

AUTHORIZING AN AUTHORITY

by Rabbi Dovid Green

In this week's parsha we find the commandments regarding kosher and non-kosher food. As we may already know, something which is kosher or not is a matter of what it is made of, or what ingredients are in it. It is not an issue of its level of holiness. We may also notice that no reason is given in the Torah for observing these laws. It pays to understand why the Torah gives us commandments without giving us reasons to observe them. The world at large is very sensitive about doing anything without full understanding, especially in regard to religion. Experience teaches us that there is good reason for that sentiment. However, we can also appreciate that if a person believes in G-d, and attributes a higher intelligence to Him, then he takes it as a matter of course that G-d knows better than he does.

A student of Torah well understands that putting one's trust in Someone Who clearly knows better is not considered following blindly. There is an element of choice in it. There is clearly a time and a place where all questions aside, recognizing authority means acting first and understanding later. The military is a good example of this. It is crucial that authority is recognized unquestioningly. Battles and wars are won on the merit of that alone. A student of Torah, who accepts the veracity of the scriptures, is happy to show G-d his loyalty by observing the commandments which are not explained. He relies on the knowledge that G-d knows better, and has his good in mind. Here is what Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov, of blessed memory, writes in his "Sefer HaParshios" regarding this topic:

(The) holy Israelites do not skeptically question the decrees of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, to examine and understand why He forbade one food and permitted another. They are satisfied just knowing the will of the King of The World what they should and should not do; what they should and should not eat, whether they know the reason or not. Not only that, but they rejoice over commandments and decrees. They bless and praise the Giver (of the commandments) for not giving reasons! Why so? Because if reasons would be given, people might leave aside the words of the Creator, and perform the commandments for their own personal reasons. Consequently, they would be serving themselves, and not the Creator.

Furthermore, if the reasons and benefits of the commandments would be explained, at some point in time someone might come along convincing others of his great wisdom. He might say that this and this commandment no longer applies. That is, since the reason appears no longer relevant, so too the commandment no longer applies. Perhaps the ignorant might even listen and learn from this leader to disregard commandments. Yet the laws which The Creator gave us were given to be

observed forever and in all places, unless the Torah states specifically otherwise. Even though we don't know the reasons for the commandments, and why some foods are permitted, and some not, we do know one overriding reason. It is this which is stated by King David in Psalms. "Taste, and you'll see that G-d is good." The commandments were only given for the good of mankind.

The sages say in midrash, "why does G-d care which way we prepare an animal to be eaten" (whether it is slaughtered properly or not)? "The words of G-d refine (us)." (Psalms 18) The commandments were given to refine mankind.

The Creator could have made it that people follow the commandments just as He put it in nature that one would not jump into a burning fire. The nature of the fire itself prevents someone from stepping into it, and so to speak, punishes those who would. G-d could have done the same with foods that should and should not be eaten. Why did He create His world that both choices are given to mankind equally without anything naturally holding him back? It is in order to refine mankind.

There is no comparison between someone who abstains from evil deeds as a result of an iron curtain in his way, who really wishes he could do the deeds --- and someone who abstains because of a hedge of roses (commandments against doing such deeds) in his way. If he really wants he can pass through the hedge of roses. Why doesn't he pass through? It's because he takes pity on the roses, on their beauty and their pleasant scent, and he controls himself and abstains from passing through. Anyone who finds himself tempted to do wrong, and is being overpowered by his inclination, yet abstains because of this hedge of roses, is pure and refined, etc.

Rabbi Ki Tov's beautiful words speak for themselves. May we all merit to appreciate the beauty and pleasant scent of the hedge of roses.

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