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*In Israel: Chukat is read this week and Balak next week

*Outside of Israel: Korach is read this week and Chukat next week

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Gift from the Wilderness

“...a gift from the Wilderness – the gift went to the valley and from the valley to the heights and from the heights to the valley in the field of Moav, at the top of the peak, overlooking the surface of the wilderness” (21:19-20)

Most *ba’alei teshuva* (returnees to Torah living) will tell you how at one point they sprang out of bed with “*Modeh Ani*” barely having left their lips, and rushed off to *daven*, unbelievably charged with the thought of putting on *tefillin* and *davening* – however slowly – with a minyan. How the expectation of Shabbat was visceral and the vistas of Torah were breathtaking.

And then, somewhere along the line, habit begins to dull the gloss. It’s not that the secular world has such a strong pull. Mostly you feel: been there, done that. Worn the T-shirt. Sometimes even knitted the T-shirt. It’s just that at some point you realize that you are different, and however religious you become you’re always going to be an “outsider.” It’s ironic that to be a *ba’al teshuva* you have to be somewhat rebellious. If not, you’d never have given up your nine-to-five existence to become a 24-hour a day “Yid.” And then you find yourself in one of the most conformist systems known to man. You could become bitter. Or you could pin your hopes on your children. After all, they’re “religious from birth” and instinctively know how to walk the walk and talk the talk. But that’s also a challenge. The majority of *noshrim* (“dropouts” from the observant world) seem to have either *chutznik* (non-Israeli) parents or *ba’al teshuva*

parents. And if you have both – that’s a double-whammy. Despite this, with a lot of prayer and common sense it is possible to bring up normal and well-adjusted Orthodox children.

But what about their parents? Are they just a stepping stone that’s been stepped over?

Never give up on your dreams.

The “gift of the wilderness” – the gift of water, the gift of Torah – comes miraculously out of the desert of a secular life. You have to follow that water. Sometimes it goes down to the valley, and sometimes it rises miraculously, and against its nature – to heights. But it can also return seeking the fields of Moav, the tremendous pull of the 49 gates of impurity.

Yet, if you keep going and you’re not prepared to stop and say, “Well, I got this far. Not bad for a *ba’al teshuva*!” If you keep following the water it will lift you to the top of the peak overlooking the surface of the wilderness, and you will know how far you have come.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chukat: Erchin 16-22

Rebuke: Words of Love

Rabbi Tarfon said, "Be amazed if there is anyone in this generation who is able to rebuke another. If one says to another, 'Remove the twig between your eyes,' the other will reply, 'You remove the beam between your eyes.'"

The *gemara* on our *daf* teaches about the mitzvah of *tochacha*, which is a Torah command to rebuke another person who is involved in a transgression. Why? Because of love for him. The source for this mitzvah is the verse, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. You shall reprove your friend..." (Vayikra 19:17) One who is motivated by love, and not by hatred, is enjoined by the Torah to take action in the face of transgression and "not to stand idly by the blood of your brother." (Vayikra 19:16)

Rashi explains Rabbi Tarfon's statement about a twig and a beam as follows: If one says to another "remove the twig" (meaning do *teshuvah* from your small transgression), the reply will be "remove the beam" (meaning your large transgression). Rashi explains that since no one is completely without any hint of transgression, the above dialogue will occur, and even a well-intentioned person's words will not succeed in convincing the other to cease his transgression.

Rabbi Tarfon's teaching in our *masechet* is in line with another teaching found Bava Metziah 107b: "Adorn yourself and afterwards adorn others." Before one admonishes or attempts to correct others, it is proper for one to first rebuke himself. The rebuke will obviously be more effective if it originates from a source that is itself not polluted. People can sense if rebuke is motivated by love, anger, or righteous indignation, and it will only be effective if love is the principle factor behind it. An esteemed Torah scholar once

entered a taxi (in Israel). The taxi driver was about to turn the key in the ignition, when the rabbi put his hand on the driver's hand and asked him, "Do you work on Shabbat?"

The driver looked into the rabbi's eyes and felt incapable of admitting that he transgressed Shabbat. On the other hand, being an honest person, the driver could not deny his sin. The driver immediately took an oath in his heart never again to drive on Shabbat, and turned to the rabbi and said, "No, I do not work on Shabbat."

The rabbi smiled and replied, "Good, let's go."

From that time on, the taxi driver and his family made a commitment to observe Shabbat. Of course, the taxi driver would probably have responded quite differently to anyone else, and the rabbi would not necessarily have made this inquiry of any taxi driver. However, the effectiveness of the rebuke was due to the spirit in which the words "rebuke" were said.

For detailed, annotated discussion of the laws of *tochacha* and their sources, refer to *After the Return* (Feldheim Publishers) and *Avotot Ahava* (in Hebrew, by the same publisher).

- *Erchin 16b*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the people of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

Our Homeland

The term "homeland" is certainly not a title exclusive to Eretz Yisrael. Every nation expresses its patriotism by referring to its land as its "*moledet*".

We do find, however, a Torah source for its application to

the Jewish homeland. When the Patriarch Yaakov, in the home of his uncle Lavan in Padan Aram, was told by G-d to leave, the instructions were "to return to your *homeland* and I shall be with you." (Genesis 31:3)

Q & A

Questions

1. "Take a perfect *Para Aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" *temima* mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *Para Aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *Para Aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Para Aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *Para Aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14, 15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, which was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, to which everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

ASK!

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By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

Affirmations

From: Melech

Dear Rabbi,

I have read about the results of a process called “affirmations.” The details are that you set yourself a goal, and you write down that goal 15 times on a piece of paper every day. For example, “I will become a famous soccer player.”

According to the person who referred me to the technique, he has had spectacular success with it. And it’s not just that it makes you more focused. Almost every affirmation he did was realized through some strange “co-incidences”. According to him, events that would have been totally out of his control just started happening, until his previously unlikely goal was made a reality.

He’s not a religious person, but he acknowledges that it may have effects similar to prayer. For example, he says that research shows that sick people whom are prayed for are much more likely to recover than those who aren’t, even if the sick people themselves are unaware that others are praying for them.

So here’s my dilemma: If Hashem created a mechanism such as “affirmations,” is it wrong to use it? It seems somehow to be circumventing the “natural” order of things. Or maybe it is a natural force that just wasn’t documented for the last 5760-plus years? I am confused. Part of me says “Go on!” while another part says “Wait, this might not be good.” What are your thoughts?

Dear Melech,

There doesn’t seem to be a problem with what you describe as “affirmations.” It appears to be simply using the “natural” power of mind over matter. It may seem supernatural because we usually only use a fraction of our brains, and this taps into normally latent natural powers of the brain.

There are two explanations for the “supernatural coincidences” you might encounter while using “affirmations.” One is that, with your mind focused on the goal, you notice opportunities you would have otherwise missed. It’s like when a person buys a used car, he suddenly notices a lot of cars with “for sale” signs. “What a coincidence,” he thinks. “A lot of people are selling their cars just now when I happen to want to buy one.”

Another explanation is indeed a “supernatural” one. As the Talmud says “A person is directed (by Heaven) in the way he wishes to go.”

The Mishneh Berurah says to say “In honor of the Holy Shabbat” every time you buy something for Shabbat, since “speech has a powerful effect in matters of holiness.”

So, pick a good goal, and then use “affirmations” to achieve it. And remember: You WILL succeed, you WILL succeed....

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *para aduma* the red heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death.

After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water

merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land.

The *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies, and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days.

Sichon the Amorite attacks the *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, the *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Laws and Orders

The Torah introduces the laws of the Red Heifer by saying, “This is the *chok* of the Torah” (Num. 19:2). From this instance and many others it seems that the word *chok* (or *chukim/chukot* in plural) refers to a type of law or rule. In many cases the word *chok* is accompanied by its counterpart, *mishpat*. For example, when the Jews arrived at Marah the Torah says, “There He placed for them *chok* and *mishpat*, and there He tested them” (Ex. 15:25). Similarly, the Torah prefaces its ban on various Canaanite and Egyptian practices by saying, “You shall do My *mishpatim*, and you shall safeguard My *chukim*... and you shall safeguard My *mishpatim*” (Lev. 18:4-5). From here we see that *chukim* and *mishpatim* are different types of laws, but as we shall see below, they are far from synonymous – there are major differences between them.

In explicating the verse above (Lev. 18:4-5), the Talmud (*Yoma* 67b) explains that *mishpatim* are laws which would still have been written even had the Torah not codified them. In other words, *mishpatim* are rules which can be intuited or logically deduced, such that they would exist even without the Torah commanding them. As examples of *mishpatim* the Talmud cites the prohibitions against idolatry, sexual misconduct, murder, stealing, and blasphemy.

Turning its attention to *chukim*, the Talmud explains that the Evil Inclination tries to convince people that these commandments are pointless. Meaning, *chukim* are commandments whose purpose or reason is not readily understood. As examples of *chukim* the Talmud lists the prohibitions of eating pork and wearing *shaatnez* (wool and linen together), the *chalitzah* ceremony, the purification process of a leper, and the scapegoat offered on Yom Kippur. Because the reasons behind all of these commandments are not understood, they are called *chukim*. The Talmud then rhetorically raises the possibility that these commandments are indeed meaningless and pointless, but then counters that suggestion by expounding on the end of Lev. 18:5, “I am Hashem’ – I am Hashem, I promulgated them (*chakaktiv*) and you do not have permission to second-guess their legitimacy!”

Peirush HaRokeach explains that, simplistically speaking, a *chok* refers to *issur v’heter* (roughly, “ritual law”), while *mishpat* refers to *dinim* (“civil law”). However, Maimonides (in *Shemonah Perakim* ch. 6 and *The Guide for the Perplexed* 3:26) more closely follows the Talmudic passage above, and explains that *chukim* are commandments whose rationale is hidden from us, while *mishpatim* are commandments whose rationale is more obvious. Per Maimonides, Rabbeinu

Bachaya (to Gen. 26:5, Ex. 15:28, Deut. 6:17, 7:12), Ibn Yachya (to Ps. 147:19), and Radak (to Ps. 119:1) all explain that *chukim* refer to commandments whose reasons were not revealed, while *mishpatim* are the intuitive laws which govern interpersonal relations.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim explains that *chukim* are more likely to be forgotten because they are not intuitive. This is because only the O/one who commands the *chok* truly understands its rationale, while everyone else is just following orders. Thus, to avoid forgetting them, *chukim* – more than other types of laws – tend to be committed to writing so that they will last longer and be remembered (see Isa. 30:8, Iyov 19:23).

The word *chok* is commonly translated into English as “statute,” which is a type of law whose details seem somewhat arbitrary. For example, the “Statute of Limitations” says that certain crimes can only be prosecuted if the perpetrator is indicted within a certain amount of time from when he committed the crime. That amount of time is essentially arbitrary, as it could just as easily have been longer or shorter.

Rabbi Pappenheim continues that the term *chok* (meaning an inexplicable law) was borrowed to refer to any set amount or quota that is imposed by a higher authority. In such cases the arbitrary nature of the prescribed quantity resembles the inexplicable law, which also appears to be arbitrary. For example, when the Pharaoh’s enforcers chided the Jews for not producing the required amount of bricks, the word used to describe that amount is *chok* (Ex. 5:14). Whatever number of bricks they were ordered to prepare was completely capricious, as the Pharaoh could have just as easily commanded them to make more or less than that number.

Rabbi Eliyahu Menachem Margules (author of *Emunas Eliezer*) explains that although *chok* does not inherently mean “a commandment without a known reason,” it bears this implication because it is related to *chakuk* (“engraved”). When somebody follows commandments out of rational understanding, then his obedience is conditional. He obeys only as long as the reason applies. However, when somebody follows the commandments simply out of a commitment to follow G-d’s will, then his obedience is unconditional and is more “engraved” or “ingrained” in his persona. For this reason, commandments without revealed rationale are called *chukim* – they ingrain loyalty to G-d more effectively than other types of commandments.

What is so special about “engraving?” Engraving denotes the total identification of the writing with that upon which it is

written. This is opposed to, say, classical writing with a pen and paper, in which the ink and paper are technically separable. In engraving, the paper itself becomes the writing. This unbreakable bond between the written word and that upon which it is written parallels the unbreakable relationship between G-d and one who follows His *chukim*. Indeed, the Mishnah (*Avot* 5:16) teaches that love which depends on something else can be lost if that thing is lost. However, love which is not contingent on anything else can never be lost. When one's obedience and loyalty to G-d is not bound to rationalistic whims, the relationship is much stronger and cannot be broken. [Rabbi Pappenheim has a slight variation on this theme. He writes that just like engraved writing is inseparable and everlasting, so does a *chok* refer to an unmitigated, unchanging law. He explains that for this reason the word *chok* is commonly attached to the word "forever" (e.g., see Ex. 12:14, 30:21, Lev. 3:16, 23:14).]

Just as the word *chok* does not inherently mean "a commandment without a known reason," so too does the word *mishpat* not inherently mean "a commandment with a known reason." Rather, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro explains that the word *mishpat* denotes a decision between two viable options. For example, a *shofet* (judge) must decide between two equally legitimate litigants. The introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* (known as *Patach Eliyahu*) explains that *mishpat* is known as "The Middle Pillar" because carrying out *mishpat* involves an impartial judge standing in the middle and deciding between the litigants. When following a *mishpat* – a commandment whose rationale is meant to be understood – one functions like a judge who weighs his options, comes to a logical conclusion and proceeds accordingly. This is the opposite of a *chok* – a statute – which does not require rendering one's own decision, because the law is already set in stone.

In light of the above it seems as though *chukim* are more important than *mishpatim* and accomplish more. However, Rabbi Yisrael of Salant (1810-1883) points out that, in practice, the opposite is generally true. Oftentimes *chukim* serve as stepping-stones towards *mishpatim*. If one properly follows the commandments whose reasons are not revealed, then he will be able to refashion himself into being able to follow the *mishpatim* as well. In other words, fulfilling the *chukim* helps train one's intellect to be able to properly understand the reasons behind the *mishpatim*, and will lead him to follow those rules as well. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter

describes *chukim* as rungs on a ladder that lead one towards the fulfillment of *mishpatim* – the pinnacle of moral perfection.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ps. 119:5), who explains that the letter KUF of the word *chok* can be interchanged with the letter GIMMEL to produce the word *chag* (colloquially, "holiday"). At its core, the word *chag* means "circle," leading Rabbi Hirsch to explain that a *chok* is like a "circle" in that its purpose is to encircle or surround us with various commandments, and give us extra opportunities to develop ourselves in a positive way.

The basis for this *chok-chag* connection is a Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* §15:25) which expounds on the verse, "He (G-d) told His words to Jacob, His *chukim* and *mishpatim* to Israel" (Ps. 147:19). The Midrash takes this as an allusion to the holidays, because the holidays (*chagim*) are elsewhere called a *chok* (see Ps. 81:4-5), and their date depends on the calendrical policies of the judicial (*mishpatim*).

Interestingly, many sources relate the *chok-mishpat* dynamic to the dual roles of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. There are two ways to organize this comparison. First, Rabbi Berachiah Beirach Shapiro (d. 1663) writes in *Zera Beirach* that *chok* alludes to the Written Torah, because it is not fully explained, while *mishpat* refers to the Oral Torah which reveals and expands on the hidden logic behind the terse commandments of the Written Torah.

Second, the *Zohar* (3:113a) takes the opposite approach: *Chok* refers to the Oral Torah, while *mishpat* refers to the Written Torah. In seeking to explain this *Zohar*, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that the word *chok* is related to the word *cheik* ("bosom"), which denotes the "middle" or "interior" of a person. When something is engraved (*chakuk*), it is carved into something's interior (*cheik*). With this in mind, Rabbi Mecklenburg contrasts the Written Torah with the Oral Torah. The Written Torah is made up of a text which is easily accessible and has, at least superficially, a plain meaning. It thus corresponds to *mishpat*. By contrast, the Oral Torah corresponds to *chok* because it takes the Written Torah and digs deeper to reach the "interior" and reveal the less obvious meanings of that text.

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Fettered and Free: Man's Dual Nature

The commandment of the Red Heifer is introduced as *the law of the Torah*. As such it is the fundamental institution of the whole teaching of *tumat met*, the impurity imparted by a human corpse. The red heifer is also referred to as a *chatat*, which denotes a clearing away of sin, or cancellation of a sinful act and implicates morality. In this commandment, therefore, we find a clear link between the concept of *tumah*, impurity, and *chatat*, which implicates the sphere of morality.

Moral freedom is the first indispensable condition for sanctification of life which the Torah obligates us to strive for. This fundamental truth is threatened by the sight of a man succumbing to death, for the human corpse demonstrates the power of death for all to see, and the superficial observer perceives in the corpse the power of nature dominating everything, including man. If man must submit to the compelling forces of nature upon death, we might think that he also must submit to the compelling forces of nature during his lifetime. If so, he is under the same universal spell of the rest of nature, and his moral freedom does not exist. Wherever he “must” by compelling necessity, there is no room for choice.

The whole purpose of the laws of purity and impurity is to negate this idea. These laws confront the demoralizing illusion of physical non-freedom with the Divine guarantee that man does indeed have moral freedom. Throughout our lives, then, when energy of moral awareness is threatened by reminders of bondage to physical forces, the Law reminds us that purity is within our reach.

The red heifer was a public *chatat*, and in contrast to other *chatat* offerings the entire procedure was accomplished outside the Sanctuary. The individual *chatat* offerings atoned for private sins of particular individuals, and represented the individual's vow to remain faithful. This *chatat*, by contrast, publicly proclaims that it is indeed possible to be free of sin! Man is indeed capable of controlling himself in the face of any physical temptation.

However, in announcing man's moral freedom, it also recognizes that he is subject to physical forces – he remains free *despite* these forces. It does not teach man to close his eyes and ignore the physical reality of his nature. Rather, through the details of its laws, it shows him that he is mortal, *and also* eternal. He is fettered *and also* free. He has physical powers *and also* moral powers.

The heifer is a physical animal, mature (at least three years old), complete (*temima*) with full vitality, and unblemished. It may not have ever carried a burden. While it is meant to help man in his work, this heifer has never used its strength in the service of Mankind. It thus represents physical nature unmastered by man.

This physical nature uncontrolled by man is then handed over to the *Kohen*, clad in his white garments, whose task it is to show the way to purity. He then takes this raw physical force unrestrained by man and takes it outside of the camp, representing that unfettered animal nature has no place in the framework of Jewish national life. Outside the camp, the *Kohen* then slaughters the animal, demonstrating that the animal aspect must be subordinated through a sharp and decisive act of human free will. He then collects the blood of the animal – the nature now directed and controlled by moral choice – and directs it seven times towards the Sanctuary, until it reaches complete and full expression. Everything aside from this blood – everything physical and animalistic that has not been so reined in – will disintegrate into ash.

These ashes are preserved by the community to remind them of the fundamental teaching of man's dual nature: Man is an amalgam of Heavenly and earthly, the G-dly and the animal, the eternal and the transitory. The ashes testify to this truth whenever death paints the illusion of man's bondage to physical forces, and restores the awareness of moral freedom.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 19:22

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