

LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
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 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
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 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתחיל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
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Shagalov

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LIKKUTEI SICHOT

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume VIII: *Vayikra*

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In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

BECHUKOSAI

TO LABOR IN TORAH STUDY

On the phrase,¹ “If you proceed in My statutes,” the *Sifri* states (as quoted by *Rashi*):

Is the intent the performance of the *mitzvos*? The continuation [of the verse] “and are careful to keep My commandments” pertains to the *mitzvos*. What then is the intent of “If you proceed in My statutes”? That you labor in the study of Torah.

This requires explanation: If the intent of the phrase is that Jews should observe the *mitzvos*, we could understand why the term *bechukosai*, “in My statutes,” was used. Although there are three different types of *mitzvos* (*chukim*, *eidus*, and *mishpatim*), one could assume that the verse is referring to all three with the term *chukim* to imply that even the *eidus* and the *mishpatim*, which can be rationally understood, should be observed with the same commitment of *kabbalas ol*, acceptance of G-d’s yoke, as are the *chukim*.²

If it is postulated that the phrase is referring to the study of Torah, however, the term *bechukosai* presents a difficulty. Torah study involves comprehension and understanding. We must labor and review our studies, not only to know the laws,

1. *Vayikra* 26:3.

2. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Mishpatim* in this series, where this concept is explained.

but to understand their motivating principles as explained in both the Written and Oral Law.

Some *mitzvos* are placed in the category of *chukim* because their motivating principle transcends understanding. As *Rashi* states:³ “It is a decree... you have no permission to question [its observance].” These are, however, a distinct minority within the Torah. By and large, the Torah was given in a manner which can be comprehended by a mortal mind.

To cite a parallel: The Written Law is quantitatively far smaller than the Oral Law. Now the *mitzvah* to study the Written Law can be fulfilled by merely reading portions from it. For this reason, even an unlearned man who does not understand what he is reading is required to recite a blessing before studying Torah. With regard to the Oral Law, by contrast, the *fundamental element* is understanding. When a person does not understand the passage he is studying, he may not recite a blessing before studying.⁴

There is a radical difference between the Written Law and the Oral Law. The Written Law is a bounded text, with a specific number of verses and letters. There is no possibility for addition. The Oral Law, by contrast, is not restricted in size. It is true that at present only a certain number of laws have been revealed, but in every generation there are additions, as our Sages commented:⁵ “Every new insight developed by an experienced sage was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai.”

The same pattern is reflected within the Written Law itself. The part of the Written Law which transcends understanding and deals with *chukim* and the like is far

3. In his commentary to the beginning of *Parshas Chukas*.

4. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, the conclusion of ch. 2; see also *Likkutei Torah, Vayikra*, the *maamar* entitled *Biur Lo Tashbis*.

5. See the *Jerusalem Talmud, Pe'ah* 2:4; *Shmos Rabbah* 47:1; *Vayikra Rabbah* 22:1; *Tanya, Kuntres Acharon*, the passage beginning *Lehavin Peratei*.

smaller than the part which speaks about *mitzvos* that can be grasped.

As such, the use of the term *bechukosai* in the opening verse of the Torah reading is problematic. Since the intent is that the Jews “labor in the study of Torah,” it would seem more appropriate to use another term. For as mentioned above, *chukim* represent a very small portion of the Torah.

AN INTEGRAL WHOLE

In *Likkutei Torah*, the Alter Rebbe interprets the term *bechukosai* as related to the word *chakikah*, meaning “engraved.” The implication is that we must labor in the study of Torah until the words are engraved within us.

The advantage of engraving over writing is not merely that engraved letters are united with the surface unto which they are carved, for this is also true with regard to written letters. Although letters written on parchment are not part of the parchment itself, they become united with the parchment.

Instead, the advantage of engraving is that the letters are not an independent entity. Their existence cannot be separated from the object onto which they have been engraved; the two form one integral whole.

This is the lesson the term *bechukosai* communicates with regard to the study of Torah. The intent is not merely that a Jew who studies the Torah should be united with the subject matter. The caution against studying Torah in a superficial manner, as Doeg the Edomite did,⁶ is a more elementary lesson. Instead, the intent of the phrase is to teach that a person must engrave the Torah he studies within his being. Studying in a manner which resembles writing — in which

6. [Though Doeg was a great scholar, his knowledge did not produce personal refinement] (*Sanhedrin* 106b).

two separate entities come together — is not sufficient. Instead, one must study in a manner that resembles engraving; the student should cease to see himself as an independent entity; his entire existence is the Torah.

This approach was exemplified by Moshe our teacher, the first recipient of the Torah. His *bittul*, self-nullification, was so great that he identified totally with G-dliness, saying⁷ “I will grant grass....” The word “I” refers to G-d, and yet it was uttered by Moshe because “the Divine Presence spoke from his throat.”⁸

A similar process of self-transcendence was manifest by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. His individual existence was entirely subsumed; he was nothing more than an expression of G-dliness. For this reason, he could say:⁹ “I saw superior men and they are few... If there are two, they are my son and I. If there is one, it is I.”¹⁰ Praising himself in this way was not a departure from the humility that is natural for the righteous, because he had no self-concern whatsoever.

WALKING THE EXTRA MILE

As mentioned on several previous occasions,¹¹ every interpretation of a particular term or verse in the Torah is related to every other. Thus the interpretation of the Alter Rebbe, that Torah study must resemble “engraving,” shares a connection to the simple meaning of the term *bechukosai*, referring to *chukim*, implying that one must study the Torah with *kabbalas ol*. It’s true that a Jew must also understand the Torah, but the basis of his understanding must be *kabbalas ol*.

7. *Devarim* 11:15. Note the interpretation of *Likkutei Torah*, *Vayikra* 50a.

8. See *Zohar*, Vol. III, pgs. 7a, 265a, 332a; *Shmos Rabbah* 3:15; *Vayikra Rabbah* 2:3; *Mechilta*, *Shmos* 18:19.

9. *Sukkah* 45b, *Sanhedrin* 97b.

10. *Bereishis Rabbah* 35:2.

11. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Toldos* in this series.

He must seek to understand, not because of the resultant intellectual satisfaction, but because G-d commanded that he comprehend what he studies.

For this reason he “labors” in Torah study, applying himself more than would be his natural tendency. Were his study to be motivated by only personal satisfaction, his commitment to study would be proportionate to the satisfaction he receives; he would not labor beyond his ordinary pattern.

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the two interpretations. Studying Torah with the commitment of *chukim* involves labor. This enables one’s study to be internalized until it is “engraved,” and the person and the Torah become an integral whole.

MAKING PROGRESS

The other term in the opening phrase of the Torah reading: “If you proceed,” is also worthy of attention. Proceeding implies a framework in which there are separate levels (e.g., separate rungs within the cosmic order of existence, the *Seder HaHishtalshelus*, or different attributes among the range of the powers of our soul), and a person proceeds from level to level, for example, from a lower level of love to a higher level, or from a lesser intellectual rung to a higher one.

How is it possible to make progress within the commitment of *kabbalas ol*? Since *kabbalas ol* transcends intellect, how is it possible for one level to be different than another?

In *Likkutei Torah*, the Alter Rebbe explains that the word “proceed” refers to the reward for our Divine service. If a person labors in the study of Torah with the commitment of

bechukosai, he will be rewarded with the potential to “proceed,” to make further progress.

This, however, represents a departure from the simple meaning of the text. When teaching the verse to a child, the term “proceed” refers to our Divine service, and the description of the reward begins with “I will provide you with rain in its season.”¹²

SHIFTING PLATEAUS

In *Likkutei Torah*,¹³ it is explained that faith relates primarily to those levels of G-dliness which cannot be grasped conceptually. The levels of G-dliness which *can* be understood, *must* be understood. It is only after arriving at a consummate understanding of those levels which intellect can reach that the true concept of faith comes into play.

This is the difference between the faith of the Jewish people and the faith of the non-Jewish nations.¹⁴ Non-Jews believe in the levels of G-dliness that can be perceived by intellect — the G-dliness which “fills up all worlds.”¹⁵ This is not true faith. Jewish faith, by contrast, centers on the level of G-dliness which transcends intellectual comprehension, the G-dliness which “encompasses all worlds.”¹⁶

With regard to intellectual comprehension, it is always possible to ascend from one level to another, as implied by the verse:¹⁷ “Days shall speak, and the multitude of years will communicate wisdom.” As one’s understanding grows, one’s faith should be directed to ever-higher plateaus. Matters

12. *Vayikra* 26:4.

13. *Devarim* 4a; *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 45a ff.

14. See *Siddur Im Dach, Shaar Chag HaMatzos*.

15. [*Memale kol almin* in the Hebrew original.]

16. [*Sovev kol almin* in the Hebrew original.]

17. *Iyov* 32:7.

which one previously had to accept on faith come within one's conceptual grasp, and one's faith thus can rise upward.

This paradigm enables us to understand the concept of progress with regard to *chukim*. As one's understanding of the *mitzvos* grows, one's conception of the *chukim* should also change. Practices which one previously accepted as *chukim* should be shifted from that category, and comprehended intellectually.

We see this pattern expressed by Moshe. At the outset, he, like others, viewed the laws of the Red Heifer as a *chok*. After he advanced in his Divine service, G-d told him: "I will reveal the rationale for the Red Heifer to you."¹⁸ From that time onward, Moshe could no longer consider the laws of the Red Heifer a *chok*. This is not to say that Moshe lacked the depth of commitment associated with *chukim*. Instead, the intent is that his appreciation of *chukim* shifted to a higher plane.

Similarly, every person must advance his understanding each day, and as a result, "proceed in My statutes" by coming to an ever-higher appreciation of *chukim*.¹⁹

Similar concepts apply with regard to labor in Torah study. What was yesterday considered a strain must today be considered natural, and one should set one's sights on further horizons.

And this will lead to G-d's blessings: "I will give you rain in its season," and "I [will] lead you upright,"²⁰ to *Eretz Yisrael* in the ultimate Redemption. At that time, we will proceed without bounds, going from strength to strength,²¹

18. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:6.

19. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Emor* in this series, note 11, which explains a similar concept.

20. *Vayikra* 26:13.

21. *Tehillim* 84:8.

BECHUKOSAI

until we reach a level which transcends all possible progress
— “the day which is all *Shabbos* and rest for life-everlasting.”²²

(Adapted from *Sichos Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai*, 5722)



22. The conclusion of tractate *Tamid*.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

57

Our generation is the last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption, as proclaimed and announced by my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, the Yosef of our generation (named after the first Yosef who proclaimed and announced that "G-d will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that was sworn to Avraham, to Yitzchak and the Yaakov"¹). For all our deeds and Divine service have already been completed, all appointed times have already passed, teshuvah has already been done, and all the preparations have already been finished In a manner of "great preparation," all is ready for the festive meal² of the time to come, Livyosan, Shor Habor³ and Yayin Meshumar.⁴

(From the talk of the 10th of Teves (may it be transformed into rejoicing), and Shabbos Parshas Vayechi, 14 Teves 5752)

1. Our Parsha 50:24.

2. Based on the expression of our Sages, of blessed memory - Avos, chapter 3, Mishneh 16. Sanhedrin 38a and Rashi's commentary.

3. See *Bava Basra* 75a. And *Vayikra Rabba* chapter 13:3.

4. *Brochos* 34:b. See there for cross references.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

58

We have already mentioned many times the words of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, that aside from the fact that already "all the appointed times have passed,"¹ the Jewish people have already done teshuvah and already everything is completed, even including "polishing the buttons." We only need G-d to open the eyes of the Jewish people so that they should see that the true and complete Redemption already exists, and we are sitting already by the prepared table at the festive meal of Livyosan, Shor HaBor,² etc.

Therefore it's understood... in this generation and at this time, after every requirement has been accomplished (as mentioned above), one has the complete assurance in the Torah that there will certainly be "(You will remember the day of your exodus from the land of Egypt) all the days of your life... to bring about the days of Moshiach."³

There is no need for any interruption, G-d Forbid, between "all the days of your life" and "the days of Moshiach" (which has been the situation for the Jewish people in all the generations **before** our generation). Rather, "all the days of your life" for every Jew, living physically as a soul in a body, includes in the simple sense (also) "the days of Moshiach." This is without an interruption, since the Redemption is actually coming imminently and immediately at this instant and in this place (even if the condition is one of night, "coming to Egypt"). Thus the last moment of exile and the very last instant of exile become the first moment and the very first instant of Redemption.

1. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

2. See *Bava Basra* 74b ff. *Pesachim* 119b and in other places.

3. *Brochos* 12b.

BESURAS HAGEULO

And from "the days of your life" at this time and in this place, without any interruption whatsoever, G-d Forbid, (even if he is already older than seventy years, etc.) every Jew will go immediately - totally and completely, "Reuven and Shimon descended, Reuven and Shimon arose,"⁴ - into the continuation of "all the days of your life.," into the days of Moshiach and the eternal life that then will be.

Practically, this means that the Divine service of the Jewish people now must be "to bring about the days of Moshiach." We must reveal that the situation of "coming to Egypt" in exile is in truth a situation of the "Redemption of Israel." [This is achieved] through his preparation of himself and others for the situation of "the days of Moshiach."

The above includes (particularly in conjunction with the day of passing of the Rambam⁵) strengthening and increasing the study of the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, especially the Laws of King Moshiach,⁶ in the last two chapters of the "Laws of Kings" which conclude the *Mishneh Torah*.

In addition to one's own study of this, one should also influence other Jews around him (men, women and children) in a manner of "raising many disciples,"⁷ and many more will see and emulate them.

May it be G-d's Will, that through the resolution itself will come imminently and immediately the reward, the actual fulfillment of the Rambam's words at the conclusion of his work,⁸ that after there

4. *Vayikra Rabba*, chapter 32:5. See there for cross references.

5. [*The Rambam passed away on 20 Teves. Translator's note.*]

6. This is how it is titled in the Venice edition of 5284 and 5310.

7. *Avos*, chapter 1, *Mishneh* 1.

8. *Laws of Kings*, end of chapter 11.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

already exists "a king from the House of Dovid, expert in the Torah and involved in mitzvos like Dovid his father... and he will compel all Israel to walk in [the ways of Torah], strengthen its breeches and fight the wars of G-d" - who is the "presumed Moshiach" [b'chezkas Moshiach] - there will already be immediately the "confirmed Moshiach" [Moshiach vadai], who "does all the above and succeeds, builds the Temple in its place and gathers the dispersed of Israel... He will then improve the whole world so that it serves G-d in unity,..."

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Shmos, 21 Teves 5752)

IN HONOR OF

Yakov Ariel שיחי Muchnik

On the occasion of his 6th birthday, 4 Iyar, 5782

AND IN HONOR OF HIS BROTHERS

Avraham שיחי Muchnik

On the occasion of his 2nd birthday, 7 Iyar, 5782

Menachem Mendel שיחי Muchnik

On the occasion of his 8th birthday

Lag B'Omer - 18 Iyar, 5782

AND IN HONOR OF HIS SISTERS AND BROTHERS שיחי

May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community.

*

DEDICATED BY THEIR PARENTS

Rabbi & Mrs. **Dov** and **Racheli שיחי Muchnik**

Shluchim of the Rebbe in Oxnard, California

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