

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS
CHUKAS

בשבת

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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

JUST TRYING TO FIT IN

Parshas Chukas starts with the laws of *Parah Adumah*, a red cow that was used to purify one who had become *tamei*.¹ The Torah describes this law as a “חוק,” a word usually used to describe a law without an easily understood reason behind it. Why does the Torah specifically mention that the reasons behind *Parah Adumah* are not easily understood?

Rashi² explains that the nations of the world may question this *mitzvah*. “This *mitzvah* is contradictory! It purifies those who are *tamei*, but it makes *tamei* those who are pure!”³ Therefore, in response, Hashem writes the word ‘חוק,’ as if to say, “Yes, this *mitzvah* is hard to understand, but it is My will, and you should accept it as such.”

Reb Chizkiyahu Eliezer Kohn⁴ (1901-1968) asks two incisive questions. If *Parah Adumah* is contradictory, why does Rashi ‘blame’ this question on the nations of the world; wouldn’t anyone reading the Torah ask this question? Additionally, what is the response? If the question needs an answer, how is, “This is the way it is,” an answer?

Rabbi Kohn explains that if only the reader were bothered by the contradiction, it would be easy to accept the fact that Hashem is much wiser than we are. However, once others start to challenge us, we feel less secure. It is human nature to want to be liked and understood by others. We don’t want to feel like we are sticking out in the crowd, and will do what we can to fit in. Therefore, Rashi points out that it’s not our own thoughts that may be problematic — those are easily answered. It is the challenge posed by others that may throw us.

What, then, is the response? It is to recognize that, even in the face of challenges, we can hold fast to what we know to be true. This *mitzvah* might be hard to understand, but Hashem is infinitely smarter than we are, and we can accept that we simply don’t know or understand everything.

It is important to recognize when we are doing things because of pressure from others, whether it is making trouble in class, with whom we choose to be friends, or even what we prefer to do with our free time.

By recognizing how others affect our decisions, we will be better equipped to make the right choices.

1 *Bamidbar* 19:2

2 *ibid.* s.v. זאת חקת

3 *Sifsei Chachamim ibid.*

4 *Nachlas Eliezer*, cited in *Mishulchan Gavoah* on *Bamidbar* 19:2

It is human nature to want to be liked by others.

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Others’ influence can be subtle, or it can be obvious. In both instances it can be difficult to deal with — in the first case because we don’t realize it, and in the second because we’re afraid to be made fun of, or otherwise hurt.

In the latter case we are often torn; we know the right thing to do, but we’re afraid to do it. What can we do to bolster ourselves in these situations?

One thing that can be very effective is to remind ourselves of what it is that we are doing.¹ When we refrain from doing something wrong, or step up and do the right thing, we are connecting to something so much more than that act.

We are announcing to all that Hashem is in charge, and we are here to do what we can to connect to Him. We are giving ourselves and those around us a lesson in integrity. We don’t just speak about the importance of keeping the Torah, we *live* it.

Yes, it would preferable to not be in this situation, but once we are here, we can use it as an opportunity to remind ourselves of what really matters.

1 Based on *Tur Orech Chaim* 1:1, and *Beis Yosef ibid.* s.v. ומי שוהתחיל

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I testify that the most worthwhile and valuable moments of my life have been the occasions when I encouraged the masses to go in the ways of Mussar; this is the crowning achievement of my life.

- Reb Yonason Eibeshitz, Ya’aros
Devash Drashah 15

THE UNITY PRINCIPLE

Dr. Robert Cialdini, Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University, has been studying the science of persuasion for decades. An influential thought leader in the field, he has written books, given lectures, been hired by companies who want to improve their marketing, and was even involved in two United States presidential elections.

In 2016, Dr. Cialdini published a book¹ where he describes a very powerful principle that influences our decisions. He named it, "The Unity Principle."

The idea is that one is influenced by a person that they identify with. It can be someone who speaks the same language, has the same economic status, or even comes from the same town. The very fact that the two of you have something in common makes it that much easier for one to influence the other.

This idea is so powerful, marketing companies constantly use it in order to get consumers to buy their products. In their advertisements, companies will highlight the percentage of people who buy their product, or will use actors who are similar to the type of person they are targeting. Better yet, businesses will often try to find actual consumers to discuss their product, as people are more apt to be influenced by someone they relate to, despite their not being an expert on the subject.

The effects are powerful because they are subtle. People don't even realize that they are more likely to have a positive impression of someone who is similar to them, and are therefore much more prone to this sort of influence. The net result is that a person makes a decision, thinking it was their decision all along, without the recognition that it was the subtle "Unity Principle" at play.

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¹ *Pre-suasion*, Simon & Schuster, 2016.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Even one as great as Yehoshua could possibly give in to peer-pressure.¹
- The first ingredient in *Avodas Hashem* is not worrying about what others will say or think.²
- Avraham Avinu was called Avraham Ha'Ivri (Avraham from the other side) because he was able to stand up against the philosophy of the entire world.³ In fact, Jews are called Hebrews, as a cognate of Ivri.
- Dovid Hamelech is praised in his ability to speak of Torah thoughts, even when those around him were other heads-of-state, speaking of royal matters.⁴

¹ *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 13:16 s.v. ויקרא משה

² *Tur Orech Chaim* 1:1, *Beis Yosef ibid.* s.v. ומייש והתחיל

³ *Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8

⁴ *Tur Orech Chaim* 1:1