

A Thought on Parashas Kedoshim

By Jeremy Richards

In Memory of my Dear Parents, a"h

L'ilui Nishmos Yitzchok Ben Nachman Halevi a"h and Yenta Bas Yisroel a"h

לעלוי נשמת יצחק בן נחמן הלוי ע"ה ולעלוי נשמת יענטע בת ישראל ע"ה



אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ בְהִמָּתְדָה לֹא־תִרְבִּיעַ כְּלָאִים שְׂדֵה לֹא־תִזְרַע כְּלָאִים

וּבְגָד כְּלָאִים שַׁעֲטָנָו לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ: (ויקרא י"ט: י"ט)

You shall observe My decrees:

You shall not crossbreed your livestock with different species.

You shall not sow your field with a mixture of seeds,

and a garment which has a mixture of shaatnez (wool and linen) shall not come upon you.

(Vayikro 19:19)

In this posuk we can discern two significant themes. The first is the notion of the 'חוק' (chok), or [plural] 'חוקים' (chukim), which is variously translated as 'laws,' 'decrees,' 'statutes,' and 'suprarational commands.' The latter translation is given by Rabbi Chaim Miller in his 'Chumash Kol Menachem,' in which he consistently translates according to Rashi's interpretations. Chukim are generally thought of as laws that we understand less than others, or even whose meanings are hidden from us, and we shall expand on this. The second theme, very closely connected to the first, is the prohibition of mixing and mingling species, whether in the animal or plant kingdoms.

There is a certain poetic irony in the Torah's ability to tantalise the curious mind with the challenge of fathoming meaning in mitzvos that are designed to elude us. Indeed, there are different approaches regarding the extent to which 'chukim' are to be thought of as having no rationale at all or as having meanings that are known to Hashem but not to us.

On the posuk above Rashi writes the following:

"חֻקִּים אֵלוּ גְזֵרוֹת מֶלֶךְ, שְׂאִין טַעַם לְדָבָר"

"Chukim" refers to decrees of the King, which have no rationale.

The impression from Rashi's words is that chukim do not have any rationale at all, and Ramban takes issue with this:

ואין הכונה בהם שתהיה גזרת מלך מלכי המלכים בשום מקום בלא טעם כי כל אמרת אלוה צרופה (משלי ל ה) רק החקים הם גזירת המלך אשר יחוק במלכותו בלי שיגלה תועלתם לעם ואין העם נהנים בהם אבל מהרהרין אחריהם בלבם ומקבלים אותם ליראת המלכות וכן חוקי הקב"ה הם הסודות אשר לו בתורה שאין העם במחשבתם נהנים בהם כמשפטים אבל כולם בטעם נכון ותועלת שלימה

“...and the intent is not that the decree of the most exalted King is ever without any rationale, for *“every” word of G-d is purifying* (Mishlei 30:5). Rather, the “decrees” are like edicts of a king who makes laws of his kingdom without revealing their benefits to the masses, and since the people are unaware of the rationale they do not find them satisfying; rather, they question the need for them in their hearts, while accepting them in practice out of fear for the government. So, too, the decrees of the Holy One Blessed is He are the esoteric laws that He has put in the Torah which the masses, in their minds, do not find satisfying as they do the ‘mishpotim’ (social and interpersonal laws, which are easier to understand). [In truth,] however, all the laws have a sound rationale and absolute benefit.

(Adapted from translation in Ramban, Graff-Rand edition, Artscroll)

With regard to the mitzvos in the posuk above, Ramban teaches that only shaatnez - the prohibition against mixing wool and linen - has a hidden meaning. Mixed breeding and mixed planting, he explains, have rationales that can be readily understood:

והטעם בכלאים כי השם ברא המינים בעולם בכל בעלי הנפשות בצמחים ובבעלי נפש התנועה ונתן בהם כח התולדה שיתקיימו המינים בהם לעד כל זמן שירצה הוא יתברך בקיום העולם וצוה בכחם שיוציאו למיניהם ולא ישתנו לעד לעולם שנאמר בכולם "למינהו" (בראשית א)

"The underlying rationale for the prohibitions against 'Kilaim' - 'mixture of species' - is that G-d created individual species in the world for all living entities - for plants and for animate creatures, and He implanted in them the capacity for reproduction so that those species will exist indefinitely, for as long as He, blessed is He, shall wish the world to exist. And He commanded as part of their reproductive capacity that they shall produce offspring according to their individual species, so that those species shall never change into something else, as it is stated regarding all of them: למינהו - "according to its kind." (Bereishis 1:11,12,21,24,25)

Let us now turn to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch's analysis and explanation of these laws in his monumental 'Horeb.' We shall see that Rav Hirsch gives an explanation that is consistent with what we have just seen in Ramban, but in his own unique literary style:

"Respect the Divine order in G-d's creation... You should not interfere with the natural order which you find fixed by G-d in His world for its ultimate good. You must, by respecting the boundaries of that order, guard yourself against allowing the free use and transformation of this world, which He has granted you, to degenerate into a G-d-forgotten, world-destructive presumption.

First let us learn the limits which G-d, the Creator of that world order, has set for our observance. True, even if we were possessed of all human knowledge, we should still know only the external appearance of things; we should know only what they appear to be to us, and gather therefrom what they are in reality. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarification and classification, let us try, as far as we are able to do so with our limited powers, to gain some insight into the laws which ask us to respect the Divine order of the universe." (Horeb, Soncino Press 1981 p.283)

Rav Hirsch proceeds to give lengthy explanations of five areas, basing his thoughts on the following Chumash sources: Vayikro 19:19 (see above), Devorim 22:9-11, Shemos 23:19, Bereishis 1:11-12, and Bereishis 1:20-22. The reader is encouraged to see these sources, and Rav Hirsch's extensive explanations, but here is how he lists the main instructions contained within them:

"First Law: Do not cause animals of diverse kind to copulate nor allow this to be caused by others...

Second Law: Do not graft trees of diverse kind on to each other nor cause this to be done by others...

Third Law: You may not allow one task to be done together by animals of two species...

Fourth Law: You may not cover or warm the body by means of a material which is a combination of wool and linen...

Fifth Law: Do not boil meat and milk together..."

Rav Hirsch then adds the following general commentary:

"Let us take together all these laws which G-d, the Designer of the world has decreed us to observe in this world. What concept results from viewing these statutes and the hints which have been passed on to us by our Sages?

We hear the call: Look around, man, look around you in the great household of the universe. See how every being which lives and develops has the great law of 'for its own species' imprinted upon it by G-d. According to this law, every creature first transforms all that it absorbs from creation into suitable food for itself, enlarging itself, and then uses the surplus of its corresponding powers to generate a being similar to itself. See how every self-developing being, plant and animal, lives for itself and for its species.

Watch this law of Divine order in the universe and respect it in your own human activities, to perfect your essential human self. Do not forget that G-d has summoned you to the task of serving the world and cultivating it protectingly, but not to enter destructively into this orderly course of development through your self-seeking.

Do not forget this, and do not put the powers of a created being which have been designated for its own species to the use of sustaining another species. In this context two heterogeneous species are called כלאים (*kilayim*), from the root כלא, 'to close up'; for G-d's law of creation has closed them to each other, and they may only combine their powers by external compulsion.

It is in this way, as such single beings, each gifted with powers of development for itself and its species, that the independent animal and the trees and plants which grow from the womb of Mother Earth stand before you. To mix and graft various species of animals and plants is to make a mockery of this law of creation."

(Horeb, Soncino Press 1981 pp.285-286)

Note that Rav Hirsch includes shaatnez (fourth law), whereas Ramban separates it out as having a hidden meaning.

The edition of Horeb we have been studying was both introduced and translated by Dayan Dr. Isidore Grunfeld. Dayan Grunfeld writes similarly on this subject in his masterly 'The Jewish Dietary Laws.' His style is not dissimilar from that of Rav Hirsch, and in his chapter on kilayim he writes the following:

"The account of creation by G-d of plants, birds, cattle, fish, sea-monsters and all sorts of creatures is invariably accompanied by the statement that He made them למיניהם or למיניו - after its or their "kind." Every blade of grass and every living being, as the Midrash (Ber. Rabbah 10:7) puts it, has its innate law, according to which it develops. Left to themselves they would never mix; and nor should man interfere with the Divine order of Creation. He should respect the Law of species governing their differentiations as part of the whole organic world."

(The Jewish Dietary Laws, Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld Vol.2 p.45)

Thus far, Dayan Grunfeld's words are similar to Rav Hirsch, but now he gives us some additional context. On the words, אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ - "You shall keep My chukim" (Vayikro 19:19) Dayan Grunfeld cites the Talmud Bavli:

את חקתי תשמרו, חוקים שחקקתי לך כבר (סנהדרין ס. קידושין לט.)

and he translates: "Keep the laws of nature which I established long before the laws (of the Torah) that I am giving you now." (Sanhedrin 60a Kiddushin 39a)

...and the Talmud Yerushalmi:

חקים שחקקתי בעולמי

"laws which I ordained in My world" (Kilaim 1,7)

Dayan Grunfeld explains these sources to indicate that, in keeping separate the different species which Hashem created as distinct from each other, we are confirming those natural laws which Hashem established and which "proclaim G-d as the universal Law-Giver."

These words from the Yerushalmi are also found later in the Ramban we were learning above:

וכך אמר רבי חנינא משום רבי פנחס משום חקים שחקקתי בהם את עולמי (ירושלמי כלאים פ"א ה"ז) וכבר כתבתי בסדר בראשית (א כו) שהצמחים כולם יסודותם בעליונים ומשם צוה להם השם את הברכה חיים עד העולם והנה המערב כלאים מכחיש ומערב מעשה בראשית (רמב"ן, ויקרא י"ט:ט) (ט)

"And thus said Rabbi Chanina in the name of Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair regarding these "decrees," that they are "decrees with which I established the order of My world" (Yerushalmi Kilaim 1:7) And I have already written in my commentary on the Torah-portion of Bereishis (see end of Ramban on Bereishis 2:8) that the foundations of all the growing things are in the higher realms, "and from there G-d has commanded the blessing for them, life forever." Thus, one who mixes two species repudiates and disorders the original Creation." (Ramban Vayikro 19:19)

Taking us a little deeper still, Dayan Grunfeld then treats us to an insight from the Zohar:

"When G-d created the world, He assigned all things to their respective sides, and appointed over them celestial powers, so that there is not even a tiny herb without such a supervisor, and whatever they do is done through the power of that heavenly control, and all are rigidly assigned, and none leaves its appointed sphere...Therefore it is forbidden to confound species and mate them one with another, because this dislodges the heavenly power from its place and is a defiance of the celestial household. The word 'kilaim' (diverse kinds)...also bears the meaning of 'preventing,' indicating that one who does this prevents the celestial powers from carrying out their function, and throws them into confusion. As has been said, he alters the commands of the King..."

(Zohar (Soncino Ed.) Vol.5, pp.86a-86b)

(The Jewish Dietary Laws, Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld Vol.2 pp.45,46)

Explaining this passage, Dayan Grunfeld says that when we mix species "the cosmic harmony is shaken" and "the peace within the Heavenly Council is jeopardised." He writes:

“Even the Heavenly Household needs peace,” the mystics say, and they base this assertion on the passage in Job: **עושה שלום במרומי** - “He makes peace in His high places.” (Iyov 25:2) This heavenly peace, and the harmony of the cosmos relating to it, depend on there being no interference with the task of each heavenly agent, such as if man arbitrarily mixes different species of earthly plants or creatures.” (Zohar III, 86,87; Bachya Ben Asher on Vayikro 19,9 & Ramban on Vayikro 19,19 & Devorim 18,9) (The Jewish Dietary Laws, Dayan Dr. I. Grunfeld Vol.2 pp.46,47)

Let us see in full the posuk from Iyov cited above:

הַמְשֵׁל וְפָחַד עִמּוֹ עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֵמָיו

“Dominion and terror are with Him,
He makes peace in His heights.” (Iyov 25:2)

This is found in the third speech of Iyov's friend, **בלדד השוּחִי** - Bildad the Shuchite. In these words, explains Rabbi Shimon Schwab, Bildad expresses his belief that there seems to be a contradiction in G-d's management of world affairs:

“On the one hand, there is **הַמְשֵׁל** - an obvious pattern of G-d's orderly control and rulership of the world...which bespeaks G-d's purposeful dominion of everything in creation. This appeals to the mind. However, at the same time, there is **פָּחַד** - sheer terror, when seemingly random occurrences and catastrophes such as earthquakes strike, and they kill a hundred thousand people in one instant, regardless of whether these people are good or bad. This bespeaks chaos, the opposite of purposeful order. This is completely incomprehensible. How does one reconcile this contradiction?

To this question Bildad says: **עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֵמָיו** - in G-d's heights there is no conflict between these two manifestations of His rulership. Although to us humans this appears as a contradiction, G-d has “made peace” between **הַמְשֵׁל** and **פָּחַד** and both can coexist. There is no contradiction between G-d's infinite goodness in nature - where even the little worm is given its food, so that it, itself, can become food for the bird - and His seeming unconcern for the suffering and prayers of the greatest tzaddikim. This apparent absence of G-d's dominion inspires **פָּחַד**, sheer terror. However, as inexplicable as it is to us, to G-d there is **שְׁלוֹם**, harmony, between His orderly rulership of the world, and His terror-inspiring seeming disinterest in the suffering in the world. How these two go together is known only **בְּמַרְוֵמָיו**, in G-d's heights.” (Rav Schwab on Iyov, Artscroll p.279)

Is it not remarkable that this heavenly peace and harmony can be upset by our tampering with nature as it has been created in this physical world? Mixing nature's separate species, we are taught in the Zohar (see above), “...prevents the celestial powers from carrying out their function, and throws them into confusion.” Though we may not understand how there can be harmony between **הַמְשֵׁל** and **פָּחַד**, it is nevertheless vital that such harmony exists and continues to exist. It is equally vital, therefore, that we realise we have the power to interfere with the “peace in His heights” by transgressing the prohibitions of kilaim, as well as the power to preserve the **שְׁלוֹם בְּמַרְוֵמָיו** by keeping different species separate.

We must not leave this posuk in אייב without glancing for a moment at its interpretation by **מלבי"ם**, Malbim, Rabbi Meir Leibush (or Loeb) ben Yechiel Michel Wisser (or Weisser), 1809-1879. Indeed, I am grateful for having been guided to this by ‘Hashem's hand,’ since the ideas here draw together a number of the themes we have discussed.

In his commentary ‘Bi'ur Ha'Inyan,’ on Iyov, Malbim writes:

כה (ב) **הַמְשֵׁל וְפָחַד עִמּוֹ**, ר"ל ה' נותן ממשלה לאחרים (שעז"א המשל בהפעיל), ובכ"ז נשאר הפחד עמו, ר"ל הוא דומה כמלך שמינה מושלים תחתיו, ובכ"ז הוא בעצמו משגיח על כל דבר וכולם מתפחדים ממנו, וכן כל כחות הטבע ותולדותיה הגם שהפקיד עליהם מושלים רבים שהם מערכת הכוכבים והשרים העליונים וכ"א ממונה על פעולה מיוחדת, בכ"ז הוא המשגיח על כולם שיהיה בדין ובצדק וכולם מתיראים ממנו. והוא **הַמְשֵׁל וְפָחַד עִמּוֹ**, שהגם שהכחות אשר בבריאה, וכן הראשים הפוקדים עליהם, הם מתנגדים זל"ז, וכ"א פועל פעולה מיוחדת לעצמו מתנגדת אל פעולת זולתו, הוא העומד בראש הסולם וקושר קשרים לאותיות הבריאה, ומחבר ומצרף כל הפרטים להנהגה כוללת שלימה ולספר שלם כתוב במכתב אלקים בחכמה ודעת, כמ"ש [ישעיה מה ז] יוצר אור ובורא חשך עושה שלום [ובורא רע אני ה' עשה כל אלה], וכמש"ש:

Iyov 25:2 **“Dominion and fear are with Him:** this means that Hashem gives dominion to others (which is the sense of *הַמְשִׁיל*, since it is in the ‘Hiph’il’ - the causative form), and nevertheless the fear remains with Him, which is to say that He is similar to a king who appointed rulers under him, but nevertheless he, himself supervises every thing and all of them fear him. Similarly regarding all the forces of nature and her subsidiaries, He (Hashem) has appointed over them many rulers, including the array of stars and the heavenly princes, and each one of these is appointed over a unique, individual action, even so He is the Supervisor over them all, ensuring that everything proceeds according to justice and righteousness, and everything fears Him.

And He is the One Who makes peace in His high places, since even though the forces in Creation, and also the heads who are appointed over them, they are opposites of each other, and every one performs a separate function for itself that is in contrast to other actions, He is the One Who stands at the top of the ladder and ties knots to connect the letters of Creation, and bonds and joins all of the details into a single unified leadership and a complete book written in the Divine script with wisdom and understanding. As is written [Yeshayahu 45:7]: “Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates evil; I am the L-rd, Who makes all these.”

In this understanding of the posuk the unity is in Hashem’s overarching and unifying management of all the forces in Creation, rather than in the harmonious coexistence of the purposeful and the random. This difference in nuance enables us to see Hashem working in His heights, *בְּמַרוֹמָיו*, to bring together and join all disparate powers and forces of nature under His ultimate Divine control, such that the fear of every creature is absolutely directed towards Him. This is a vision of harmony and unity that exists not only in the upper worlds, but throughout all Creation, though managed and directed from up there. In relation to this picture, transgressing the prohibition of kilaim would upset the unity across all Creation, whose life source begins on high. This is reminiscent of Ramban’s description:

“...And I have already written in my commentary on the Torah-portion of Bereishis (see end of Ramban on Bereishis 2:8) that the foundations of all the growing things are in the higher realms, “and from there G-d has commanded the blessing for them, life forever.” Thus, one who mixes two species repudiates and disorders the original Creation.” (Ramban Vayikro 19:19)

Let us conclude with a look at Rambam’s discussion of *‘chukim’* in his Moreh Nevuchim - The Guide for the Perplexed:

“...the multitude of the Sages believe that there indubitably is a cause for them - I mean to say a useful end - but that it is hidden from us either because of the incapacity of our intellects or the deficiency of our knowledge. Consequently there is, in their opinion, a cause for all the commandments; I mean to say that any particular commandment or prohibition has a useful end. In the case of some of them, it is clear to us in what way they are useful - as in the case of the prohibition of killing or stealing. In the case of others, their utility is not clear - as in the case of the interdiction of the first products [of trees] and of [sowing] the vineyard with diverse seeds. Those commandments whose utility is clear to the multitude are called mishpatim [judgements], and those whose utility is not clear to the multitude are called chukim [statutes].”

(The Guide for the Perplexed, Transl. Shlomo Pines, Chicago Press: Vol. Two, Part Three, Chp.26 p.507)

Later, Rambam lashes out at those who are opposed to there being reasons for the laws:

“There is a group of human beings who consider it a grievous thing that causes should be given for any law; what would please them most is that the intellect would not find a meaning for the commandments and prohibitions... Rather things are indubitably as we have mentioned: every commandment from among these six hundred and thirteen commandments exists either with a view to communicating a correct opinion, or to putting an end to an unhealthy opinion, or to communicating a rule of justice, or to warding off an injustice, or to endowing men with a noble moral quality, or to warning them against an evil moral quality. Thus all [the commandments] are bound up with three things: opinions, moral qualities, and political civic actions...”

(The Guide for the Perplexed, Transl. Shlomo Pines, Chicago Press: Vol. Two, Part Three, Chp.31 p.523,524)

Rambam makes very clear his view that all the mitzvos have reasons of one kind or another. However, he does also distinguish very clearly between the generalities of mitzvos and their details. The former, it is Rambam’s view, have discernible rationales, but not the latter:

“The true reality of particulars of commandments is illustrated by the sacrifices. The offering of sacrifices has in itself a great and manifest utility, as I shall make clear. But no cause will ever be found for the fact that one particular sacrifice consists in a lamb and another in a ram and that the number of the victims should be one particular number. Accordingly, in my opinion, all those who occupy themselves with finding causes for

something of these particulars are stricken with a prolonged madness in the course of which they do not put an end to an incongruity, but rather increase the number of incongruities...

Know this notion and grasp it. The constant statements of [the Sages] to the effect that there are causes for all the commandments, as well as the opinion that the causes were known to Solomon, have in view the utility of a given commandment in a general way, not an examination of its particulars."

(The Guide for the Perplexed, Transl. Shlomo Pines, Chicago Press: Vol. Two, Part Three, Chp.26 p.509)

In an interesting analysis of Rambam's approach to 'suprarational commands,' Rabbi Chaim Miller (based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's thoughts) writes:

"Thus, in the final analysis, we see that the rational and suprarational commands both contain rational and suprarational elements: many details of the rational mitzvos have no reason, and even the so-called suprarational mitzvos also have a reason, albeit not a "revealed" one. Consequently, when we say that a certain mitzvah is "rational" or "suprarational," we are referring to which aspect of the command predominates."

(Based on Likutei Sichos vol.32, p.174ff.)

(Rabbi Chaim Miller, Chumash 'Kol Menachem' p.779)

One thing is certain: our unquenchable thirst for knowledge of Hashem, and our insatiable desire to be close to Him, will lead us always to search for meaning in His holy mitzvos, which are the expressions of His will. To find meaning and purpose in His holy words is to understand Him a little better, and to understand Him is to love Him and feel the warmth and security of His Presence.



Wishing everyone a Good Shabbos,

Jeremy