



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

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Renewal vs Change

אִם-בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְנִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם אֵלֵי:

If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them (Vayikra 26:3)

Much ink has been spilled explaining this *pasuk*. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh has 42 different interpretations of this *pasuk*. We will highlight an important and relevant lesson derived from this *pasuk* by the Menachem Tzion, Rav Menachem Sacks, the son-in law of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank.

Torat Hashem Temima Meshivat Nafesh” – only when Torah is complete does it restore the soul

In every generation there are movements among even observant Jews to “modernize” Judaism in an unhealthy way. Such individuals desire to maintain the “logical”

principles of the Torah and they claim that in order to preserve our religion in a modern society, we should relinquish the irrational mitzvot, known as “*chukim*”. In an advanced society, we need to adapt our religion to the times.

The Gemara (Shabbat 31b) states that when a person passes away, one of the questions that Hashem will ask of them is: “*Kavata itim laTorah?*” Did you set aside time to study Torah?” But we have, on occasion, suggested another interpretation. “Did you adjust the times – the norms and influences of the day – to the precepts of the Torah rather than trying to adjust the Torah to fit with the times? (the latter would reflect *-kavata Torah La’itim*). The influence should be from within the Torah environment to the outside world and not the opposite. Some people try to adapt the Torah to modern times. They suggest that we be “open-minded” about contemporary norms and values. We say that, on the contrary, we need to open our minds to accept the Torah and adapt our lives to it.

History testifies that once change is instituted at the “*chukim*” level, it eventually leads to the demise of the observance of rational mitzvot as well. Trying to modernize the Torah leads one down a slippery slope. *Torat Hashem Temima Meshivat Nafesh*” – only when Torah is complete does it restore the soul.

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Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik distinguished between a “*mechadesh*” (renewal) and a “*mesahane*” (change). It is important to constantly evaluate how to perform mitzvot properly in different situations. During the covid period *gedolei hador* were challenged with many new halachic questions that arose and many treatises were written to address those issues. As Hazal tell us “*ein bet midrash b’li chidush*”. However, to be “*mesahane*” – change halacha to adapt to modern times is prohibited.

The Menachem Tzion interprets our pasuk as follows. If you follow my statues (“*im b’hukotai telechu*”), only if you keep the mitzvot, the *chukim* that may be difficult to comprehend, only then – will you continue to observe the rational mitzvot. Once *chukim* are ignored, other Mitzvot are later disregarded as well.

During this period between Pesach and Shavuot as we prepare for our celebration of *Matan Torah*, may we strengthen our learning and observance of Torah and mitzvot, both *chukim* and *mishaptim* and transmit the full *mesorah* to future generations. Only then we will be worthy of the blessings that are promised in the following *pesukim* - peace and prosperity in the Land of Israel! ■

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