

Our *Parashah* opens: "If you will follow My *Chukim* / decrees and observe My commandments and perform them." *Rashi z"l* explains that the first phrase in this verse is an admonition that one should study the Torah with *Ameilut* / applying great effort. [Until here from *Rashi*]

Where in the words, "If you will follow My *Chukim*," does *Rashi* see a reference to Torah study? R' Mordechai Greenberg *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* emeritus of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh in Israel) explains: We read a few weeks ago (*Vayikra* 18:3), "Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled, and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you, and do not follow their *Chukim*." *Rashi* writes there that the phrase, "Do not follow their *Chukim*," is admonishing us not to attend their places of entertainment. Even if no specific sin is involved in such attendance, explains R' Greenberg, those forms of entertainment are their culture, a reflection of their value system, not ours. Our value system is the Torah. Thus, just as the word "*Chukim*" in the earlier verse is shorthand for a way of life--in that case, the gentiles' way, which is anathema to the Torah--so "*Chukim*" in the opening verse of our *Parashah* is shorthand for an entire way of life--our way of life, which centers on Torah study with *Ameilut*.

R' Greenberg continues: At first glance, there may be similarities between our way and their way. For example, many gentiles have a Sabbath, and we have *Shabbat*. However, these days are worlds apart. While theirs is a day of rest from the workweek, our *Shabbat* is meant to be a day set aside for holiness. Only in this way can we understand why the "work" that is prohibited on *Shabbat* is not necessarily laborious or tiring. Rather, what is prohibited are activities that, in G-d's Judgment, would distract us from *Shabbat's* holiness. (*B'darachei Ha'parashah: Vayikra* p. 117)

Shabbat

R' Moshe ben Maimon *z"l* (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes (*Hil. Shabbat* 30:2) that the way to honor *Shabbat* is to sit wrapped in one's cloak [*i.e.*, *Shabbat* clothes] waiting to welcome *Shabbat*, as if one is waiting to welcome a king. R' Yonoson David *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Pachad Yitzchak in Yerushalayim) explains: One cannot enter *Shabbat* "suddenly"; rather, a person must prepare himself. This is the idea of sitting and waiting to welcome *Shabbat*. This is, similarly, the idea behind the *Mitzvah* of "*Tosefet Shabbat*" / bringing in *Shabbat* a few minutes early.

R' David continues: The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 57b) states that *Shabbat* is "a sample of *Olam Ha'ba*." On the *Shabbat*, we leave the "atmosphere" of this world and enter the lofty atmosphere of *Olam Ha'ba*. One cannot do this without preparation, just as one cannot attain any level of holiness without preparation. This is what it means to be "*Shomer Shabbat*" (usually translated, "One who observes the laws of *Shabbat*"). We read (*Bereishit* 37:11), after Yosef told his brothers about his second dream, "So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father '*Shamar*' / kept the matter in mind." *Rashi z"l* interprets "*Shamar*" to mean that Yaakov "awaited and looked forward to the time when [the dream] would come to pass." Likewise, writes R' David, to be "*Shomer Shabbat*" means to await and look forward to the time when *Shabbat* will arrive.

Rambam writes further: "Sages of earlier times would gather their students on *Erev Shabbat*, wrap themselves in their cloaks, and go out, saying, 'Let us go out toward *Shabbat*, the king.'" [Commentaries note that *Rambam's* text of the *Gemara* apparently referred to *Shabbat* as a "king", rather than as a "queen," as is more familiar to us.] Why is it significant that the sages gathered their students? asks R' David. He explains: These sages saw in their students a continuation of themselves, the next generation of transmitters of the Torah, and an extension of themselves that was one generation closer to the future days of *Mashiach* and the World-to-Come. As such, teaching these students was one way that the sages prepared for the World-to-Come. And, since *Shabbat* is a taste of *Olam Ha'ba*, as noted, it is fitting that the sages' preparations involved their students as well.

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“If you will follow My *Chukim* / decrees and observe My commandments and perform them.” (26:3)

“But if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments. And if you consider My *Chukim* / decrees loathsome . . .” (26:14-15)

Why in the first verse does following *Hashem's Chukim* come before performing His commandments, while they are reversed in the second verse? R' Raphael Hakohen Hamburger *z"l* (1722-1803; rabbi of Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbeck, Germany) answers:

Most “*Chukim*” are negative commandments (for example, “Do not wear *Sha'atnez*,” “Do not eat non-kosher animals,” etc.) The way to become a servant of *Hashem* is to first perfect one's observance of the negative commandments, then to perfect one's observance of the positive commandments, as we read (*Tehilim* 34:15), “Turn from evil and [then] do good.” Therefore, the earlier verse above places following *Hashem's Chukim* before performing His commandments.

On the other hand, one who is abandoning his service of *Hashem* is likely to do so in the opposite direction: first, he will stop observing the positive commandments, then he will transgress the negative ones. Therefore, the later verses above, which speak of that process, place not performing *Hashem's* commandments before considering His *Chukim* to be loathsome.

(*Marpeh Lashon: Amud Ha'yir'ah* p.6-7)

“I will turn My attention to you, I will make you fruitful and increase you, and I will establish My covenant with you.” (26:9)

Rashi z"l comments: “Increase you” means that you will stand tall.

R' Shlomo Wolbe *z"l* (1914-2005; a pre-eminent figure in the *Mussar* movement) explains: “Standing tall” refers to being what mankind is supposed to be. We do not know how great man is! R' Wolbe states. We view ourselves through our petty desires, puny goals, and limited perceptions, he continues, but this is a mistake on our part.

R' Wolbe relates: The *Alter* of Slabodka (R' Nosson Zvi Finkel *z"l*; 1849-1927) raised generations of students based on one foundation: Recognizing the greatness of man. The *Alter* spoke constantly of “Adam before the sin” -- what man is supposed to be. This is how he produced such great students who built much of the post-war *yeshiva* world in both the United States and Israel. Our biggest problem, writes R' Wolbe, is that we cannot escape from our smallness. “Standing tall” is an attitude, seeing ourselves as people with great powers, made in the image of G-d.

(*Shiurei Chumash*)

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R' David adds: *Sefirat Ha'omer* / the period we are now in, when we count the days leading to *Shavuot*, serves a similar purpose. Through this counting, we implant in our consciousness that we must prepare to receive the Torah on *Shavuot*, not just show up on that day expecting the Torah to be handed to us.

(*Nakumah Ve'na'aleh* p.19)

“If you will follow My *Chukim* / decrees and observe My *Mitzvot*/ commandments and perform them.” (26:3)

Rashi z"l writes: One might think that “Follow My *Chukim*” denotes the performance of the commandments. However, when the Torah states, “And observe My *Mitzvot* and perform them,” that covers the performance of the commandments. How, then, must we understand “Follow My *Chukim*”? As an admonition to study the Torah with *Ameilut* / applying great effort.

Rashi continues: “Observe My *Mitzvot*/ commandments and perform them” means: Study the Torah with *Ameilut* with the intention of observing and performing its teachings. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Yosef Yitzchak Feigelstock *z"l* (1931-2021; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Mesivta of Long Beach, N.Y.) writes: At first glance, *Rashi* contradicts himself. In the first comment quoted above, *Rashi* states that “Observe My *Mitzvot* and perform them” refers to the performance of *Mitzvot*; therefore, the preceding phrase must refer to something else, *i.e.*, Torah study. In the second paragraph, however, *Rashi* says that “Observe My *Mitzvot* and perform them” also refers to Torah study!

R' Feigelstock explains: In fact, the entire verse is an admonition to toil in the study of Torah. In his first comment, *Rashi* is stating that if the verse were intended to admonish us to perform the *Mitzvot*, the first phrase (“Follow My *Chukim*”) would be redundant, for the second phrase speaks expressly of performing the *Mitzvot*. Therefore, the first phrase must be referring to something else, namely, Torah study. Having reached that conclusion, however, we can no longer understand the second phrase (“Observe My *Mitzvot* and perform them”) either as a command to perform the *Mitzvot*, for something so basic should have been at the beginning of the verse. Therefore, that phrase must relate back to the obligation to study Torah contained in the first phrase, *i.e.*, it should be understood as telling us how and with what intent to study Torah: “Study the Torah with *Ameilut* with the intention of observing and performing its teachings.”

(*Yehegeh Chochmah*)

How does the phrase “Follow My *Chukim*” (literally, “Go in My *Chukim*”) allude to Torah study? R' Yehuda Loewe *z"l* (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) explains: “Going” is something that involves toil--like Torah study, which requires a person to tire himself out. Also, “Going” is an appropriate description of Torah study, because the process of delving farther and farther into a subject is reminiscent of movement. The word “*Chukim*” is used, as that term refers generally to the *Mitzvot* that we do not understand. Through arduous Torah study, one can gain some level of understanding even of the *Chukim*.

(*Gur Ayeh*)