

Chukas

It is told that in 1917 in Russia, the day after it was known that the Czar (Nikolai) had been executed, the Rogachover Gaon (Rabbi Yosef Rosen—one of the most brilliant and greatest Torah scholars of our century) came into the Shul where he was Rabbi, and saw a group of people standing around talking excitedly. These were times of turmoil, and it was obvious that something major had developed. So he approached them and asked “*Vos hert zich?*” (“What is new?”) So they told him that the Czar had been shot. Without any other apparent reaction, tears began streaming down the Gaon’s face.

“But Rebbe,” his Baalei Batim (the people of his Shul) asked him, “The Czar was not known for his love for the Jews?”

“I know, I know,” he told them. “I am crying about the *Prikas Oll* (rejection of recognized authority) involved.”

Perhaps the Gaon had a greater depth of vision than could have been recognized at that time. Perhaps he saw the advent of a new self-proclaimed free and liberated social order. Perhaps he saw, in this harsh caricature of a once all-powerful Czar being almost nonchalantly killed by a (renegade) group of (illiterate?) peasants, an omen for the future. A future where even *Eved*—a servant—*Naaseh Melech*—becomes a king.

Derech Eretz—respect—*Kodmoh LaTorah*—precedes the study of Torah. Respect is a prerequisite to the proper study of Torah.

If you have a difficult situation for which you seek advice, and you ask someone whom you revere and respect (even if only in this area of his specialization) you accept his answer graciously and follow his advice. However, if this person (whom many others respect as an expert) happens to be an old time friend, or a member of the family—somehow that respect is missing, somehow his answer does not seem so wise, somehow you see flaws in his advice, and somehow you do not so graciously accept his word.

The more respect one has for Torah, the more one can learn from Torah. In other words, the more importance and respect you place

on the logic of Torah and *Chazal's* (our Sages') words, the more you can learn from Torah.

And this is a lesson *Rashi* attempts to teach at the outset of the Sedrah *Chukas*. On commenting on the word *Chuka*, *Rashi* says that when the *Yetzer Hora*—inclination to do bad—and people of the world (non-Jewish) will ask for what reason do you keep those illogical Mitzvohs, you will answer, “These are the decrees of the King and we have no right to question them.”

Why does not *Rashi* simply say “these are the decrees of the King, etc.?” Why does he preface it with others asking a question?

Because for someone who has proper and ultimate respect for the Torah, he no longer has the question as to the meaning of these Mitzvohs. He can already understand (within a spiritual Torah logic) the deepest meanings of these Mitzvohs.

But how does one aspire to this? By first accepting the “decrees of the King” unquestioningly, and by thus developing a total inner respect. Then and only then can Torah teach such secrets as the reasons for the *Chukas Hatorah*.

By learning Torah assiduously one develops this respect for the *Nosain Hatorah*—A-mighty, the Giver of the Torah.