

Pardes Yehuda

Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick

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פרשת חקת בלק תשפ"ז

The Pursuit of the Unknowable

זאת חקת התורה: (במדבר יט ב)

We are introduced to the commandment of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer. The Torah introduces this mitzvah with unique phrase: "זאת חקת התורה." This is the statute of the Torah." Chazal explain that a chok is a decree given without an explicit reason. The Yalkut Shimoni tells us that King Shlomo, the wisest man to ever live, set out to solve this mystery. Shlomo himself declares in Koheles: *"I said I would grow wise, but it remains far from me."* The Midrash says that King Shlomo understood the spiritual idea of almost every mitzvah, but whenever he reached the mitzvah of the Red Heifer, he would analyze, question, only to come up completely empty-handed. He simply could not grasp it.

But this Midrash raises a question: What was King Shlomo thinking? If Hashem openly declared that the Red Heifer is a chok, a secret decree, then any humanly reason is wrong. If Hashem says, "I am keeping this secret," Why would the wisest of all men spend his precious time and energy trying to find something that is definitely sealed?

The Masas HaMelech, Hagaon Rav Shimon Moshe Diskin, offers an answer that opens up how we must view the mitzvah of learning the Mitzvos of the Torah. To understand Shlomo's approach, imagine if the Torah took a logical mitzvah "If you borrow money from your neighbor, and stated it is a chok that you must pay him back, "we would look at that verse and be deeply confused. We would say it makes perfect sense! If I take something that isn't mine, basic human morality and intellect demand that I return it!" If the Torah were to label a financial repayment as an "unknowable decree," our obligation in learning that Torah would be to intellectually dismantle our own logic. We would have to ask ourselves: "Why does the Torah reject human logic here? Why is my moral knowing insufficient? What element of this act overstep human intellect?" We would have to challenge every single rationalization until we reached a point where we realized that we don't return the money just because it makes sense to us, but because it is a divine decree. By exhausting our human logic to its limits and finding its boundaries, we would finally clarify the truth of the Torah's statement that it is, indeed, a chok. This, the Masas HaMelech explains, is exactly what King

Shlomo was doing with the Red Heifer.

Shlomo never fell into the trap of arrogance. He knew that he could never find the "real" reason for the Parah Adumah, because Hashem said it didn't have a humanly accessible one. Shlomo wasn't trying to find the real reason. Instead, he was fulfilling his ultimate obligation of Torah study: He was testing every single possible human theory to prove that none of them were sufficient.

He looked at the Red Heifer and asked: "Could it be a health measure? Could it be a symbolic representation of the Sin of the Golden Calf? Could it be an ancient environmental ritual? No, that doesn't fit the parameters." He researched, lectured, and investigated every single rationale the human mind could possibly manufacture to explain the Red Heifer. And one by one, using his intellect, he systematically proved that every single human explanation was flawed, incomplete, or incorrect.

Only after he had exhausted every avenue of human thought, only after he had hit a dead end of every intellectual corridor, did he reach ultimate clarity. He looked at the vast landscape of human wisdom and realized it couldn't touch this mitzvah. And it was at that moment that he was finally able to declare with absolute clarity and conviction: *"והיא רחוקה ממני"*—"It is truly, completely, far from me." Shlomo didn't fail. His realization that it was beyond him was his success. He verified the truth of the Torah's definition of a chok by mapping the outer boundaries of human intellect.

This is a profound lesson here for us in our daily lives. We live in an information age where we believe everything can be understood through rationalism. When tragedy strikes, when life challenges us, or when we face divine calculations that seem unfair or confusing, our first instinct is to demand a rational explanation. We want to know why.

King Shlomo teaches us the sanctity of boundaries. True wisdom is not about knowing everything; true wisdom is having the intellectual honesty to know where human logic ends and where Divine Providence begins. We may ask the questions, to process our thoughts, to do the mental and emotional work, and then—with a full heart—to recognize that the ultimate answers belong to something much greater than ourselves. We must always maintain the humility to look up at the Heavens and say, "Ribono shel Olam, I have done my searching, and I am ready to trust in Your infinite wisdom." (Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

STORY OF THE WEEK (By Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

**** *How a friendly neighbor and the Sanzer Rebbe's blessing stopped a village revolt.* ****

In the town of Vysove, near Gorlitz lived the wealthy Reb Elazar Tzieger, of blessed memory. He managed his business dealing in glassware in the village of Pahremba, which was about four miles away from the city of Sanz, Galitzia, Poland. There were many notorious gentile thieves in that area who would steal glass even during broad daylight. Reb Elazar was a very strong man, and he constantly pushed them back from these thefts.

My grandfather, the pious Reb Yudel Shabsi, from Sanz, owned a glassware shop. The aforementioned Reb Elazar used to frequent Sanz to visit my grandfather, Reb Yudel, who would purchase all his glass stock from him. He would pay him a sum of money in advance for the merchandise, as is the custom among merchants. Reb Elazar's family still resided in Vysove, while Reb Elazar himself stayed in Pahremba, to tend to his business.

Once, on a Friday afternoon they were loading glass onto wagons. Reb Elazar was standing by watching, when some young gentile boys tried to steal some of the glass tubes. Seeing this, Reb Elazar became filled with anger and struck one of the youth on his cheek—who happened to be the son of the village judge. The boy fell to the ground and could not stand up on his feet, and the other gentiles carried him back to his home.

Reb Elazar became deeply frightened, but because it was Friday afternoon close to Shabbos, he could no longer leave the village. On Shabbos night, he prayed with all his heart for the honor of Shabbos and then lay down to sleep. A gentile acquaintance of his came and knocked on the door, asking to be let into the house. Reb Elazar opened the door for him, and the gentile entered.

The gentile said to him, "Elazar, give me a cup of whiskey and I will tell you what is happening. Although I am strictly forbidden from telling you because I was sworn to secrecy, you know that I am your friend, so I am compelled to tell you." Reb Elazar gave him a cup of whiskey, and the gentile revealed to him that all the gentiles of the village had gathered at the judge's house. They had concluded among themselves that at midnight, they would all assemble—each armed with whatever he had at home, an axe or an iron bar—and they would do to Reb Elazar what he had done to the boy. Furthermore, they planned to smash the entire glass inventory so completely that no one would ever recognize a building had even stood there.

Hearing this, Reb Elazar did not know what to do, as it was already the holy day of Shabbos. However, being a devoted Chosid of Sanz, he composed himself, took a few loaves of challah and some fish, with a little whiskey, and fled into hiding in the nearby forest. He sat there in the forest until the conclusion of Shabbos. On Saturday night, as soon as darkness fell, he ran to Sanz.

He arrived in Sanz in great terror and went straight to my grandfather, Reb Yudel Shabsi, who was very close to the heilige Rebbe of Sanz, Harav Hatzaddik Rav Chaim Halbershtam. My grandfather was originally a chosid of Radoshitz. He begged my grandfather to go with him to the Rebbe with a Kvitel so the Rebbe would pray for his safety. Since Reb Elazar had fled in a hurry, he had no money on him from his business, to add with his Kvitel, a Pidyon as was the custom. He wrote down the entire incident on the Kvitel and borrowed ten rubles from my grandfather for the Pidyon.

They went together to the Rebbe of Sanz. When the Rebbe read the Kvitel, he turned to him and said: "For a crisis as severe as this, one only gives ten rubles for a Pidyon Nefesh? You need to give one hundred rubles!"

My grandfather Reb Yudel ran to his house, took out one hundred rubles cash from the drawer, and placed it before the Rebbe. The Rebbe counted all the money, and together it totaled 110 rubles. The Rebbe counted them all—the entire 110 rubles—and exclaimed, I told you I need only 100 rubles! My grandfather explained: "Ten rubles are for the Pidyon Nefesh, and one hundred rubles are on account of the crisis."

The Rebbe then said to Reb Elazar: "Don't worry, the gentile boy will be fine, and the decree will change. Go back to your home, take one hundred rubles, go immediately to the judge, and place the one hundred rubles before him. Then leave there, and everything will already be fine."

Reb Elazar did exactly so. He went to his house, took one hundred rubles, went to the judge, placed it before him, and returned to his home. The boy did not die, and the crisis quieted down completely, just as the Sanzer rebbe said. Reb Elazar was shocked to find out from his gentile neighbor that on that holy night of Shabbos, when the gentiles had gathered, they simply returned and did nothing at all to harm him. Hashem listened to his prayers from the heart and completely saved from all evil.

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