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Ta'amei Ha'mitzvot – The Reasoning Behind The Mitzvot

The 613 commandments that are in the Torah can be broken down into a number of different categories (many of which overlap). Positive and negative, between man and G-d and between man and his fellow man, those we understand and those that we do not, and many others. The name given to the final category, those commandments that we struggle to understand, are most commonly known as “**CHUKKIM**” and the most common example of a “*chok*” is the *Parah Adumah* – the red heifer. A further example is that of *Kilayim*.

This week, those studying *Mishnah Yomit* began *Masechet Kilayim*, which is the fourth *masechet* of *Seder Zraim*, and deals with the prohibited creation of new breeds of plants and animals as well as the mixing of existing materials such as wool and linen (*Sha'atnez*).

The laws of *Kilayim* are derived from the following *passuk* in *Vayikra* (19:19): “You shall observe My decrees [Chukkim]: you shall not mate your animal into another species, you shall not plant your field with mixed seed; and a garment that is a mixture of combined materials shall not come upon you”. *Rashi* immediately writes in his commentary on this *passuk* that “they are the decrees of the King and there is no point attempting to explain them”. Just like we do not understand the reasoning behind the *Parah Adumah*, so too, we don't understand the reasoning behind the laws of *Kilayim* and it was for this reason that the Torah introduces these laws using the word “*chok*” - a term used for that which is unexplainable to human logic.

However, not all commentators agree with *Rashi* on this point. *Ramban*, in his commentary on this *passuk*, states very clearly that there is a logical and understandable reason for the laws of *Kilayim* and that they definitely do not fall into the category of “unexplainable”. *Ramban* explains that the reason *Hashem* commanded us to observe the laws of *Kilayim* is that anyone who attempts to create a new species of plant or animal by joining two existing species together is clearly denying the fact that *Hashem* created and completed the world in seven days. For if everything was complete, why would man have to seemingly “help” G-d by creating new species of plants or animals?

Furthermore, *Ramban* also offers an explanation as to why the word “*chok*” appears in the *passuk*. It is not coming to teach us that the law is unexplainable (as *Rashi* did) but rather that the violation of these laws are a violation of the laws of nature and you should therefore “observe” the decrees/laws of nature set down by *Hashem* by adhering to the laws of *Kilayim*.

A further explanation is offered by the *Sefer HaChinich* (whose author is unknown) in his commentary to the 244th commandment – the prohibition of mating two animals of different species. The Torah states at the end of the sixth day of creation that *Hashem* “saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (*Bereshit* 1:31) According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, everything created by *Hashem* has a purpose and each creation is perfectly suited to its purpose. If someone were to change one of the creations by mixing it with another species, the new species would therefore lack the original perfection achieved by G-d.

This idea is expanded upon in his commentary to the 62nd commandment – not to allow a sorcerer to live. Not only does the creation of a new species destroy the purpose of that species and cancel the good that it would have provided to humankind, but the result of the creation of a new species is the nullification of the power of both the angels of the original species. This idea is based on a *midrash* in *Bereshit Rabbah* (10:7) that says: “you will not find a blade of grass below [on earth] which does not have a celestial being above that bids it, Grow!” The creation of a new species not only destroys the angels appointed over the two original species but fails to create a new angel for the new hybrid species.

Finally, although it would seem from the above explanations that man is forbidden to make even the smallest improvement to his quality of life, it should be noted that the laws of *Kilayim* are limited to specific matters. They do not limit the infinite number of combinations that are so much a part of modern life. To the contrary, man is duty bound to improve the world and in a sense, “complete” the work of creation.

Ben-Zion Hain

Revision Questions

דמאי ז' – ז'ד: ז'ח

- If someone purchases wine from a *Cuti* and does not have time to separate *trumot* and *ma'asrot* before *Shabbat* what can they do during *bein ha'shamashot* (between sunset and nightfall)? (ז'ד: ז')
- If one has dates that are *tevel* at home, and is unable to get home and separate *trumot* and *ma'asrot* before *Shabbat* what should he do? Does he act differently if the dates were *demai*? (ז'ח: ז')
- What is the ruling if someone has two baskets of *tevel* produce and says: (ז'ג: ז')
 - “The *ma'asrot* of the first basket shall be in the second basket”?
 - “The *ma'asrot* of this one shall be in the other, and the other’s in this one”?
 - “The *ma'asrot* of each shall be in the each other's basket”?
- What should one do if he has a mixture of: (ז'ג: ז')
 - 100 parts *tevel* and 100 parts *chulin*?
 - 100 parts *tevel* and 100 parts *ma'aser rishon*?
 - 100 parts *chulin* and 100 parts *ma'aser rishon*?
 - 100 parts *tevel* and 90 parts *ma'aser rishon*?
 - 90 parts *tevel* and 80 parts *ma'aser rishon*?
- What should one do if when separating *ma'aser rishon* from barrels of wine, he is unaware of his intention when saying: (ז'ח: ז')
 - The outer row shall be *ma'aser*?
 - Half the outer row shall be *ma'aser*?
 - A row shall be *ma'aser*?
 - Half a row shall be *ma'aser*?
 - One barrel shall be *ma'aser*?

כלאים א' – א'ט: א'ט

- The first *Mishnah* list pairs of produce – would they be considered *kilayim* if planted together? (א'ט: א')
- The second and third *Mishnayot* lists pairs of vegetables – are they considered *kilayim*? (א'ב-ג: א')
- What pairs of similar things are listed in the next *mishnah* and what is the *kilayim* related concern? (ז'ד: א')
- The next *Mishnah* returns to listing pairs of vegetables – are they considered *kilayim*? (ז'ה: א')
- What pairs of similar things are listed in the next *mishnah* and what is the *kilayim* related concern? (hint: this time it does not refer to plants) (ז'ו: א')
- Explain the debate regarding grafting vegetables and trees. (ז'ז: א')
- Can someone place a vine in a watermelon if his intentions are that the vines draws water from the watermelon? (ז'ח: א')
- What are the four concerns that the *mishnah* addresses when burying bundles of radishes at the base of a vine? (ז'ט: א')
- Explain the debate regarding planting a single wheat seed and a single barley seed together? (א'ט: א')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

Between mincha & ma'ariv

Mizrachi Shul

David Bankier

9:50pm (after ma'ariv)

Beit Midrash -

Naftali Herc

Yehuda Gottlieb

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before

mincha

Mizrachi Shul

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
9 th Jan. כ"ח טבת	10 th Jan. כ"ט טבת	11 th Jan. א' שבט ר"ח	12 th Jan. ב' שבט	13 th Jan. ג' שבט	14 th Jan. ד' שבט	15 th Jan. ה' שבט
Kilayim 2: 1-2	Kilayim 2: 3-4	Kilayim 2: 5-6	Kilayim 2: 7-8	Kilayim 2: 9-10	Kilayim 2:11-3:1	Kilayim 3: 2-3

