**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

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With great sadness, Yeshivat Har Etzion dedicates this shiur in memory of our dear alumnus, **Rabbi Michael Mark** Hy”d (’87 H), director of Yeshivat Otniel, who devoted his life to spreading Torah, light, goodness and love. May Hashem send a refua sheleima to his wife, son and daughter, and comfort to his family, community, and all those he touched. Yehi zikhro barukh.

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# PARASHAT CHUKAT

**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT”L**

**“When a Man Dies in a Tent…”**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“This is the statute of the Torah…” (*Bamidbar* 19:2): Since Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, “What is this law [of the *para aduma*, the red heifer], and what is its rationale?” – therefore it is called a “statute (*chok*)”: it is a decree that I have issued, and you have no right to question it. (Rashi, ad loc.)

Rashi’s explanation raises questions of its own. Why should we be troubled by the taunting of the other nations and of Satan? More importantly, why is there any need for the Torah itself to award them any attention? Is the Torah then addressed to the nations and to Satan, who come to criticize and taunt *Am Yisrael*?

It would seem that Rashi refers here not only to Satan as we usually depict this entity, as a frightening, mythical figure, but to the Satan that exists within each of us. This ‘Satan,’ or cynic within us, questions and undermines our service of God and our relationship with Him. We must respond to these questions by reminding ourselves that God makes His decree and “you have no right to question it.” We must understand that our lives, as religious Jews, will inevitably entail questions, doubts, and difficulties. There is no one for whom the Torah is truly and fully comprehensible and clear. If anyone feels that he understands everything, there is some deficiency in his faith.

A Jew must live his life in an unending struggle to find answers to his questions and solutions to his problems; he must not think that a life of faith is simple and clear. As the Gemara teaches:

The words of the Torah endure only within someone who kills himself over it, as it is written, “This is the Torah: when a man dies in a tent…” (*Bamidbar* 19:14). (*Berakhot* 63a)

The Gemara is not necessarily describing physical suffering; it is speaking of spiritual doubts and difficulties. The study of Torah is accomplished from within questioning and crisis. Despite it all, “when a man dies in a tent” – one must remain within the tent and not leave. One must address and grapple with reality, not try to escape it.

Here we approach the deeper concept conveyed in our *parasha*, which speaks of the impurity of death. Death represents passivity, an absence of movement and vitality. Torah, in contrast, expects us to be active, to struggle, to create – despite the physical and spiritual challenges that face us and the world. It is for this reason that a corpse represents the most primary category of ritual impurity. There is nothing more opposed to and distant from sanctity than death. The Torah guides us towards sanctity, which is attained and maintained through life forces; progress on this path requires complete severance from every type and aspect of death that exists in our lives.

The message of our *parasha* is twofold. On the one hand, we must not think that we know and understand all of the Torah. It is forever beyond us and we must accept it as a decree from God. On the other hand, we must not despair or give up on grappling with the questions and uncertainties that arise from observance of Torah and its commandments. We must accept God’s decree and, at the same time, exert ourselves to the utmost in the tent of Torah in order to deepen our understanding of it to the extent possible.