

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Impossible to Erase

A double *parasha*? 191 *pesukim*? In this economy!? We know Hashem runs the world – no, really, Hashem runs the world, and that means if we have this doozy of a double *parasha*, it's not just because we're officially on summer vacation; rather, there must be an eternal lesson brought through this combination. So what's the *kesher* between them?

Let's start in the beginning – *Bereshit*

bara Elokim... wait! Too far. I mean the beginning of *Chukat*, the words: "Zot *chukat haTorah*."

Chok, a decree beyond reason, is related to the word *chakika*, engraved. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, *zt"l*, explains this is more than wordplay; rather, letters that are engraved are everlasting – the written word can be erased, it can be covered over, but what is engraved is unable to be altered. So too, a *chok* is a *mitzvah* that will never change, or adjust. A *chok* is *emet elyon*, unyielding truth.

My Rebbe, Rav Shmuel Zucker, *shlit"l*, teaches: the ultimate *chok*, the *mitzvah* of *parah aduma*, represents *tehiyat hameitim*, the resuscitation of the dead. By purifying a person who was *tamei meit*, impure through contact with a corpse, it brings the person to *tahora*, purity, and a return to regular Jewish service.

From this, we can understand that *teshuva* is also a form of *tehiyat hameitim*, because when

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RABBI
TZION
ZIV



LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Immediately after Aharon's death, the Canaanite king of Arad attacked Israel and took a captive. Rashi explains that the captive was really a female slave whom the Jews had previously captured in battle. The Ramban explains that it is inconceivable that they would have suffered the misfortune of the capture of a full-fledged member of the Jewish people at this time, while under the leadership of Moshe.

The Rambam (*Matnas Aniemi* 8:10) writes that there is no greater *mitzvah* than to redeem captives and that it takes precedence over providing food and clothing for the poor. This is because a captive suffers from a lack of food, drink, and clothing and faces danger to his life, all simultaneously. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Yoreh De'ah* #252), interestingly, points out that although captivity was an issue in earlier times, it did not really exist in his times, except in far-off places like Asia and Africa, as was reported by the caravans that travelled in the Arabian deserts.

Tosofos (*Bava Basra* 8b) resolves what seems like a serious contradiction. If redeeming captives is in fact the greatest *mitzvah*, why does the Talmud (*Megilah* 27a) list only two causes for which one is allowed to sell a *sefer Torah* – to study Torah and marry a woman. Why not add a third, to redeem captives? Tosofos suggests that perhaps the opposite is the case, it is so obvious that we would sell the *sefer Torah* to redeem a captive that it does not even need to be mentioned. The *Aruch HaShulchan* concludes that

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this is certainly the *halacha* and it is also the intention of the Rambam when he cites that passage from *Megilah* of only two causes, without comment. The Rambam is merely choosing the language of the Talmud, as he is apt to do, but he agrees with Tosofos that there is a third – redeeming captives. (The *Aruch HaShulchan* takes exception with R. Baruch Frankel, who took the words of the Rambam as evidence that he disputes the suggestion of Tosofos.) 🕒

A PARASHA THOUGHT

CONTINUED

we sin, spiritually, we are bringing death into the world. However, as the Rambam teaches, through *teshuva* we become a *birya chadasha*, a new creation, as if we have a new life – we are *zoche* to *chadeish yameinu kikedem*, given a new reality where our sin does not exist.

Olam HeAhLam, the world we live in, is a world where our true selves, the letter engraved upon us, our *neschama* and personal piece of Torah, are all concealed, shrouded by the *ash* of *cheit*, buried beneath the mud of sin.

This is, perhaps, why we find a very similar *passuk* later in our *parasha*: *zot haTorah adam* – a Jew is a living Torah. A Yid must remember these words – *Zot*

chukat haTorah – the Torah, the *chok* of *teshuva* is engraved, etched upon our very soul.

When we live *teshuva m'ahava*, repentance borne from closeness with Hashem, from love, we are connecting to the Torah, to the spark of perfection that is within us. We return to the truth of who we are: the original, perfect engraving.

This idea serves as the *yesod* of *parshas Balak*. Bilaam attempts to apply a layer of negativity, using his speech, to curse *Klal Yisroel*, seeking to bury our truth with the false reality of this world. But when he looks out at the tents of Israel, he is forced to recognize the holy reality of our unalterable essence. He gazes at a nation whose greatness cannot be wiped away, for it is deeply etched within us.

Bilaam wants to force a curse, but the engraving – what was never lost – breaks through, declaring the truth! “*Mah tovu ohalecha Yaakov, mishkenotecha Yisroel*” – How good are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! The beautiful truth.

No curse can erase an engraved letter, for when Hashem looks at a Jew, He doesn't see the surface dirt or the external mask; Hashem sees what He Himself engraved.

As we head deeper into a Tamuz,

hachodesh shekoolo tzar, towards ShivAsar b'Tamuz and Tisha b'Av, days which seem inevitable, each of us must realize who we really are. The *yetzer harah* wants us to look at ourselves and see only the surface stains, the filth, and the mud of our mistakes. But a Yid must remember, our connection to Hashem is not written in pencil; it is carved into the very bedrock of our soul. *K'racheim Av al banim* – the mercy of our Father is upon us. Realize your potential – I can bring *geulah*; I have the *koach* to wake from the nightmare and end this false reality.

When we feel and live through this love, we are living *chaim shel kol haTorah koola*, bringing out the Torah of our soul. This Torah will bring about *techiyat hameitim mamish*, this Torah will unlock *geulah*, this Torah will bring us home! It should be immediately if not sooner, and it should be a Shabbat *shalom*. *Git Shabbes!!* 🕒



TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

Although not the primary *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, Jewish men have been wearing *talleisim* (prayer shawls) in prayer for millennia. The Talmud records stories of sages preparing for prayer by donning a *tallis*, and the appearance of G-d perceived by Moshe is described as G-d being cloaked in a *tallis* like the communal prayer leader (e.g. *Tannis* 20a; *Rosh Hashana* 17b). Ibn Ezra (11th century) and Rambam (12th century) both highlight the importance of praying while wearing a *tallis*, and the Radbaz (15th century) writes that so is the custom of all of Israel. There are various reasons for the *tallis* during prayer, one of which is that it is respectful to pray wearing a special garment. In contemporary society, it is common that the *tallis* is worn only during *Shachris* (the morning service), which has been the case in the Ashkenazic community for at least 450 years, as is evidenced from Rabbi Moshe Isserlis's testimony of this practice. Other sources, mainly kabbalistic, teach of the advantage of donning a *tallis* for all prayers and Shlah (Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz, 16th century) even records that Jews of “all Arabic lands” would wear a *tallis* for the afternoon prayers as well, a custom continued by Yemenite Jews until today. A *Tallis* would generally not be worn for *Maariv*, being that there is no obligation to wear *tzitzis* at night. An explanation for why *Shachris* is the most apropos prayer for the *tallis* is the ideal of wearing *tzitzis* while reciting the *Shema* which contains passages discussing that *mitzvah*. 🕒