

The Torah demands compliance to its Laws.

**וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּכֶם הָאָדָם וְתִי בְּקִדְמִי אֲנִי ה':**

“And you shall guard my statutes and my ordinances, that man shall do them; and you shall live in them, I am Hashem.” (Vayikra 18:5)

What is interesting is that the exhortation to follow the rules and laws of the Torah does not come at the beginning or end of instruction but is placed – seemingly randomly – in various sections. This admonition must come to amplify and teach a new law. What is it teaching? Why is it placed here?

This pasuk ends a parsha (section) that is sandwiched between the laws of Yom Kippur and the ordinances of family purity. The Mishkan is now set up and the laws of *tahara* and *tummeh* (ritual purity) are explained. The Torah then regulates that no private animals may be eaten without them be sacrificed by the Mishkan. (Ibid 17:5). Thereby, the Torah is making it clear that the Mishkan is the center of life. However, it was anticipated that in a short time the Mishkan would not be so easily accessible to everyone (or it should not have been. It ended up being another 38 years in the desert). The Torah turns to the laws of living in the Land of Yisroel. It turns its attention to helping Bnei Yisroel maintain their purity in the Land. It provides the remonstrance for Bnei Yisroel to maintain their spiritual purity, lest they be ejected from the Land. (Ibid 18:25).

Hashem commands Moshe to speak to Bnei Yisroel (ibid 18:2) and teach them not to go in the ways of the Lands of Mitzrayim or Canaan (ibid 18:3). This warning is two-fold. First, do not continue in their practice, particularly laws like incest. (Pharaohs often married their sisters or other close relatives). Second, do not even follow their good laws. The Law shall be what Hashem provides. In this way, the Torah is setting itself out as the Constitution for the Land of Israel. The Land will be governed by Torah Law. This section both connects and is separate from the next verses about maintaining purity of intimate relationships.

This section connects to the next sections in that it lays out the Torah is the law of the land and the following relationships are now unlawful, regardless of prior or current practice by Bnei Yisroel, the Egyptians, Canaanites, or any neighboring peoples. Live by the Torah’s laws not by these other practices. It also, thereby, outlaws relationships that were cursed--Canaan and his grandfather, Noah (Bereishis 9:25) – and those that were not, like Lot and his daughters (ibid 19:31), Reuven and his father’s (possibly divorced) wife (ibid 35:22), and Yaakov and two alive sisters (ibid 29:28). All prior practice is nullified, and the Torah sets down the rules anew.

This section also stands alone. It is in midst of the sections of purity, but it also introduces all coming laws about staying holy and ritually pure. The Torah is all about

maintaining the holiness of Beni Yisroel. *Kedusha* here means separation. Bnei Yisroel will live in the Land. The Land is to be their Holy Land. However, the current and former inhabitants have not always maintained the standards of ritual purity that the Torah—or the Land—demands. Bnei Yisroel will live by a different—or at least a specifically codified—moral and ethical standards. The Mishkan will forever be their centerpiece. However, even if not near the Mishkan—and later the Beis HaMikdash, and even later any Beis Midrash—their lives will be lived with the presence of mind to maintain a degree of separation from the mundane. The laws of kosher animals, touching unclean animals, carcasses, and discharges, staying away from consuming blood, and purity in relationships are all part of keeping the Torah and not following a “worldly ethical view.” Morality is not a moving compass.

What is important is that even if the world’s ethics change and suddenly certain relationships or animals are seen as okay, the Torah’s standards do not change. All the pork eating in the world will not change the laws of Kosher. This goes for every aspect of the Torah. The moral compass is the Torah, not what the world at large thinks.

There is another aspect to the admonition here. This pasuk is close to the midpoint of the Torah in letters (Vayikra 11:14), words (ibid 10:16), and pesukim (ibid 13:33). They all deal with this topic of *tahara* and *tummeh*. This central location is a perfect location for the Torah to teach that this is how life is to be lived. Now, the previous pasuk already stated that Bnei Yisroel should follow the Torah. “My rules you shall do, My statutes you shall guard, to walk in them, I am Hashem, your Lord.” (Ibid 18:4). Our pasuk adds something very important.

“You shall guard my statutes and my Laws.” This is going further than the previous pasuk. It already said guard My statutes. Now it is adding that all Laws shall be guarded as well as done. Just at prohibitive statutes should be guarded, so too, positive commands should be kept with the same zeal. *Doing* the commands is just as important and an act of holiness as *refraining* from abhorrent or evil behavior. The wording here also makes it more proactive. Not *should be guarded* but *guard!*

“That man shall do them.” This means that the Torah really is the moral lodestar for all mankind. Yes, the Torah is the constitution for the Land of Israel. The Torah is also a beacon of light, a moral compass, a set of laws, for the entire world to live by, for all time. The Torah is a set of Laws to come close to Hashem and follow in His ways. All people of the world can so follow it to follow Hashem and come close to Hashem. The laws prevent the slippery slope of falling to either extreme—lenient or strict.

“And live in them.” The Torah is not meant to be oppressive or overly restrictive. It is also not meant to put anyone’s life in danger. With this phrase it is taught that living life overrides any commandment. One may start a fire on Shabbos or eat a *tummeh* animal to save a life. Also, this is how one lives. Living by no rules, or rules simply put in place by man, is not a way to live. This life is fleeting, it only takes up the time from birth to death. Living according to the Torah is a life well lived.

“I am Hashem.” The freer from bondage (Shmos 6:6) and who sanctifies (ibid 31:13). I give these laws for mankind to live by.