

# RED ALERT!

## CHUKAT

*by Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)  
of the Young Israel of Hollywood -  
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)*

## DIVREI TORAH

- The opening chapter gives us the perplexing law of the Red Cow. This law is the epitome of the Hebrew term Chok, an incompressible Torah law. My wife and I once spent a Shabbat in Rechovot, Israel, and we ate dinner Friday night at the house of HaRav Simcha HaKohen Kook z"l, the chief rabbi of the city. HaRav Kook passed away in 2022 at the age of 92; he was a great nephew of HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, chief rabbi of Israel, died 1935. After dinner that Friday night, HaRav Kook stated that every Torah law has to be understood as a Chok. You have to keep studying that law until you will reach something incomprehensible, making us realize that every law is from Hashem. His example was the law of Do Not Kill. It seems very comprehensible. Until you reach the following. A suspected murderer is judged by a court of 23 judges. If the judges vote 22 to 1 to find him guilty, they execute him. But if they vote 23 to 0 guilty, they may not execute him. Seemingly illogical, but the vote would indicate that no one argued for his defense.

- Having a law like a Red Cow will bring about many questions from religious doubters, like “What kind of law is this? What reason is there for this?” To this the Dubnov Maggid (Rav Yaakov Krantz, 1741-1804, great preacher and master of parables) told a story. An ignorant Jewish businessman struck it rich and succeeded to marry off his son to the daughter of the chief rabbi of the city. After the wedding this rich man noticed that the rabbi was deliberately distancing himself from his Mechutan. When the wealthy man asked the rabbi about this, the rabbi responded that there is nothing to talk about. The application of the story is that after Hashem gave us the Torah, we would expect some explanation for all these Halachot, but such is not the case. We only accept these laws, and admire and be satisfied that Hashem has chosen us above all other nations of the world.

- The expression “this is the Chok of the Torah” appears twice in the Torah. Once is here with the mitzva of the Red Cow. The second place is in Parshat Matot when the Torah describes the method of kashering the utensils that Bnei Yisrael took in the war with the Midianites. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888, Germany) wrote that both these laws, one here dealing with the purity of the body, and there, dealing with the

kashrut of your home, serve as the introduction and the necessary conditions of all 613 Torah Mitzvot. This definitely fits well with what Rav Kook stated in the first Dvar Torah above. The bottom line is back to what Rashi wrote: Don't think about it. It will only confuse us. Be comfortable where and what we are in Hashem's world.

- Miriam dies in the beginning of chapter 20. (Between chapters 19 and 20, there is a gap of some 38 quiet years. Nothing happened during that time except the slow dying out of the generation of male adults that left Egypt, with the exception of the women and members of the tribe of Levi.) Now in the fortieth year of travel, Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe will die. Miriam dies on the 10th of Nissan. Aharon will die on the first of Av. And Moshe will die on the 7th of Adar. In the span of 11 months, the top 3 religious leaders will expire, preparing the nation for the new reality to accompany the people into Canaan. Miriam and Aharon die in this Parsha. The Kli Yakar (Rav Shlomo Efrayim of Luntzitz, 1550-1619, Poland and Prague) notes that there was no crying or eulogies associated with Miriam's passing. Hence the people suffered from thirst immediately after her departure.

- The Abravanel weighs in on the reasons that Moshe and Aharon are

decreed to die in this Parsha. According to him (Rav Yitzchak Abravanel, 1437-1508, Portugal, Spain, and Italy), neither Moshe nor Aharon died because of the hitting of the rock. Aharon's sin was his involvement with the construction of the Golden Calf. Moshe's sin was his approval of the spy mission to Canaan. The reason that Hashem did not decree their real punishment for their sins was to allow the entire nation that left Egypt to die out naturally over the course of some 40 years. Now with their departure, Hashem will lead these two most righteous men to their departure as well. (The subject of Miriam's death is not discussed by anyone. Maybe it was just her time to leave.)

- According to the straight forward reading of the text, Moshe and Aharon do not enter the Promised Land due to the sin of hitting the rock, rather than speaking to it, as HaShem instructed them to do. Our commentators over the course of years all ask the same questions. Moshe hit the rock, not Aharon. What did Aharon do to warrant his dying in the desert? According to most, the answer is quite textual. The Torah records that Moshe hit the rock twice. Had he hit the rock just once, Aharon would have not been guilty of any wrong doing. He could have been surprised. But after Moshe hit the rock once, Aharon could have and

should have said something to stop his brother from hitting the rock a second time. The fact that Aharon said and did nothing indicated that he was in agreement with Moshe's actions. Hence Aharon did deserve a similar punishment.

## Questions by RED

### From the text

1. What is the main purpose of the Red Cow? (19:17-18)
2. Where did Miriam die and in what year after the Exodus? (20:1)
3. On what calendar date did Aharon die? (33:38)
4. How did Hashem stop the deaths caused by fiery snakes? (21:8-9)
5. What were the names of the two mighty kings that Moshe and Bnei Yisrael killed while traveling? (21:21 and 33)

### From Rashi

6. What is the real lesson in referring to the law of the Red Cow as a Chok, a decree? (19:2)
7. Hashem sent a Mal'ach, a messenger, to take the Jews out of Egypt. Who was that Mal'ach? (20:16)
8. When Moshe was trying to convince the Edomites to allow Bnei Yisrael to go through their country to get to the Promised Land, he told them that Bnei Yisrael would buy

water from the Edomites. Why? The Jews had their own water! (20:17)

9. Why was Mt. Har given that name? "A mountain of a mountain" (20:22)

10. The Canaanites attacked Bnei Yisrael after Aharon died, but they were not Canaanites. Who were they? (21:1)

### From the Rabbis

11. Where did we see this rock before (the rock that gave the people the water)? (Ramban)
12. On what calendar date did Miriam die? (Seder Olam)
13. Who really was punished by Hashem telling Moshe that he will not enter Eretz Yisrael? (Malbim)

### Midrash

14. How did Hashem make it easier for Bnei Yisrael to defeat Sichon and his army?

### Haftara - Sho-f'tim

15. Why did Yiftach's brothers expel Yiftach from the family?

### Relationships

- a) Nadav - Aminadav
- b) Elisheva - Pinchas
- c) Merari - Machli
- d) Efrayim - Mupim
- e) Sh'eila - Peretz

## **ANSWERS**

1. To purify a person who had become Tamei, impure, by contact with a dead body.
2. In Kadesh in the desert in the 40th year after the Exodus.
3. On Rosh Chodesh Av.
4. He had Moshe make a copper snake and everybody bitten by a snake would be healed when he sees Moshe's copper snake.
5. Sichon and Og.
6. That we humans do not have permission to think too much over it.
7. Moshe
8. When staying at a hotel, we should buy food from the hotel, to help them make money.
9. The mountain was shaped as if it was a mountain on top of a mountain.
10. Amalekites.
11. This rock gave Yishmael and Hagar water in the desert. And the same rock gave Bnei Yisrael water at Mara.
12. The 10th of Nissan.
13. Bnei Yisrael would suffer by not having Moshe as their leader.
14. Hashem had the Edomites leave their cities and combine to be one army and fight one battle with the Jews.
15. Because he was from a different mother.

## **Relationships**

- a) Grandson & Grandfather
- b) Grandmother & Grandson
- c) Father & Son
- d) First Cousins
- e) Half Brothers