

Hashem teaches about Para Aduma.

זאת חקמת התורה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה הָלְאָמָר דָּבָר | אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּקְרָא אֶלְيָה פֶּרֶה אַדְמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אִין־בָּהּ מָוִים אֲשֶׁר לְאַעֲלָה עַלְיָה עַל:

“This is the Law’s statutes, that Hashem commanded, saying: ‘Speak to Bnei Yisroel, that they shall take a red cow that is complete, without a blemish, and a yoke has never been laid upon it.’” (Bamidbar 19:2).

What does the pasuk mean by saying, “this is the Law’s statute?” Aren’t there many laws and statutes in the Torah? What is special about the term “chok?”

These laws were taught after Moshe and Aharon inquired about what should be done for the people who wanted to offer the korban Pesach but they were tameh mes (had impurity by way of contact with a dead body). The laws of ritual impurity were taught prior to building the Mishkan. They are impurity from touching a dead animal or creepy crawler (Vayikra 11), childbirth (ibid 12), affliction (ibid 13-14), and discharges (ibid 15). Then the Torah teaches not to approach the sanctuary with impurity on them, lest they shall die. (Ibid 15:31). Yet, Hashem did not teach about the impurity of touching a dead human. That was not taught until the death of Nadav and Avihu. Moshe did not allow Aharon or his other sons to touch the bodies. He called for others to grab the bodies by their tunics so that they can bring the bodies outside the camp. (Ibid 10:5).

The incident with Nadav and Avihu occurred on the first day of Pesach. We have learned previously, that there were two seven-day periods of inauguration. Moshe was involved in the first, daily erecting and disassembling the Mishkan. Then there was the priestly inauguration when Aharon and his sons performed the service under the supervision of Moshe. Then this was the 15th day of the first month, the eighth day of the priestly inauguration, whereby Aharon brought his offerings to purify the Ohel Moed and bless the people. It was not necessarily that the people who became impure by way of touching a corpse touched that corpse close to Pesach. Since the laws were never taught, they may have been impure for weeks.

Hashem retaught the laws of Korban Pesach to Moshe. (Bamidbar 9:2). These were the laws of korban Pesach outside of Mitzrayim. During the seven days leading up to Pesach, that year, Moshe taught these laws. This is when those with the concerns approached Moshe. Hashem gave the response, regarding Pesach sheini. (Ibid 9:10). These laws of para aduma were given first. We know this because the Torah says there, the people who could not offer the korban Pesach came close before Moshe and before Aharon. (Ibid 9:6). The Torah then says, Hashem spoke to Moshe. (Ibid 9:10). Here, it says, “And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon.” (Ibid 19:1). That is the response to both. The people approached both so Hashem responded to both. Thus, the question was

deeper than just korban Pesach. They had no idea how to rid themselves of corpse-tumeh altogether. Hashem instructed them how to do it.

This is how to understand, “this is the Law’s statute.” The word **תֹּורַה** Torah, means a body of laws. This is why all five sefarim are called Torah. It is a complete body of laws. The Torah contains within it smaller bodies of laws. “There is one set of laws for the citizen and stranger.” (Shmos 12:49). Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel upon leaving Mitzrayim that they shall have the body of laws in their mouths. (Ibid 13:9). Hashem questions why Bnei Yisroel are not keeping the body of laws they were taught already. (Ibid 16:4). These examples happened before Har Sinai, indicating it does not refer to the entire Torah, but a smaller body of laws. other examples are, “This is the body of laws for the Oleh.” (Vayikra 6:2). “This is the body of laws of the Minche.” (Ibid 6:9). “This is the body of laws of the Shelamim.” (Ibid 7:11).

תְּר֣וּת means statute, a written laws of governance. Contrary to mitzvos, which are commandments to do something (keep Shabbos) or refrain from doing something (do not steal), statutes are decrees that govern behavior (if you want to become purified from corpse-tumeh, this is how). Pesach, and the anniversary of leaving bondage, was to be remembered, and that was an eternal statute. (Shmos 12:14). Keeping all the laws and rituals of Pesach is also an eternal statute. (Ibid 12:17). The statue of the Passover offering is that no foreigner shall eat of it. (Ibid 12:43). Almost every time the Torah uses the word, it says “eternal statute.” (E.g., Ibid 27:21, 28:43, 29:9, Vayikra 3:17, 7:36, 10:9, 16:29, Bamidbar 10:8, 15:15, 18:23 and many others).

Abhorrent practices and illicit relationships are called a statute. (Ibid 18:30). Bnei Yisroel is taught not to follow the statutes of the other nations. (Ibid 20:23). Inheritance law is called a statute. (Bamidbar 27:11). After giving the laws of the accidental killer, the Torah says, “this is the statute of judgment for generations.” (Ibid 35:29).

The only other time the Torah uses the phrase “this is the Law’s statute” is when Eleazer – the next kohen gadol – taught the people how to purify metal vessels from impurity. (Ibid 31:21). Therefore, chok or statute, means more than just a rule. It really is the essence of the way of living – best practices. That is why it can be the crux of the body of law of purifying from corpse-tumeh. Hashem is saying, this is the crux of how to deal with anyone who has corpse-tumeh and they still want to bring a korban or practice in the Ohel Moed. Let them become pure through the para aduma. If one wants to purchase, obtain, or use vessels that were used by idolaters, then this is the crux of how to deal with making them usable. Statutes, for the most part, are eternal. It is a way of surrounding oneself with practices that keep the spirit of the Torah and what Hashem wants alive.

A chok, a statute, is not necessarily a law that one cannot understand. It is easy to understand why to celebrate the anniversary of leaving bondage. It is also easy to understand why one should immerse in water to rid himself of ritual impurity because that is the same way to rid oneself from physical impurity. Blowing trumpets to signal the army is easily understood. More than that, these are practices that promote the reminder of who the person is, who the person is part of, and who he ultimately answers to. Proper relationship, ritual purity, festivals and anniversaries, all promote a sense of history and a sense of belonging.