

Summer for the Soul

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

After parshiyos that discussed the tragic accounts of the meraglim and Korach, this week's parsha begins with an elevated vision of life steeped in Torah. "Zos chukas haTorah, adam ki yomus ba'ohel." This is the way of Torah: spiritual living demands sacrifice. Those who seek to bind themselves to Torah shed the layers of material life, dedicating themselves to growth, meaning, and eternity. Their lives revolve around Torah, and they steer away from pursuits that distract from their spiritual ascent.

Rashi, quoting the Medrash Tanchuma, tells us that the Soton and the nations of the world mock this mitzvah. They ask: What sense is there in the Parah Adumah? What logic can justify it? The Torah anticipates this, so it emphasizes that this command is a chok, a Divine decree beyond human understanding. We follow it because it comes from Hashem.

We are not expected to explain the Torah to those who mock it. We do not owe the world rationales for our practices. We follow the chok, the word of Hashem, with humility and resolve, and through that, we survive and flourish in a world saturated with falsehood.

A story is told of a lion that encountered a chicken and began to choke it. "Why are you doing this to me?" the chicken cried. "I never harmed you."

The lion answered plainly, "Because I can."

For much of our history, that was the attitude of the world toward the Jewish people. For centuries, we were tormented without reason, our loyalty and intelligence questioned, our very existence scorned. The Torah teaches us not to justify ourselves to those who wish only to ridicule. Engaging with them is fruitless. Their questions are not sincere. Their aim is not clarity, but derision.

Torah, the ultimate wisdom, does not conform to conventional logic. Its truths are not confined to what the human mind can grasp. We accept the chukim alongside the mishpotim, with the understanding that our bond to Hashem transcends reason. Torah living is not a matter of intellect alone. It is a covenant rooted in submission, in faith, in eternity.

Greatness in Torah is not achieved through brilliance, but through purity, diligence, and humility. Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach would often recount the story of Rashi, who, before writing his timeless commentary, traveled extensively to ensure that no greater peirush already existed. Only after his search proved fruitless did he begin his monumental work. As he wrote, he fasted hundreds of times, begging that his words would reflect Divine truth and help propel people to the truth.

Rav Shach would become emotional as he retold this story. To him, it represented the essence of Torah greatness: not ego or intellectual conquest, but deep humility, responsibility, and fidelity to mesorah.

Rav Aharon Kotler, in Mishnas Rav Aharon on Parshas Korach, explores the unique role of shevet Levi, the shevet set apart from all the rest to serve in the Mishkon and rule on matters of halacha. They were not given a portion in the land, which would have encumbered them with caring for it, planting and harvesting for their sustenance. Instead, they relied on terumos and maaseros from the rest of the nation.

Rav Aharon asks: If their service was so vital, why were they left financially dependent on others? Wouldn't this create instability and pressure, especially when considering that the reason for the terumos and maaseros – and them not owning property – was so that they would not be worried about earning a livelihood?

His answer is profound: Precisely because they were spiritual leaders, they needed to be protected from arrogance. Had they been self-sufficient and financially secure, they might have grown proud and disconnected from the people. But Torah leadership demands humility. Financial dependency served as a safeguard against conceit. For without humility, a person cannot merit siyata diShmaya, Divine assistance. Hashem detests arrogance, as the posuk says, "Toavas Hashem kol gevah lev." Someone who is conceited cannot properly understand Torah and arrive at the proper p'sak halacha. Someone who is conceited will be lacking the siyata diShmaya necessary to pasken correctly.

To grow in Torah, intelligence alone is not enough. Torah is unlike any other form of knowledge. It is a Divine gift, granted to those who approach it with reverence and self-effacement. This principle holds true for communal leadership as well.

A group of askanim devised a solution to a communal issue. Before implementing it, they consulted with a senior communal leader, who told them that he favored their approach but must first consult with Rav Shach before signing off on it. When the plan was presented to Rav Shach, he rejected it outright, saying that he saw from the Chofetz Chaim that their approach is wrong.

The group was convinced that they had thoroughly analyzed the issue and arrived at a perfect solution. Convinced that Rav Shach rejected it because the plan wasn't properly explained to him, they went themselves to meet Rav Shach to discuss with him their solution to the pressing communal crisis.

Rav Shach told them, "I will not debate your arguments, and for all I know, your thoughts might be correct. But Klal Yisroel is not led by conclusions and thoughts of smart people. Klal Yisroel is led by mesorah, tradition. If the mesorah from the Chofetz Chaim is that we don't engage in something like that, then we don't do it, no matter how smart it seems, for following our mesorah is the proper course of action."

This is a vital truth in every generation. Too often, people believe that they know better than the Torah. They view themselves as visionaries, convinced that their solutions are superior to those passed down through generations. But such confidence often stems from arrogance, not insight. And without humility and mesorah, even the most well-intentioned leader can lead others astray.

We see people who are consumed by a problem and believe that they have the perfect solution. They fail to properly consider it, as they are convinced of their intelligence and leadership abilities, but due to their conceit, they lack the *siyata diShmaya* required to arrive at proper decisions.

They think that their reasoning is impeccable, but they fail to consider the *mesorah*—namely, how *gedolim* who came before them thought and acted.

No one, as smart as he thinks he is and as pressing as the problem he faces is, has a right to present plans that differ from our *mesorah*. Doing so causes mayhem and fails to solve problems. The logic may be compelling, but it is still wrong.

People in our day are led astray by those who claim to understand the reasoning for different *halachos* and temper them to mesh with the times.

History has shown us the dangers of this path. The Conservative and Reform movements arose from attempts to modernize *halacha*—to “rationalize” it, to make it more palatable. The result was a tragedy of assimilation and spiritual confusion, as they caused many to deviate from *halacha* and *mesorah*, leading millions of Jews astray.

To us, it sounds ridiculous that they maintain institutions that they refer to as “*yeshivos*” and have *halachic* decisors who write so-called *teshuvos*, as if they are following the Torah. Through the implementation of what they refer to as logic, they have so dramatically twisted *halacha* as to make it meaningless for their millions of followers.

Once *mitzvos* are rationalized and twisted to conform to someone’s human understanding of them and their concepts, the *halachos* become compromised and eventually are totally lost.

Those who study Torah while lacking *yiras Shomayim*, respect for *mesorah* and humility ultimately destroy instead of build, obscure instead of reveal, and cause others to repel the Torah instead of drawing closer to it.

When they first began, we regularly reported on the actions and teachings of those in the Open Orthodoxy movement, who follow in the path of the founders of the Conservative movement. Their hypocrisy, true intentions and the sad path they have followed have become obvious to all. We should never cease to remind all that the leaders and clergy of this group are not Orthodox in thought, practice, attitude or approach.

Their *teshuvos* and *drashos* mock tradition and *halacha*, and are fanciful attempts to have the Torah conform with current progressive thought, bearing little relation to the reality of Torah thought and interpretation. Though they claim to uphold the Torah, their reinterpretations and institutions consistently erode its foundations.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman explained the *posuk* of “*Tzidkoscha tzedek le’olam*” (*Tehillim* 119:142) to mean that man cannot fathom the depths of Hashem’s justice, for society and its concepts are ever changing. What is considered just in one generation is viewed as unjust in the next. But “*veSorascha emes*,” the truth of Torah is everlasting. It neither changes for the times nor conforms to them.

Zos chukas haTorah. Torah is a chok. Torah is neither about impressive dissertations nor social welfare and contracting with a good marketing firm. It is about following the will of the Creator as expressed in Torah Shebiksav and Torah Shebaal Peh.

Chazal say (Taanis 30, et al), "Kol hamisabel al Yerushalayim zocheh veroeh besimchosah." In order to merit enjoying the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, one must mourn its destruction.

When justice is man-made, there is always going to be inequality, mistakes, and feelings of division, for the system is inherently only as good as the mortals who formulate the laws and enforce and adjudicate them.

What society considers just is ever-changing. But the truth of Torah is eternal.

So when the parsha begins with the words "Zos chukas haTorah," it is telling us that Torah is not a philosophy, nor is it a social framework or a platform for pontification. Torah represents the Divine truth through which the world was created and which we must follow to exist successfully in the world that was created through it and for it.

The lesson for us is that we cause the flame of Torah to burn brightly within us as a steady blaze that warms everything in its path. Let mitzvos be more than obligations. Let them be the song of our lives. Let us dance to the rhythm of halacha, not out of habit or pressure, but out of deep joy and knowledge that this is the correct way to live our lives.

Let us endeavor for our tefillah to carry the urgency of someone who knows he is speaking to the One who created heaven, earth and us. Let our learning feel like a reunion with eternity. When we sit down to learn, no matter the time of day or night, let the pages of the Gemara pulse in our hands, like living breath, providing us the very oxygen we need to survive.

Let us ensure that our homes and shuls shine with sincerity, the glowing warmth of love and authenticity. Let us raise our children so they see Torah as the heartbeat of life. Let our neighbors feel kindness radiating from us. Let us uplift people and not put people down. Let us be warm and not cold, friendly and not distant.

We are students of Torah, its bearers, its heirs. We are the link in a chain that stretches back to Har Sinai, a chain forged by brilliance and by fire—the fire of bitachon, sacrifice, and unwavering loyalty to Torah, halacha and mesorah.

The fire of Torah that brings life to everything.

The summer sun stretches long across our days, casting a softer light and a slower rhythm upon our lives. With the burdens of routine temporarily lifted, we instinctively breathe a little deeper, hoping to recharge, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

But the Torah doesn't go on vacation. The weekly parshiyos continue to echo through our lives, each one a reminder of who we are and what we're here for.

As we review Israel's miraculous military triumphs that defied logic and revealed the Hand of Hashem, we are reminded that Jewish survival is never natural. It is always supernatural. At the same time, we begin to approach the somber days of Tammuz, entering the shadowed corridor of the Three Weeks, when we mourn not only the loss of the physical Bais Hamikdosh, but also the resulting spiritual distance that has become part of our lives.

And so, this calm season offers more than leisure. It offers clarity. It is a time to pause and ask ourselves the questions we so often silence during the year's noise: Where am I really headed? Am I living deliberately, or drifting gently in the current? What can I be doing better and how can I accomplish that?

We sit on porches and benches, feeling the stillness, while inside something stirs. A whisper. A nudge. A subtle call to return. To reflect. To realign. Because even as the world seems to slow, the neshomah does not rest. It seeks direction, meaning, and connection. It seeks the fire of purpose, even in the warmth of summer.

This is the time to look inward, to look upward, and to let the sunlight not only warm our skin, but also awaken our hearts and help us prepare for the great day when the new light will shine with the coming of Moshiach very soon.