

Now, O' Yisrael, listen to the decrees and to the ordinances that I teach you. (4:1)

Chukim are *mitzvos* which defy human rationale. *Mishpatim* are *mitzvos* whose reason, although not stated, are common-sensical and relatable. The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* offers a novel interpretation of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* appeal to the Jewish People. When Moshe mentioned *chukim* and *mishpatim*, he was not referring to any one *mitzvah* of the 613 commandments; rather, he was referring to two events which, on the surface, are unrelated to one another, although he demonstrates that they are actually very much connected.

One event was Moshe's decision to strike -- rather than speak to -- the rock. Moshe intended to carry out Hashem's command with great fervor, in the most expeditious manner. The second event occurred when Moshe failed to act against Zimri, when he flagrantly sinned with Cosbi, the Midyanite woman. He did not energize himself to carry out the law that exhorts zealots to kill the perpetrator. As a result, Moshe did not gain the merit of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying the Almighty's Name, which would have rectified his act of hitting the rock. In contrast, the confluence was a failure to sanctify Hashem's Name.

The *Or HaChaim* posits that Moshe thought twice before acting against Zimri, because he was discouraged by the consequence of the dynamic action he had taken against the rock. He thought to himself, "Acting with fervor and alacrity might have a disastrous aftermath. I will wait and mull this over." Zealousness cannot be mulled over. One must take immediate action or else it is no longer an act of zealousness, and the *bais din* must take responsibility in meting out the appropriate punishment. A zealot sees an outrage and acts. Moshe's caution deprived him of reversing his earlier failure to sanctify Hashem.

This is to what Moshe referred when he specified *chukim* and *mishpatim*. The incident with the rock can be likened to a *chok*, decree, since Hashem provided no reason to explain why speaking to the rock would trump striking it. The effect should be the same. The story with Zimri may be labeled a *mishpat*, ordinance, since Zimri's flagrant act of immoral perversion carries with it the concomitant punishment of death by zealots.

I think the two primary lessons to be derived herein are: Our leaders do not shy away from conceding an error. A leader assumes responsibility, does not give excuses. Second, we see what can result from altering a command or hesitating in carrying out a command. Obedience is the hallmark of a Jew. Our religion is all about subordination to the will of Hashem – not retreating to our comfort zone. Unquestionably, our quintessential leader's "error" was in relation to his unparalleled, exalted level of spirituality and closeness to Hashem. Nonetheless, we should learn from it and apply the lesson to our own lives.