

Parenting in the Parsha

פרשת חקת Without Reason

זאת חקת התורה אשר-צוה ה' לאמר דבר אל-בני ישראל ויקחו אליך פרה אדמה תמימה אשר אין-בה מום אשר לא-עלה עליה על:

This is the ritual law that the L-RD has commanded: Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid.

— זאת חקת התורה. לפי שהשטן ואמות העולם מוזנין את ישראל, לומר מה המצוה הזאת ומה טעם יש בה? לפיכך כתב בה חקה — גזרה היא מלפני, אין לה רשות להרהר אחריה

Because the Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel, saying, "What is this command and what reason is there for it?", on this account it writes (uses) the term חקה about it, implying: It is an enactment from before Me; you have no right to criticize it

- Rashi

Obedience to lawful authority is the foundation of manly character.

- Robert E. Lee

Chukim: The mysterious realm of the Torah where we simply cannot arrive at a coherent understanding of why Hashem makes certain demands of us. We know that the Torah is the foundation of wisdom, and we can often spot and recognize the tangible benefits of the observance of *mitzvos*, but *chukim* are designed to be elusive. The paradigm of *chok* in the Torah is the *Parah Adumah*. The Torah itself introduces *Parah Adumah* with the phrase "this is the *chok* of the Torah". As Rashi explains, the nations of the world mock and scorn this seemingly nonsensical ritual of purification. Many have attempted to find philosophical, kabbalistic, and pietistic explanations for this and other *chukim* over the centuries. I might suggest that the lack of a reason is the very reason for the *chukim*.

Torah observance is the ultimate expression of submission to a Greater Authority. In a culture subsumed with the values of independent thought, autonomy, and freedom of will, those of us who choose to suspend our freedom and submit to a higher authority stand out from the crowd. We swim against the current of the broader society, in acknowledging the limits of human ability, knowledge, and understanding, and in turning to a Higher Wisdom for guidance and direction.

But, if we choose to follow the precepts of the Torah because each one makes sense to us on its own merits, we are not actually submitting ourselves to a Higher Authority at all. Rather, we are choosing to serve our own judgement and autonomy. It is only when we follow the laws and rules that don't make sense to us that we truly express our submission to a Greater Wisdom, fully trusting the Authority over our own limited intellect. The *mishpatim*, the rational laws alone, are an expression of our logic and reasoning. The *chukim* express that, in truth, even the *mishpatim* are our submission to Divine authority. *Chukim* condition us to obey that authority without question or challenge. If we obey G-d, then we do so because He said so and not because we want to.

Parents should recognize the relevance to our role as the authority in our homes. Respect for and submission to authority is a bedrock of a functional society. It is also an endangered species. Parents today are often hesitant to assert their authority over their children. They want to give the children voice in their decisions and they are often fearful of their children not liking them. There is great value in including children in decision-making and in avoiding conflict in the home. But, there is also great value

in conditioning our children to recognize the hierarchy of authority and to submit themselves to that authority.

Your home needs some *chukim* along with your *mishpatim*. There are times where you should not bargain with your kids or attempt to reason with them, but simply state matter-of-factly that this is the rule because I say it's the rule. Not "you have to go to bed because you'll be tired tomorrow," but "you have to go to bed because I set your bedtime and it is now." You can be kind and empathetic as you acknowledge that it must be difficult to go to bed when you want to stay up, but you should still be clear and firm.

Your children will be happier, more well-adjusted, and more comfortable when they are not party to every decision and rule formation. Condition them to submit to your authority as a parent and you will set the stage for years of a comfortable, functional parent-child relationship. You will also train your children for a lifetime that will involve the need to respect and submit to authority in society, at work and most important in being a Torah observant Jew. That's a pretty good reason to add some *chukim* to your home.

Good Shabbos,

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