

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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THE IMPORTANCE OF REWARD

Parshas Bechukosai begins with the promise, "If you follow my *chukim* (*bechukosai*) and observe my *mitzvos*...I will provide your rain on time...and the trees will bear fruit."

On a simple level, *bechukosai*—following Hashem's *chukim*—would seem to refer to the observance of *mitzvos*. Yet, as we know, there is a distinction between *mitzvos* which are *chukim*, with no apparent logical underpinning, and *mishpatim*, which are understandable. Why, then, is the word *chukim* specifically selected here?

It is possible to explain, as Rashi does, that *chukim* here refers to the study of Torah. However, Torah study itself can be directed to the study of either *chukim* or *mishpatim*. Why does the *posuk* particularly make mention of (the study of) *chukim*?

SPIRITUAL INCENTIVES

Aside from this question, there is a larger issue raised by many commentaries and classic works.

Beyond the physical reward we receive for Torah and *mitzvos*, there is the spiritual one, which is of much greater significance: someone who learns Torah *lishmah* can experience remarkable divine revelations. Now, what would be a more appropriate promise to someone of that caliber—that his trees will bear some additional fruit, or that he will merit, in some measure, to partake now in the G-dly revelations of *Gan Eden* and *Yemos Hamoshiach*? Clearly, the reward of a Heavenly nature completely outranks anything of physical value.

That being the case, why does Parshas Bechukosai elaborate on the delights of physical reward, with no mention whatsoever of anything relating to spirituality?

We could argue that the targets here are people of a more simplistic orientation. The Torah, which speaks in average terms, was aware that they would not be persuaded by promises of lofty treasures. Considering that the entire point

of a reward is to create an effective incentive, it makes sense that the Torah focuses on more tangible benefits.

However, this answer is not sufficient. This would mean that the *parshah* is directed only to simple people, and not to those on a higher level. Indeed, the individuals at the very pinnacle of G-dly service are so selfless that they don't even care about *spiritual* reward, instead serving Hashem without any thought of recompense. However, in addressing the mainstream (who do care about reward), although the majority of Jews might be impacted mostly by *gashmiyus*, a significant amount would be attracted to *ruchniyus* as well. Why does the Torah make no mention of spiritual *s'char*, to provide an incentive for such individuals?

LIFE IS EVERYWHERE

Let's begin with an analogy. Our souls contribute various powers that animate our bodies, like sight, hearing, intelligence, emotions, and so on. Each is assigned its own exclusive destination in the body, like sight in the eyes, hearing in the ears, intelligence in the brain, and emotions in the heart. And if a certain faculty is more advanced, the appropriate body part is of a more refined nature. For example, the heart, and no lower organ or limb, contains the emotions, and intelligence, beyond the heart's capabilities, is confined to the brain.

Yet our very life force itself is omnipresent; from our head to our feet, there is no part of our body that is not alive. However, if higher faculties dwell in more refined limbs,

then shouldn't life itself take up residence somewhere truly elevated? But no, life is everywhere, even in the lowliest parts!

The answer is that our limited functions are just that—individual functions, and therefore they only match a particular part of the body. Our brain is refined enough to be the seat of our mental activity, and that is where our brain

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power must remain. The heart, which is not quite as refined as the brain but has some relation to intellect, can also be influenced by it—a “ray” from the intellect can rest there as well. However, the hands or feet are not a vessel to intellect at all. Our faculties of a particular nature are assigned certain vessels, designed to contain the entirety or at least the emanations from the *koach* in question.

Life, however, isn’t a detail; it is the entirety of our existence. A live person is the polar opposite of a dead person, while a foolish man, while not ideal, isn’t less of a human as a smart man. The same goes for the blind and deaf; the things they are lacking are simply components provided by the soul. Life, on the other hand, is the basis of our being, and is therefore present wherever any element of us is to be found.

KI HEIM CHAYEINU

What is the life of a Jew? The basis of our existence is Torah and *mitzvos*: “*ki heim chayeinu*,” they are our very life.

Let’s say we would emphasize that through Torah we can attain G-dly revelations. This would be quite logical; Torah is an appropriate vessel for such a reward. It makes sense to say that through studying Torah and performing *mitzvos* properly, we can merit to get a glimpse of the divine pleasure experienced in the future. However, this would not display that Torah is at the foundation of our very being. It would make it appear as if Torah is a specific detail that results in matching reward, just like intelligence which is compatible with specific parts of the body (the brain, with some impact on the heart, and so on).

But Torah is more than a vessel for revelation; it touches at our very essence. Where is this idea expressed? When we see that if a Jew who studies Torah owns a tree, it bears

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fruit. What’s the connection between studying a page of Gemara and a tree, you ask? Because there is no part of a Jew’s existence that *doesn’t* have a connection to Torah!

In this light, the rewards enumerated in Parshas Bechukosai resonate with any type of Jew. For simple Jews, the physical blessings are geared at encouraging them to fulfill *mitzvos*. But they have an important place

for Jews of a loftier caliber as well—not only those who desire spiritual reward, but even those who don’t need any motivation at all. These blessings aren’t there to motivate them to serve Hashem better; they are an expression of how Torah is so inherent to who we are that nothing about us is disconnected from it.

ENGRAVED MITZVOS

This is why the *possuk* uses the word *chukim*. *Chukim* is related to *chakikah*, etching. Written letters are an added element to the paper, taken from ink, not from the paper itself. By contrast, letters carved into stone are part of the stone itself.

The word *chukim* can refer here to all *mitzvos*. The reason the verse uses this terminology is to hint to us that *mitzvos* are so engrained in a person—*chakikah*—that the reward they engender is physical. We must become one with Torah so much so that our efforts in Torah study result even in material blessings.

For further learning, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 37, pp. 79ff.



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