

Parashat Kedoshim 5782, 2022:

Yisrael, Trust in Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechezkel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Kedoshim includes many well-known *mitzvot*, such as reverence for parents (*Sefer Vayikra* 19:3), the prohibition of *lashon hara* (19:16), and the obligation to demonstrate love toward other people through acts of kindness (19:18). Like most of the commandments in our *parasha*, these *mitzvot* are under the rubric of *mishpatim*, a category of laws that are essential for the functioning of a proper Jewish society. The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) defines them in this manner: “The *mishpatim* are those commandments whose rationale is revealed and the value that obtains as a result of their performance is manifest in this world. For example: the prohibitions of stealing and murder, and the obligation to honor one’s father and mother.” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Meilah* 8:8, translation my own).

In contrast, our *parasha* also includes a number of *mitzvot* that are included under the category of *hukim*, defined by the Rambam as “those commandments whose rationale are unknown.” *Talmud Bavli, Yoma* 67b further elaborates upon the fundamental difference that obtains between *mishpatim* and *hukim* in this celebrated passage:

Our Rabbis taught: “You should perform my *mishpatim*.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 18:4) These are matters that if they were not actually written [by Hashem], it is logical that they would have been [written by the Jewish people]. They include: the prohibitions of idol worship, forbidden acts of intimacy, murder, stealing, and cursing Hashem. . . . *Hukim*, these are actions wherein the Satan [Rashi, the *yetzer hara*] attempts to disprove their validity and veracity, including: the prohibitions of eating

pig flesh, wearing garments comprised of a mixture of linen and wool threads (*shaatnez*), the act of relieving a brother-in-law of his obligation to marry his widowed sister-in-law (*chalitzah*), the ritual purification of the individual afflicted with *tzarat*, and the scapegoat rite [of Yom Kippur]. [Since you cannot understand them] perhaps you will say that they are completely worthless and devoid of meaning! Therefore, the Torah states: “I am the L-rd your G-d.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 18:4) I am He who has decreed them [that is, the *hukim*] and you do not have permission to question them. (Translation my own)

My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the “Rav” by his followers and disciples, formulates a basic question as to why our *parasha* combines both these classes of *mitzvot*, “The Torah expects us to lead a dignified and honorable life because it is a book of reasonable laws. So why does it mingle *chok* and *mishpat*?” (This and the following quotes, *Darosh Darash Yosef*: Discourses of Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah, Rabbi Avishai C. David, editor, page 146, underlining my own). His answer advances our understanding of the *mitzvot* in new and exciting ways:

This mingling carries with it an additional message. The *hukim*, which are seemingly unreasonable and presented in enigmatic language, also have a meaning we cannot grasp. We ultimately trust that *hukim* are as reasonable as the *mishpatim*. In fact, they may even be more reasonable. The highest of the *mishpatim* is to love your fellow human being as yourself. The Torah says, as it were: I have another group of *mitzvot* called *hukim* that are not as comprehensible, such as *shaatnez*. God says: Trust me in everything. If I can trust my neighbor, why should I not trust God and His Torah?... Since one might have been inclined to dismiss the *hukim* categorically, the verse ends with the phrase “I am the Lord your God.” In other words, God tells us: I am the God who gave you both *hukim* and *mishpatim*. Why would I give you laws that are unreasonable?... Our special relationship with God obligates us to go beyond our logic and trust God completely. Later, in retrospect, we may understand.

The element of trust (*bitachon*) in the commandments is one of the key elements that emerges from the Rav’s analysis of these categories of *mitzvot*. In essence, *bitachon* is the actualization of *emunah* (faith) in our daily lives, in that it takes *emunah* from the realm of the theoretical to that of practically actionable behaviors. In particular, the Rav is teaching us that our current inability to comprehend the *hukim* is not the deciding factor as to whether or not we should obey them. Instead, “our special relationship with God obligates us to go beyond our logic and trust God completely.”

The Rav's presentation is highly reminiscent of a well-known passage in *Sefer Tehillim*: "Yisrael, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield. *Beit Aharon*, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield. Those who hold the L-rd in awe, trust in the L-rd; He is their help and their shield." (115:9-11) With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>.

Please contact me at rdbe718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah*, *Tanach* may be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)