



**RABBI SHALOM**

**ROSNER**

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# Which Regulations Were Transmitted At Mara?

**A**fter Bnei Yisrael cross Yam Suf, they travel for three days without water, until they arrive at Mara. There Hashem sweetens their water and we are told שם שם לו חק ומשפט – there they were informed about *chok and mishpat* (certain rules and regulations). What were these laws that were transmitted to Bnei Yisrael at this juncture? We will offer three interpretations.

## Rashi:

Rashi citing chazal, explains that the term *chok* and *mishpat* refer to the following laws that were commanded in Mara: the laws of *Shabbos*, *Parah Aduma* (the red heifer) and *dinim* (court system).

## Ramban:

The Ramban is somewhat troubled with Rashi's interpretation. If these laws were in fact commanded at Mara, why are they not preceded with a statement such as: "these are the laws to command Bnei Yisrael" צו את בני ישראל as is stated on many

other occasions? Therefore, the Ramban suggests that these laws were perhaps "conveyed" to Bnei Yisrael in Mara, but they were not officially "commanded" until Matan Torah. Bnei Yisrael were not obligated to observe them yet. It was a sort of *heads up* as to the type of *mitzvos* that will be commanded in the near future. It was like a trial run – to see how we accept and observe these commandments, which is why immediately thereafter the *pasuk* states וּשְׁמַם נִסְאוּ (there they were tested).

The Ramban then offers an alternative explanation. *Chok u'mispat* refer to societal laws. When Bnei Yisrael entered the desert, they need to learn how to function as a self-sufficient independent nation. *Chok* is a term that refers to customary behaviors as well. They had to learn how to treat their fellow Jew and perhaps after complaining of a lack of water, how to speak respectfully to Hashem as well. As slaves they lacked an understanding of proper social behavior. That is why after they crossed Yam Suf, at their first stop over, they were taught social norms and how to build a function-

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ing society. Something that does not come naturally, especially for people who were subject to slavery for generations. This is consistent with the Ramban's explanation in Parshas Vayishlach (Bereshis 34:13), where he describes "dinim" as laws of a functioning society.

### Rabbenu Bahya:

Rabbenu Bahya offers a different approach based on a literal reading of the text. Given the context, he suggests that the laws revealed to Bnei Yisrael were horticultural expertise. Immediately preceding this pasuk we are told of how Moshe inserted a branch into the water to sweeten it and make it drinkable. At that moment, Bnei Yisrael were informed of other agricultural secrets. They were taught the rules of survival in a desert. Which vegetation is edible and which is poisonous. Which sweeten and which make food bitter. Which flora can heal naturally and which require some sort of *segula*. That is what is meant by *chok umishpat*. The natural and supernatural remedies.

The very next pasuk states: "if you listen to God... and listen to His commands – the illnesses that existed in Mitzrayim will not affect you, because I am God the healer. *אני ה'רפאך*. This is to underscore that although Hashem is revealing these medicinal cures, He is the ultimate Healer.

Recently in Daf Yomi (Pesachim 56a) we learned that King Hezekiah was *nignaz* (*hid*) the book of medicinal therapies. One of the reasons given for his act is that people began to believe in the treatments and forgot that it was Hashem who was ultimate-

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ly responsible for their being cured. Here we are warned to always remember – that Hashem is the Healer- not the medications.

During this worldwide pandemic – people are anxious about getting vaccinated. Of course, we should do our *histadlus* and get vaccinated, but at the same time, we must continue to daven for a refuah and recognize that the ultimate healer is the Almighty. The gemara in Berachos (60a) cited by many poskim, suggests that before one takes medication, one ought to recite a short prayer reminding us that our reliance is on Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו, שיהיה לי עסק  
זה לרפואה, כי רופא חנם אתה

May the ultimate Healer, grant us all good health so we can serve Him properly. ■

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