

# Chukat

by Benjamin Gee - Tuesday, July 09, 2019

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## The key to finding our way through the maze of life...

What's the point of a precept if we don't have a reason for it?

This is a dilemma we face when reading the commencement of Parashat Chukat which introduces us to the concept of a 'chok'. Our 'chukim' are a small proportion of the mitzvot of the Torah for which no reason is given - and the example at the beginning of our parasha is 'parah adumah' - the Red Heifer. If someone was 'tammei' (impure), in order to become 'tahor' (pure), the ashes of the Red Heifer which had been 'shechted' (slaughtered) in an appropriate way, were administered - and as a result, that person became pure. However, the person who administered the ashes became impure - it doesn't make sense! Yet, it's a law from Hashem, and it's one which we carried out, with great passion!

My appreciation of the chukim is inspired by one of the most wonderful parables I've come across, which is found in the book 'Mesillat Yesharim' (The Path of the Just) - and I'm going to modernise it somewhat.

A man once walked into a maze, and on the other side there was a tower. The aim of the game was to make one's way through the paths of the maze in order to reach that tower. But though people would try their best, the paths would take them to this side, or that side; to an angle or backward - and people would become completely lost!

Straight after walking into this maze the person hears a sound. It's a voice, and it says "I am a man standing on the top of the tower, I can see you with my binoculars and through this megaphone I am guiding you. The man is listening to the instructions - he would love to follow them to reach the tower, but he's got a problem - they don't make sense! Why is he being instructed to walk backwards, in order to reach the tower which is ahead of him?"

So either he can say: "that person on the top of the tower can see far more than I will ever know or see - I'll put my trust in him" - and as a result he will follow the instructions and he will find that the path that goes backwards actually leads him to the connecting path which will take him all the way to the tower.

Or he could say "no, I reject that - the sounds I'm hearing that can't be authentic, this ancient form of communication is irrelevant to me - I'll find my own way". Perhaps he might still get there by chance or he might become totally lost, or he could find a point somewhere within the maze which he will presume is the tower and from which he will get some form of fulfilment - and that's very much like our lives. Soon after coming into this world we discover that it's a maze. We're hedged in. There are doubts. There are problems. There are challenges. We are looking for the tower of happiness, of meaning and fulfilment. We are so privileged because Hashem can see everything that we cannot, he knows all and through His Torah which is the megaphone, He addresses us and gives us instructions.

Sometimes the instructions make sense, sometimes they don't. But if we follow the laws of Hashem we will be on the highway to that tower of meaning, fulfilment, hope, and joy in life.

Yes, this world can sometimes be a maze, but the laws of Hashem are amazing.

Shabbat Shalom

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