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LOGIC VS. CHUKAH: WHAT'S YOUR PREFERENCE?

On the opening words of Parshas Chukas, “*Zos chukas hatorah—this is the chukah of the Torah,*” Rashi explains:

The Satan and nations of the world provoke the Jews, saying: “What is this *mitzvah*? What reason does it have?” This is why the Torah writes *chukah*: “It is My decree, and you do not have permission to question it.”

In other places, Rashi explains the term *chukah* in a similar fashion, but with some slight variations:

The evil inclination *counters* these commandments, saying, “Why must we keep them?” Hashem therefore tells us, “I have decreed, and you do not have permission to *absolve yourselves* of them.”

What is the significance of these changes: (1) *counter* versus *provoke*, and (2) *question* versus *absolve yourselves*?

TWO ARGUMENTS

There are two ways in which the *yetzer hara* can dampen the fulfillment of *chukim*. One way is to come and say, “If this *mitzvah* is truly from Hashem, it would surely make sense. How could Hashem command something that’s illogical? It must be a man-made fabrication!”

But then you have someone who believes that *chukim* come from Hashem. He knows that whatever it says in Torah is G-dly, and nothing was supplemented by Moshe. Yet, the *yetzer hara* can still come along and focus on the irrationality of the *mitzvah*. Although he fulfills it, he doesn’t appreciate it, and he performs it reluctantly and lethargically.

In the others places where Rashi explains *chukim*, Rashi is describing the first type of reaction. The evil inclination *counters* these commandments, claiming they were not given by Hashem. Since the *yetzer hara* is trying to convince us not to do them, the conclusion is that “you do not have permission to *absolve yourselves* of them” and not fulfill them.

Here, however, Rashi is describing a different type of argument. The Satan and nations of the world are not trying to stop us from

fulfilling *chukim*; rather they are merely *provoking* us, pointing out that these commandments have no logical basis. Since they are trying to plague us with doubts and questions, thus cooling off our excitement for the *mitzvah*, the conclusion is that “you do not have permission to *question* it.”

WHO AM I?

Chassidus explains that the word *chukah* is related to the word *chakikah*, engraving.

What is the difference between writing and engraving? With writing, the ink is a separate entity that is merely added onto the paper, while with engraving, the letters fuse with the stone itself.

These two types of writing correspond to two ways a concept can affect a person. Writing represents an idea that is external and does not penetrate us, while engraving signifies an idea that pervades our consciousness.

Saying that *chukah* is related to *chakikah* conveys the message that *chukim* permeate a person more than intellectual *mitzvos*. But shouldn’t it be the opposite? A *mitzvah* we understand and appreciate becomes one with us, but a *mitzvah* that is illogical seemingly remains external!

The truth, however, is otherwise. A Jew’s essence is his submission and connection to Hashem, while his ability to comprehend is an external part of his existence. Therefore, a *mitzvah* done because we understand it is something external, while one fulfilled with *kabalas ol* reflects who we truly are.

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THREE TYPES OF LETTERS

As mentioned, there can be two ways we can fulfil *chukim*: One level is where we fulfill *chukim* with *kabalas ol*, but at the same time we “question” them—it bothers us that we can’t understand them. A higher level is where we don’t question them at all, and fulfill them gladly and with vigor.

Every physical phenomenon is sourced in the spiritual realms. Here, too, these two ways of performing *chukim* correspond to

two types of engraving: the standard way of engraving letters, and engraving letters until they penetrate the stone through and through, from one end of the stone to the other.

What is the difference between these two types of engraving?

When writing letters, the letters are a separate entity. When engraving letters in the regular manner, although the letters fuse with the stone, they still have some form of self-identity, distinct from the actual stone. This can be seen from the fact that ink can theoretically be poured into the etched letters, transforming them from engraved letters to written letters. However, when engraving letters through and through, the letters have no existence of their own whatsoever. Furthermore, the letters have a greater impact on the stone, penetrating them entirely.

These three types of letters parallel three ways of performing *mitzvos*.

When we perform a *mitzvah* only because it makes sense to us, it remains external to our true essence, which is connected to Hashem beyond reason. When we perform a *mitzvah* although we don't understand it, our essence as a Jew begins to come to the fore. However, since not being able to understand it doesn't seem ideal to us, it can be compared to standard engraved letters, which retain some form of self-identity. Similarly, our action and intellect are in conflict; although we are fulfilling the *mitzvah*, it doesn't settle well with us from an intellectual viewpoint.

The highest level is when not only do we fulfill the *mitzvah*, but its superrationality actually integrates into your intellect and excites us.

SAME WORDS, DIFFERENT MINDSET

Once, at a certain *farbrengen*, the Rebbe instructed the chassidim to do something that didn't seem to have any place in logic. I overheard the reaction of two chassidim who, although saying

the same words, expressed two entirely different sentiments.

The first chossid gave a sigh: "The Rebbe said strange things today that don't seem to have any logical basis. Of course we will do it, as it was surely *ruach hakodesh*, but there's no way to explain it."

The second chossid exclaimed excitedly: "Today at the *farbrengen* we experienced utter *giluy Elokus!* The Rebbe's words had no logical basis. It was pure *ruach hakodesh!*"

Both individuals said the same thing—that the Rebbe's words were illogical, and must be *ruach hakodesh*. The first, however, lamented the fact that he couldn't comprehend the Rebbe's instruction. Of course, he would

surely fulfill it, but he would have preferred to understand it.

The second, on the other hand, had no regrets, and what's more, he was actually ecstatic at the great *giluyim* he had experienced!

THROUGH AND THROUGH

This second chossid illustrates the higher level of engraved letters. Just as the letters have no self-identity whatsoever and are completely fused with the stone, the *mitzvah* has reached your deepest part—the essence of your *neshamah*. Since it has tapped the *etzem haneshamah*, it pervades every part of us, including our intellect. Just as the letters are carved from one end of the stone to the other, the *mitzvah* permeates every part of us, from the highest to the lowest.

Of course we must also learn and understand. However, the reason we do so is not because of the merit of intellectual pursuit on its own, but because Hashem wants us to understand. The *mitzvos* are thus engraved in us through and through, from the *etzem haneshamah* all the way down to intellect.

For further study, see *Lekutei Sichos* vol. 8, pp. 123ff.

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