in a mate.

God's words must replace man's corrupted actions. ■

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“Rabbi: One of the students said because of your class he's going back to Judaism.”

-Colleen, professor; Hofstra University, NY

“My friend prints the JewishTimes & a group in shul always reads them. They are wonderful.”

“I cannot tell you how many times answers from you or

the website have turned me from distress, to Hashem, Torah, truth and wisdom. Much obliged, Michael.”

“Thank you for your lecture to our class - it was, as last time, not only informative but thought-provoking and interesting! After listening to the other 20 speakers, I can assure you, these 3 components are rarely found together.”



Groups



Email

Yahoo! Groups is an efficient means of communicating your business, religious and social interests with 1000s of others.

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Regional Lists

Connecticut

• **Fairfield_County_Shuls (75)** An announcement list serving the Jewish community and all shuls in the greater Fairfield County Connecticut location.

New York

• **Jewish_Community (1576)** The Jewish Community is intended to combine the efforts of the local "shul" groups (NYC, Teaneck, Fair Lawn, Monsey, Essex County etc) and create a single resource for the New York and New Jersey metropolitan orthodox community for announcements of interest and common events. Certain announcements are very local in nature and belong in the local "shul" groups. Other announcements are regional in nature and should utilize this group to get the word out on a larger scale.

• **brooklynshuls(60)** A list for those affiliated with Brooklyn shuls.

• **bronxshuls(53)**

• **events_for_jewish_women (182)**

• **FiveTownsJewishCommunity (1595)** The purpose of this email list is to enable local shuls, yeshivot and organizations to communicate with members of the Five Towns Jewish Community. The list should be used primarily for the dissemination of information regarding local shul, yeshiva and organizational or charity events and functions in accordance with the list policy posted on this site. It is the hope of the moderators of this group that this service will bring the community closer together by enabling the publicizing and enhancement of the

• **FiveTownsShuls (1345)**

• **HillcrestOnline (220)**

• **flatbushJewishAction (81)**

• **JFlatbushOnline (633)** Welcome! This is a group to allow members of the Brooklyn, New York Jewish community in Flatbush and other neighborhoods, to communicate. It is a place to let others know about events or programs at your shul or school, religious and cultural events, and singles events. We can also cover neighborhoods such as Boro Park or Crown Heights. It is also a place for various neighborhood topics, such as goods needed or available, different community efforts, concerns, etc.

• **lesshuls (112)** Discussion group for issues, topics and events of interest to the Jewish community of the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

• **MonseyShulsChat (72)**

• **manhattanshuls (95)**

• **NYCShuls (533) (NEW)**

NYCShuls@YahooGroups.com is an announcement list for the Jewish community in New York City. The primary goal of the group is to be an effective tool in the building and maintenance of our community.

• **PlainviewShuls (NEW)** Established to enable area residents a quick and effective means of information distribution. Please use this new forum to post shul/Torah class times, announcements, business, share ideas, and converse on matters relevant to the Plainview Jewish communities. As Torah

Jews we must follow what God demands of us. Let us all strive to learn more Torah, and practice the unmatched codes prepared by our Creator. Rising above our personal preferences, let us achieve something great...together.

• **queensshuls (102)** A general list for those affiliated with Queens shuls.

• **QueensCentralShuls (44)** An announcement list for the Jewish community and Shuls of Central Queens.

• **RiverdaleShuls (541)**

• **SiShulList (123)**

• **statenislandshuls (27)**

• **UWSyoungprofessionals (715)** The list is intended for announcements of interest Young Professionals living on the upper west side. HOW TO SUBSCRIBE: To subscribe go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uwsyoungprofessionals/join> or send a blank email to uwsyoungprofessionals-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. INFORMING OF EVENTS: To get an event added to our weekly e-mail send grubey1@yahoo.com information about the event and it will most likely be distributed to our list.

• **WestHempsteadShuls (270)**

• **WesleyHillsShuls (383)**

• **WhitePlainsShuls (26)**

New Jersey

• **BergenfieldShuls (40)** Information for and about shuls in the Bergenfield / New Milford / Teaneck area.

• **EdisonHighlandParkBulletinBoard (563)**

• **EnglewoodShuls (635)**

• **LakewoodShuls (160)**

• **PassaicJews (651)**

• **TeaneckShuls (5958)** TeaneckShuls is an announcement list for the Jewish community and shuls in the Teaneck / Bergenfield / New Milford vicinity.

• **TeaneckShulsUnrestricted (60)**

• **TenaflyShuls (204)**

• **WestOrangeJewishCommunity (79) (NEW)** The Vibrant, Diverse, and Growing Jewish Community of West Orange, NJ USA This mailing list is intended for the sharing of information between, and communication among, all members of the West Orange Jewish Community and its many Jewish Institutions - regardless of religious affiliation.

• **WestOrangeShuls (638) (NEW)** The list is intended for announcements of interest to shul-goers in the West Orange vicinity

Topical Lists

Business

• **buscardexchange (22)**

• **jcbusinessforum (322)**

• **JewishBusiness (173)** Business ethics and practices according to Jewish law.

• **JewishBusinessnetworking (380)** A place for Jewish business people to network, develop leads and contacts, exchange ideas, find jobs, provide employment, and shmooze!

• **JewishBusinessAssoc_Colorado (255)** We have monthly luncheons to discuss various business topics as well as Happy Hour get togethers to socialize with others in the Jewish Community.

• **JewishBusinessNetwork (490)** Hear Exciting Speakers, Exchange Business Leads, and Job Opportunities, Promote Your Business, and/or Come Socialize at Our 3rd Tuesday, Monthly Meetings, 6:00-8:15pm at the Jewish Community Association of Austin, 7300 Hart Lane

• **jewishwork (334)** The Jewish (and Bnai Noach) job market. For employers and for people seeking employment, anywhere in the world. On this email list you can announce positions available, and positions being sought. This list is not for ads to promote your business, product, or services.

• **UCLAAnderson-JBSA (99)**

Dating

• **Bay_Area_Jewish_Singles (29)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Singles (101)** The purpose of this group is for Orthodox Jewish singles to be able to get together, exchange information about each other, post information about gatherings / singles weekends, to ask questions and possibly be able to set up a shidduch. You MUST be an Orthodox Jew to join this group and you will NOT be accepted until you answer the questionnaire that is emailed to you.

• **JDate_Jewish_Online_Dating (50)** Are you Jewish? Are you Single? We have the solution for you! At JDate.com, you can meet like-minded Jews that are also single! This isn't an ONLINE dating site full of fake profiles! These are REAL PEOPLE just like you.

• **Jewish_Matchmaker (108)**

• **jewish-singles (350)**

• **jewish-single-doctors (28)**

• **mercerc_jewish_singles (294)**

Home Life

• **1davening (60)**

• **1-JewishComputing (64)**

• **1Jewish_Homes (83)**

• **chiddush (232)** Chiddush is an advanced group that offers Yeshiva-level Jewish scholars (talmidei chachamim) the opportunity to share original insights into Jewish ritual and lore. Submissions may be up to one screen long, and must include traditional sources for reference. Include a statement that the submission was your own and that it has not been published elsewhere.

• **davening (337)**

• **Frum-Jewish-Parents (90)**

• **Gabbai (143)**

• **Jewish_Cuisine (623)**

• **jewish-food (1749)** Jewish-Food is a moderated list for all interested in the discussion of GENERAL aspects of Jewish food which includes the exchanging of recipes, and cooking techniques of Jewish food using Kashruth (laws of keeping kosher).

• **JewishGeography (334)**

• **jewishhomes (719)**

• **JEWISH-RECIPE (492)**

• **jewish_stitchery (112)**

• **Jewish_Weight_Watchers (169)**

• **Vegetarian_Jewish_Cuisine (392)**

Religious

• **Jewish_Converts (260)**

• **Teshuvah (123)** This is a group for those returning to Halachik Judaism, or already-frum Jews interested in assisting others.

• **Torah_study (79)**

Social

• **1-JewishPhilanthropy (113)** Jewish Philanthropy offers information about philanthropic activities and surveys of foundations that fund Jewish institutions. It networks Jewish fundraisers and donors.

• **Jewish_Action_Alerts (178)** This is an action alert listserv for Jews and friends of Jews from around the world to participate in local, national and international action alerts to governments, businesses, agencies as they effect the safety, security and welfare of Jewish people at home, abroad and in Israel. Groups from which action Alerts will be posted include, but are not limited to: AIPAC, UJC, JCPA, ADL, HonestReporting.com, CAMERA, and others.

• **Jewish_Self-Defense (841)**

• **Jewish-Humor (318)**

• **jewish-jokes (455)**

• **jewish-american-veterans (83)**

• **Jewish-Outdoors-Club (1521)**

• **Jewish_World (428)**