

# AN INVITATION TO ELEVATE

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "This is the statute of the law which G-d commanded to be told." (Bamidbar 19:1-2)*

This week's parshah reintroduces the concept of chok, a mitzvah whose logic seems to be beyond the realm of human comprehension. As such, it provides another opportunity to discuss the whole concept of mitzvot in general.

It is very easy to not to see the forest for the trees when it comes to mitzvot. In other words, a person can perform a mitzvah in such a way that it actually goes against what the mitzvah was intended to accomplish. Obviously, in such a case, it is no longer a mitzvah, but try telling that to the person who thinks he has just performed the will of G-d in the best way possible.

The goal of life is to get to the World-to-Come, as the Ramchal explains. However, getting there, he explains, is a process of self-perfection:

G-d's purpose in Creation was to bestow His good to another . . . Since G-d desired to bestow good, a partial good would not be sufficient. The good that He bestows would have to be the ultimate good that His handiwork could accept. G-d, however, is the only true good, and therefore His beneficent desire would not be satisfied unless it could bestow that very good, namely the true perfect good that exists in His intrinsic nature . . . His wisdom therefore decreed that the nature of His true benefaction be His giving created beings the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible. For the intended purpose to be achieved successfully, means must exist through which this being can earn perfection. Man was therefore created with both a yetzer tov and a yetzer hara. He has the power to incline himself in whichever direction he desires ... The Highest Wisdom decreed that man should consist of two opposites. These are his pure spiritual soul and his unenlightened physical body. Each one is drawn toward its nature, so that the body inclines toward the material, while the soul leans toward the spiritual. The two are then in a constant state of battle. (Derech Hashem 1:2:1-1:3:2)

It's like a king for whom a bride has been chosen, but who had not actually grown up in a house of royalty. The point of marrying the king is to have a lasting and close relationship. However, being that she is marrying the king, the future queen must learn to play the part if she is going to live in the palace and take her place on her throne next to her husband, the king. Therefore, the king sends to

his future wife all kinds of tutors to instruct her in the way of royal life.

Likewise, G-d chose the Jewish people to be his "bride," so to speak, in order that we should go to the World-to-Come and enjoy His Presence forever. However, we did not grow up in a house of Divine royalty, but rather we became a nation while living as slaves in Egypt. It is not simply an issue of "moving" into the palace, but one of becoming conditioned to play the role for which we have been picked.

Therefore, G-d gave us the Torah and said, "Here. Learn this. Live by it. Follow its directions, and prepare yourselves for the time that we shall live together forever. You are my beloved, but that is not enough to live in the palace. To do that, you must educate yourselves in the way of Divine royalty, and become a 'kingdom of priests.' I am holy, and to be close to Me is to become holy as well."

Therefore, the goal is the relationship with G-d; mitzvot are the ways we fashion ourselves into people who are fitting for such a relationship. They are stepping stones to higher levels of holiness, and the higher we go, the closer we come to G-d, the more worthy we are in terms of our portion in the World-to-Come.

This is true of a mishpat - a mitzvah whose logic we understand, or a chok - one that we cannot relate to.

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*Therefore, keep the commandments of G-d, your G-d; go in His ways; fear Him.* (Devarim 8:6)

This is why the Talmud can make such an outlandish statement. Imagine being late on your mortgage payment, and running to the bank a week later and saying, "But I really intended to make the deposit. It was just that, along the way, my car broke down . . . and by the time the service guy came and towed my car, the bank was closing and I realized I'd never make it. The next day was even worse, and the day after, don't even ask!"

What will the bank manager say?

"I'm really sorry to hear about your troubles," he may begin, "and the truth is, I had a similar episode about a few weeks ago. But, the bank has a strict policy about mortgage payments . . . I mean, how could the bank survive if we let every client come in here with some story to explain why they haven't kept up with their mortgage payments? We're going to have to fine you . . . even though, you have to believe, if it were up to me, I'd forgive you this time."

However, the Talmud says, "You wanted to do the mitzvah and your car broke down? You ran to shul to make minyan and only eight other men showed up? No problem. Since you weren't negligent and made a good effort to do the mitzvah, from our perspective, you did it!" (Brochot 6a).

"Even though I didn't?"

"Even though you didn't."

According to Western thinking, "the road to Gehennom is paved with good intentions." In Torah, it is the road to Heaven. This is what the Talmud means when it says, "All is in the hands of Heaven except fear of G-d" (Brochot 34b). Fear of G-d is a relationship thing, especially when the fear being spoken about is not fear of punishment, but as the Hebrew word implies, it means the "seeing" of G-d.

Thus, the Rambam taught in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah (Ch. 2), "You don't love G-d yet, even though there is a mitzvah to love Him, and you don't know what to do? It's simple. Go outside and look at the universe, the one around you and those beyond you. Think. Contemplate. Consider the awesome wisdom necessary to make all of Creation, and all for man! Realize how much good you enjoy, though you didn't do anything to merit it. Think about that long enough," explains the Rambam, "and you will quite automatically burst with love for G-d!"

What is the Rambam teaching us? He is telling us that love of G-d is the most natural thing to feel. If we don't feel it, it is because we are blind to the reality of G-d and all the good that He does for us. We have taken life for granted, and the entire world in which we live in. Reverse all of that, and love of G-d will flow through your veins even more naturally than your own blood does.

So, is that what the mitzvot are meant to accomplish? Mitzvot are like a spiritual anti-histamine, so-to-speak, to clear us out so that we can breathe spirituality again, and feel our innate love of G-d. They put us in the right place, at the right time, and we put ourselves in the right frame of mind so they can elevate us closer to G-d and allow us a taste of eternity, even while still living in this world.

Thus, ultimately, it does not really matter if we are successful at executing a mitzvah or not, as the Talmud states:

Whether we bring a lot or a little, as long as your intention is to Heaven. (Menachot 110a)

However, that can only be true if one accepts all the mitzvot, and makes a concerted effort to fulfill whatever mitzvot he can, given his situation. If you can bring a lot and you bring a little, then what have you said to G-d about your desire for a relationship with Him? Or conversely, if you have only a little and you bring a lot, does that not state explicitly how much you want to be connected to G-d?

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

*Justice, justice you must pursue, so that you may live in and inherit the land which G-d, your G-d gives to you. (Devarim 16:20)*

That's why the Talmud can state that one who does a particular act as a mitzvah has done a greater deed than one who does it because he wants to do it anyhow (Kiddushin 30a). If you give charity because you like to give charity, though it shows that you're a generous person, it does not show how you wish to come closer to G-d. That is why nonreligious people can give charity, and plenty of

it.

Tzedakah, on the other hand, is charity that G-d commands us to do. Charity in and of itself is not an act of righteousness, but tzedakah is because, as the word implies, it is done because it is the righteous thing to do. In other words, if G-d did not command me to do it, then I wouldn't do it. Therefore, there is resistance on my part, and therefore when I do it, it is to please G-d and is an expression of my desire to have a relationship with Him.

Last night, I had a dialogue with one of my sons. My wife and I decided to implement the idea of ten minutes of chores on a daily basis, to get my children use to the idea of helping out around the house other than what they do on Friday to get ready for Shabbos. Needless to say, the house does not stay clean all week on its own, and it is too much for my wife and I to stay on top of everything all week long. Besides, we're not the main source of the mess.

As one might imagine, implementing such an idea is like trying to saddle up a wild stallion. There was rebellion in the ranks, especially when they found out that ten minutes ignored today becomes twenty minutes of chores tomorrow. Before my son knew it, he was in debt forty minutes and was, to put it mildly, freaking out!

When he finally calmed down, I asked him if I could talk to him about it. Eventually he said yes, and I explained to him that, believe it or not, the main part of the exercise was not to save us, his parents, extra work. That is just a wonderful side benefit. The main benefit, I told him, was to become a more responsible and appreciative human being, which can only be to his benefit.

Intellectually, he heard, though emotionally, he still resisted. So, we struck a deal: he comes home each day and asks what his chore is for ten minutes that day without complaining, he gets the work done sometime before bedtime, and we wipe the slate clean and start again. He agreed, because I think on some level, he understood it was part of being in a family, and showing his parents that he appreciates what he got.

As he left my little office (I work out of my home), he wasn't jubilant. However, I still felt that something had been accomplished, as if a barrier had been removed between the two of us. And, I know from personal experience that if he follows through and performs his "mitzvah" as an expression of obedience to a higher cause, he will, in the end, feel more like one of us.

It works the same way for us adults and it is G-d's Will as well.

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the entire congregation of the Children of Israel and tell them, 'Be holy, for I, your G-d, am holy.'" (Vayikra 19:1-2)*

In this respect, chukim make even more sense. Rashi explains that a chok is a mitzvah that has the Sitra Achra and the nations of the world scratching their heads saying, "Huh?" What a strange way to

define a mitzvah!

However, the truth is, he is not defining a chok, but rather, a mishpat. As the name implies, a mishpat is a mitzvah that the Sitra Achra and the nations of the world agree to, because they understand its benefit to the betterment of society. They have no problem accepting them, regardless of whether or not G-d commanded that we do them. Like the Negative Mitzvos of the Torah, they are designed to protect the world from destruction.

However, a chok exists on a higher plane of holiness. It is like an escalator leading to a higher dimension and much greater spiritual growth. It may operate in this world, but only as a means to get to a higher reality, one which the Sitra Achra and the nations of the world neither understand nor pursue. Only a chok doesn't make sense down here in this mundane world of everyday life. However, on the plane to which it belongs, it makes perfect sense.

Thus, when one pursues a chok, he is in fact pursuing a closer relationship with G-d. Not only is he doing a mitzvah purely as a function of G-d's Will, but he is pursuing a higher level of holiness in order to be more like G-d, to be more with G-d. This is what the Torah means when it says, "Be holy, for I, G-d your G-d am holy." Paraphrased, it means, "Pursue increasingly higher levels of holiness, for I am the essence of holiness, so therefore, the holier you become, the closer you are to Me."

That's why Korach had leverage with so many Jews in his argument against Moshe Rabbeinu, especially over the right to officiate in the Mishkan. Like Nadav and Avihu, he was simply pursuing a path of even greater holiness. "Here G-d tells us to be holy, and to try to become even more holier," Korach argued to Moshe Rabbeinu, "and you hold us back by closing off positions to holiness that ought to be open to us!"

That's why Moshe Rabbeinu had the earth swallow up Korach, as if to say: If you improperly pursue holiness, it brings you down, not up. Just recall all the Crusades and Suicide Bombers who murdered so many in the Name of G-d, to be "close" to G-d. There are some who tried to go so high, but the Talmud reveals just how low they ended up.

That's why a chok has to come from G-d. Only He can determine a true path to kedushah, and once He offers it to us, then we are able to walk it and become more elevated. The golden calf was a man-made attempt at a chok; the Parah Adumah is the admission that only G-d can create chukim, and our performance of them with complete loyalty is a perfect expression of our desire to be like G-d, and therefore become closer to Him.

*Have a great Shabbos,*  
*PW*

---

Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)