

Chukas

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The *Midrash* learns that the four terms in the second verse of the Torah, null, void, darkness, and deep, allude to the four exiles the Jewish people were destined to undergo. *The spirit of God hovering over the water* at the end of the verse is the hint to *Moshiach* and the final redemption (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4). One verse, all of Jewish history.

So exile was a *fait accompli* even before Jewish history started? From *Parashas Bechukosai* and later, *Parashas Ki Savo*, exile and suffering seem to be dependent upon how the Jewish people behave. It does say that if we do what God has asked us to do, then we earn blessings, and if we don't, then we earn curses. Is the *Midrash* just a negative prophecy that didn't have to come true, or a warning of what was destined to actually occur?

Looking back over the 2,000 years of exile, you have to wonder if the latter is the right answer. Everything the *Midrash* predicted has come true, and then some. We had the warnings and yet we ignored them and paid the consequences, and not just once, but generation after generation.

But then again, Adam *HaRishon* was told by God that if he ate from the *Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra* he would die, and he ate anyhow. But on that the *Midrash* does say something about how death was meant to come into the world, and more than likely, Adam was destined to be the cause of it. Adam even questioned God about it after reading this week's *parsha*, which starts off talking about the laws of impurity from contact with the dead, though he had yet to eat (*Tanchuma, Vayaishev* 4).

The *Midrash* calls it *alillus*, which means *pretext*. It means that God has an agenda, but He tends to hide His agenda behind historic events that seem to happen for

their own reason, because of some master plan that we barely know anything about. For example, God made Ya'akov love Yosef more than his brothers so that they would become jealous of him and sell him. It was so they would all eventually find themselves down in Egypt, just to fulfill what God told Avraham: "*You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them for 400 years*" (Bereishis 15:13).

Why was that so important? Because that was the way to rectify Creation in ways that only *Kabbalah* discusses. It is meant to happen through man, and specifically the Jewish people, but few if any really understand how. It's like God told Moshe regarding the construction of the *Mishkan*: "You just make like you're building the *Mishkan*, and I'll take care of the rest" (*Rashi, Shemos 39:33*).

It works the same with us. We just have to make the best free will decisions we can, given the Torah's expectations of us, and it will fix the world in ways we may not comprehend. History may be a *chok*—statute, but the choices we have to make aren't.

Shabbos Day

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA is the subject of the *midrash* mentioned above. This is what it says:

"*Go and see the works of God, awesome in deed toward mankind.*" (*Tebillim 66:5*): Go and see how when The Holy One, Blessed is He, created the world, He created the Angel of Death on the *first* day. . . Man, however, was created on the *sixth* day, and yet death was blamed on him. . . Adam said to The Holy One, Blessed is He, 'Master of the Universe! The Torah was with You for 2000 years before You even created the world. . . And yet it instructs, *'This is the law when a man will die in a tent'* (*Bamidbar 19:14*). If You had not already decided that death should be in Creation, would You have written this? Rather, You were just looking for a pretext to blame death on me!' This is what is meant by *awesome in deed.*" (*Tanchuma, Vayaishev 4*)

You don't have to worry. We're not talking about humans who can seem nice but be nefarious. People have *yetzer haras*. They can mean well but do bad. Betrayal is one of the negative traits of human beings.

But not God. He doesn't need to cheat anyone to get what He wants. Everything He does for us, whether obviously good or seemingly bad, is all for our good. Yes, He says He can get angry and yes, He punishes people. But if you are someone who

means well and tries to do good whenever possible, He will always have your back.

So then why can't He just come out and tell us what He is doing? Why must He sneak around behind our backs to do that which is good for us anyhow? *Why the alillus?*

Of course, the global answer is *bechiras chofshis*—free will. It's pretty much a no-brainer to choose well when choosing well seems to be in our best interest. Just as there are no atheists in a foxhole, people tend to thank God when great things happen for them. It's during those moments when a little voice inside says you are being cheated that free will comes into play, and you have to will yourself to trust in God and His decisions for you.

That was the test for Iyov. The *Satan* was convinced that Iyov only trusted in God because of his continual success. God told the *Satan* otherwise, but allowed the *Satan* to test Iyov's *emunab*. And he did, and quite frankly, Iyov remained strong in his faith given what happened to him in so short a time. Most people would have jumped ship much earlier.

But Iyov was pushed to a point that he began to wonder about his treatment, and he questioned God. And what seemed like a wager between God and the *Satan* turned out to be one of the most important lessons about life, for anyone. What happens to us is personal, but it is also impacted by so many important things that we may not, and cannot even know about. In short, life is a *chok*, and you never know whether what is happening is the real thing, or if it is just a pretext for something else more fundamental. The only way to keep in step is with *emunab*.

Seudah Shlishis

EMUNAH IS NOT merely an accessory for life. It is the purpose of life itself. We were made to have *emunab*. The opposite is arrogance and misplaced self-confidence, like Korach had. He claimed to challenge Moshe *Rabbeinu* because every Jew was *kadosh*—holy. He was right in principle but not in practice, because the moment arrogance takes over, a person has profaned that holiness.

At first thought, *emunab* and holiness seem like two different ideas. *Emunab* is depending upon God when He seems most undependable. *Kedushab* is a state of being that results from acting as much like God as humanly possible. How are the two the same?

They share a common component. Both are the drive to become one with God. Friends that cherish one another become like each other, as do spouses. As God

said, "Be holy, because I am holy." In other words, pursue a relationship with Me, and you will become holy.

Emunah is the same idea. There is something special about being able to trust someone else, especially if you really want to be close with them. When that is the case, you will find people finding reasons to have faith in the object of their admiration, sometimes even beyond what is justified.

Fortunately, that is never the case with God. He deserves all the trust we can give to Him. But then again, it is harder to develop an intense love for something as abstract as God. We can see with our own eyes the good and bad that people do and judge them based upon that. Unless a person pays close attention to their Divine Providence, and takes the time to contemplate the good it represents, they can miss God altogether. How much more so is this true when that Divine Providence includes *chukim*?

Ain Od Milvado, Part 55

IF YOU THINK about it, all that went wrong in the desert was because the Jewish people had yet to perfect *ain od Milvado*. Anyone who truly believes that God is everything only has one dialogue, and that is with God. Moshe may have said this and have done that, but at the end of the day, it was all God. Don't ask Moshe where the water is. Ask God why He hid it from you.

It's not a contradiction of anyone's free will. We choose to be the kind of people we are, and when God needs a particular type of person, He plugs them into His plan. Bizarre circumstances may throw us into situations we might have rather avoided, but they wouldn't have been able to find us if we didn't make ourselves into the kinds of people who could be affected by them.

That too is an aspect of *chok*. How does God weave so many people into a precise plan that impacts everyone exactly as they need to be impacted? And this all the while making it appear quite random. Even people can choreograph their lives to extreme levels of accuracy that can impress onlookers. But as awesome as they appear to us, they still remain within the realm of the possible. Difficult, but possible.

But God's choreography of history, when you consider that every last detail planned by Him and just carried out by man, is unfathomable. So the brain, therefore, just says that it is impossible, and not from God but random history. That's the good thing about *chok*. It's just a more sophisticated way of saying, "I don't know how this can be from God, but I believe that it is." You will be surprised how much eternal reward such a simple statement of *emunah* is worth to God and in the World to

Come.