

## **This is the chok/statute/decreed of the Torah. (19:8)**

The term *chok* is used to describe a *mitzvah* which, for all intents and purposes, seems inexplicable. While Hashem certainly has a rationale for this *mitzvah*, our little finite minds have difficulty understanding that which is infinite. We are instructed to serve Hashem out of love and awe – not because it makes sense, it seems the right thing to do, or we understand it. We serve Hashem because He is the Almighty, and, on *Har Sinai* we accepted to be His People, with a resounding declaration of *Naase v'Nishma*, “We will do and we will listen,” thereby affirming our commitment to Hashem being based on doing – not on listening and understanding. The *chok* then becomes the key to all observances. We serve because He is King. He makes decrees, and we accept them. There is no rhyme or reason – just obedience. This is Judaism.

The concept of *chok* goes beyond the scope of *mitzvos*. There are *chukim* in life, episodes which, at the time, do not make sense: illnesses; financial challenges; and such, which are beyond our ability to understand and accept. These episodes of inexplicability should be treated the same way we perform *mitzvos* which are *chukim*. They are Hashem’s decree. He owes us no explanation. We take it as it comes, and smile.

This is the *yesod*, foundation, of *Parah Adumah*. Hashem seems to be conveying to us the following message: “*Rabbosai* – you are not going to understand all of My ways. *Parah Adumah* appears to you as a senseless, contradictory *mitzvah*. This is the way I want it to be, and this is what I want you to follow.”

Perusing our national history, our people have suffered many tragic and grievous events. These experiences run counter to our vision and understanding of a loving and kind G-d. How could He allow these terrible things to happen? Sadly, there are some who employ their inability to understand as a vehicle for reneging their commitment, to rebel and deny Hashem. Apparently, their ancestors who experienced the tragedies, who were the victims, did not seem to think so. They maintained their belief in Hashem, and, with pride and dignity, sacrificed their lives to glorify His Name. They are the true survivors. Their descendants, who arrogantly deny Hashem and impugn the integrity of their ancestors, are the actual victims. The parents live on, while the children have chosen to exchange eternal life for temporary gratification.

In his commentary to the *Haggadah*, **Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita**, explains the verse *Baruch HaMakom Baruch Hu*, “Blessed is the *Makom* (Hashem), blessed is He,” which precedes the discussion of the four sons. We understand *Makom* as referring to Hashem, since *makom* means “place”; Hashem is the *Mekomo Shel Olam*, the “place” of the world. He embodies the entire world. *Rav* Weinberger notes that this term as reference to Hashem is not found anywhere in *Torah She’B’ksav*, Written Law. The first time Hashem is alluded to by the word *Makom* is in *Bereishis* 22:4, with regard to the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak, wherein the Torah writes *Va’yaar es haMakom meirachok*, “He (Avraham Avinu) saw the place from afar.” While we usually translate the place as *ha’Makom*, the place where Avraham was instructed to slaughter Yitzchak Avinu, the

*Zohar HaKadosh* contends that *Makom* refers to Hashem. Thus, the *pasuk* is informing us that Avraham sensed that Hashem was distant from him. Specifically at this moment of ultimate sacrifice, when he needed Hashem's closeness more than ever – He appeared distant and unapproachable.

The **Chidushei HaRim** explains this anomaly. After all, this is when Avraham required and deserved Hashem's support. He was doing exactly what he was instructed to do. Why not grant him support? Apparently, Hashem was enabling Avraham to magnify the challenge of the *Akeidah*, thereby allowing him to qualify for an exponentially greater reward. When Avraham accepted the *nisayon*, challenge, of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, it was his tenth test. Although he had successfully passed the previous nine, taking the tenth test was equivalent to saying – "I am negating the first nine. If I pass this one, I receive the reward for all ten. If I fail, I fail all ten." This was an incredibly difficult step, but our Patriarch was prepared to demonstrate his total conviction.

There were so many questions that coursed through his mind. Everything about this test ran counter to what he had been led to believe. How could Hashem promise him a glorious nation if He was demanding that he sacrifice his only son? The *Satan* executed his role in attempting to dissuade Avraham from following through. Indeed, everything was working against his success. Nonetheless, our Patriarch moved forward. It was at this time that he needed Hashem so much; one little bit of encouragement would have gone so far. Instead, Hashem distanced Himself, magnifying the difficult nature of the test. Hashem did this to allow for a potentially greater reward.

Rav Weinberger notes that we employ the term *HaMakom* twice in our vernacular. When we visit a *shivah* house, where mourners are grieving the loss of a loved one, we say *HaMakom yinacheim eschem*, "The *Makom*/Hashem should comfort you." In light of the *Chidushei HaRim's* explanation of the *Zohar HaKadosh*, we now have a poignant new interpretation of these words. Someone who has just lost a close relative is going through a grief process that takes its toll on his ability to think rationally. He feels that G-d has distanced Himself from him. At a moment like this, we say to him: "*HaMakom*, the Almighty, Whom you feel has distanced Himself from you, will once again be close with you. If you believe that Hashem really cares about you and that what has occurred is part of His Divine Plan, then you will be reunited with Him."

Another instance when this word is used is in the prayer of *Acheinu kol Bais Yisrael*, "Our brethren, all of the House of *Yisrael*, who are in strife, trouble, the *Makom* should take pity on them and remove them from their troubled circumstances." Once again, this is an instance when a person begins to question Hashem's closeness to him. We pray that Hashem will provide him the opportunity to be in His close proximity once again.

There are situations in life when our belief is challenged. It is specifically at these times that we must be resolute in our conviction and make every attempt to transcend the obstacles, so that we come closer to Hashem. Indeed, when He appears far away, it is specifically at this time that we can get much closer – if we only persevere. Patience and conviction are the answers. I came

across the following story in Rabbi Hillel Goldberg's *The Unexpected Road*. It is a story of faith and trust which was challenged a number of times, and, only after generations, did the light finally appear.

The war had ended, and a father and his young son were reunited in Buchenwald's Barracks 66. It was a miracle that they had both survived. A few days later, they were both taken to France.

It was a miracle that the young boy had survived the murder camps, but he was terribly weak. The torture and starvation had taken their toll on his young body. He was now near death. The doctors said that his only hope for survival was a blood transfusion. Blood was at a premium. The war had just ended, and there were wounded and sick, broken people everywhere. Where would this boy's father find enough blood to allow his son to live? He tried everywhere – to no avail. Finally, he made the ultimate decision: he was going to give his son his own blood. If only one of them would live, let it be his son.

So it was performed. The father lay down next to his son. The blood transfusion began with the father's blood flowing into his son's arm. The son was revived; his life was before him; a new dawn had risen. The father, however, died, lying there next to his son. The young boy grew into a man, nurtured by his father's blood. He had a family – four children. The new father did not live to see his children grow up and marry, however, because, at the young age of forty-three, he returned his *neshamah*, soul, to his Creator.

Four young orphans. It was not supposed to be this way. When the grandfather gave up his blood so that his son should live – he was supposed to live to a ripe, old age. So many questions. No one had answers, but one does not question Hashem. Eventually, we will be privy to the answers – in due time. The four orphans grew up, married, and had large families, which grew profusely. Today, there are grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren, all leading Torah lives, studying Torah, performing *mitzvos*, all because a father gave his blood to his son. We now have the answers. This is what *HaMakom*, Hashem, wants. He may seem distant, but actually, He is much closer than we think.