

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

22 Iyar, 5780 – May 16, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Behar-Bechukosai
Likkutei Sichos Volume 3, Pages 1012 – 1015

Rashi in His Own Words

ויקרא כ"ו, ג': אם בְּחַקְתִּי תִלְכוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם:

רש"י ד"ה אם בחקתי תלכו: יכול זה קיום המצות, כשהוא אומר ואת מצותי תשמרו, הרי קיום המצות אמור, הא מה אני מקיים אם בחקתי תלכו, שתהיו עמלים בתורה:

רש"י ד"ה ואת מצותי תשמרו: הוּו עמלים בתורה על מנת לשמור ולקיים, כמו שנאמר (דברים ה', א') ולמדתם אותם ושמרתם לעשותם:

Vayikroh 26:3: If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them...

Rashi Heading: If you follow My statutes: I might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the commandments. However, when Scripture says, “and observe My commandments,” the fulfillment of the commandments is (already) stated. So what is the meaning of “If you follow My statutes?” It means that you must toil in the study of the Torah.

Synopsis

In this week's Torah portion, Behar-Bechukosai, G-d tells us that¹ “If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them,” *then* He will give you very great rewards. The question is that “following in My statutes” and “observing My commandments” would seem to be the same thing! Both seem to refer to fulfilling Mitzvos. Yet, Torah is Hashem's Will and Wisdom. Every word is measured; each word is precise. It contains no redundancies. “Following His statutes” and “observing His commandments” cannot both refer to the same thing. To explain this, Rashi tells us that the words “following in My statutes” here refers to toiling in Torah study.

However, the word “Statutes - חוקים,” which Rashi explains to mean “toiling in Torah study,” refers to a specific sort of Mitzvah. It refers to those Mitzvos for which there is no rational explanation.

If the Torah were referring to fulfilling the commandments², it would seem perfectly natural to specify this sort of Mitzvah. All Mitzvos, including those which we understand to one degree or another, must be observed in the same manner that we fulfill “Statutes - חוקים.” We must keep them because Hashem commanded us to; not because we understand them.

However, since Rashi explains that these words refer to toiling in Torah study, “Statutes” does not seem to be the appropriate word. The primary idea of Torah study is *not* learning something by rote, without

1. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 26:3.

2. This is what is implied by the words “if you follow my statutes.”

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understanding it. Instead, we must strive to know every word which we learn. The use of the word “statutes” would seem to negate this. “statutes” refers to that which human intellect cannot grasp.

We can explain this by looking at a deeper explanation of the Hebrew word “חוקים.” Aside from having the meaning of a statute, it is also derived from the word חקיקה meaning engraved. Ink and paper or parchment are both two separate things. When one writes upon paper, the ink and the paper become united *as if* they are one thing. On the other hand, letters that are engraved in stone, such as those on the two tablets, have no existence of their own. They are a part of the stone upon which they are engraved.

Thus, Rashi is explaining that by using the word “Statutes - חוקים,” the Torah is teaching us *how* we must study. We must learn Torah and indeed toil in Torah, in a manner that what we study becomes engraved upon us. Our very being must become one with the Torah, which we study.

Rashi’s Explanation

In this week’s Torah portion, Behar-Bechukosai, the Torah tells us an instance of cause and effect¹. “If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them...” then, the Torah continues that³ “I will give your rains in their time, the land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit.” Hashem continues with increasingly greater rewards, ultimately concluding that⁴ “I will place My dwelling in your midst, and My Spirit will not reject you. I will walk among you and be your G-d, and you will be My people.”

Hashem’s words appear to contain a redundancy; “If you *follow My statutes* and *observe My commandments*...” Both clauses seem to mean the same thing. They are both referring to Mitzvah observance. Therefore, Rashi cites the words “if you follow My statutes,” and states that “I might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the commandments. However, this cannot be so. When the Torah says ‘and observe My commandments,’ the fulfillment of the commandments is stated. What does the Torah mean with the words ‘If you follow My statutes’? The Torah is saying that you must toil in the study of Torah.” In other terms, Rashi is explaining that here following My statutes refers to working in Torah study, while observing commandments refers to the performance of Mitzvos.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

There are three different types of Mitzvos:

1. **Ordinances** – משפטים: These are Mitzvos which have a rational explanation. Even had the Torah not commanded us to perform these Mitzvos, we would have understood the need to keep them on our

3. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 26:4.

4. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 26:11-12.

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own. Included in this category are most of the interpersonal Mitzvos. Examples of this sort of Mitzvah would be not to murder, not to steal, and not to deceive a fellow. This is in keeping with the saying of the Sages that⁵ “had the Torah (G-d forbid) not been given, we would have learned modesty from a cat and honesty (not stealing) from an ant.”

2. **Testimonies – עדות:** These are commandments which we can also comprehend with our human intellect. However, had the Torah not commanded us to perform these, we would not have felt any need to fulfill them. For example, we can all understand that since Hashem redeemed us from the slavery of Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, we must celebrate Pesach every year on this same date. However, had the Torah not commanded us to do so, we would not necessarily have instituted the festival of Pesach.
3. **Statutes – חוקים:** These are commandments which human intellect cannot fathom. For example, the Torah’s prohibition against wearing a garment containing both wool and linen. The only reason for observing these commandments is Hashem commanded us to. As the Sages say⁶, “Because Satan and the nations of the world taunt Israel saying, ‘What is this commandment, and what purpose does it have?’ Therefore, the Torah uses the term ‘statute.’ I have decreed it; you have no right to challenge it.”

In the verse which we are discussing, had “following My statutes,” referred to Mitzvah observance, we could easily understand the Torah’s use of the word “Statutes - חוקים.” After all, we must fulfill *all* Mitzvos as if they were statutes, regardless of whether or not we understand them. The word Mitzvah means commandment; all Mitzvos are the King’s commandments. Following them is an essential part of accepting the yoke of Hashem’s kingship. It makes no difference whether or not we understand them.

However, Rashi explains here that “following My statutes” does not refer to Mitzvah observance. It relates to the obligation of toiling in Torah study. The point of Torah study is striving to understand what one learns. This is certainly the case regarding *struggling* in Torah study. The study does not merely mean reviewing until one knows all of the Torah’s obligations by heart. Instead, it means grasping and understanding the Torah that one learns to as great an extent as possible. The use of the term “Statutes – חוקים” would seem to contradict this idea since it refers to Mitzvos, which we cannot comprehend.

However, the very fact that there are Mitzvos, which we cannot comprehend itself, seems to contradict what we are saying. As much as we may study these Mitzvos, we cannot expect to understand them. We can

5. See Talmud Eiruvin Page 100, at the end of Side b.

6. See Talmud Yoma Page 67, Side b. This is also cited in Rashi’s comments to Parshas Chukas, Bamidbar 19:2.

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understand the overwhelming majority of Mitzvos with human intelligence to some extent. However, based on this, we need to know how Rashi can explain that going in Hashem's statutes refers to "toiling in Torah."

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi⁷

The Alter Rebbe explains in Likkutei Torah⁸ that aside from meaning a statute the Hebrew word "חוקה" has an additional meaning. It is also related to the word "חִקְיָהּ," which means engraved. Based on this, we can see that according to Rashi's explanation, the Torah is alluding to the manner in which Torah must be studied. How much more so is this true regarding toiling in Torah.

There are two manners in which the Torah was given to us; one is as a scroll, and the other is the two tablets that Moshe Rabbeinu received at Sinai. A Torah scroll is written with ink on parchment. The ink and the parchment are two different things. However, when a scribe uses the ink to write a Torah on the parchment, the two become one.

However, we were also given two tablets of stone. The words were not written *on* the stone. They were engraved into the stone. The letters do not exist as a separate thing from the rock; instead, they are one with the stone. A person's toil in Torah must cause him to become one with the Torah itself.

One who studies Torah and does not allow it to penetrate himself is defeating the purpose. We find this regarding Doeg Hoedomi⁹. The Sages teach us that the Torah, which he learned was¹⁰ merely "from his lips to the outside." In other words, despite having learned a great deal of Torah, it never penetrated his heart. He never became one with the Torah, which he studied. This is not the correct path of Torah study.

However, one might think that uniting oneself with the Torah in the same manner that ink is one with parchment is sufficient. The ink and the parchment are two separate entities, yet they become one. That certainly *seems* to be a perfectly acceptable way of uniting oneself with the Torah! Our Parshah teaches us that even this is insufficient. Our toil in Torah must be in a manner of חִקְיָהּ. The Torah must become one with us.

Our unity with G-d and His Torah must be along the lines of that which was demonstrated by Moshe Rabbeinu, who was the very first one to receive the Torah directly from Hashem. His unity with G-d and G-dliness was so great that he could actually say¹¹ "I will give grass in your fields." How was he, a mortal, able to

7. In this particular talk the Rebbe does not offer a simple explanation.

8. See Likkutei Torah at the beginning of Parshas Chukas.

9. He was an advisor to King Saul – Shaul Hamelech. We find in I Shmuel Chapters 21 and 22 that he was directly responsible for the death of a large number of Kohanim. Yet he was one of the greatest Torah scholars in his time.

10. See Talmud Sanhedrin Page 106, Side b.

11. Parshas Eikev, Devorim 11:15. See also Likkutei Torah for Parshas Bechukosai, Page 50, Column a.

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say these words? Because he was united with Hashem to the extent that¹² “the Shechinah spoke through his throat.” That is what is demanded from each of us.

The ultimate reward for our toil in Torah study in this manner is¹³ “I am the Lord your G-d Who took you out of the land of Egypt from being slaves to them. I broke the pegs of your yoke and led you upright.” Leading us upright refers to the redemption through our righteous Moshiach. He will bring us to¹⁴ “a day which is total Shabbos and rest for eternity.”

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai 5722)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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12. See Zohar Section 3, Page 232, Side a. See also ibid. Page 7, Side a. See Page 265, Side a. See also Shemos Rabbah Chapter 3, 15 and Vayikroh Rabbah Chapter 2, 3. See also the Mechilta to Shemos, Chapter 18, 19.

13. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 26:13.

14. See the conclusion of Talmud Tamid.

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