



Walking the Fine Line Between Confidence and Arrogance

By Ariel Kryzman ('23)

Adapted from Rabbi Yamim Goldsmith's FMT series

This week's Parashah, Parashat BeChukotai, discusses a list of blessings that we will receive "אם-בחקתי תלכו," "If [we] follow in [Hashem's] laws" (VaYikra 26:3) and a list of curses that we will receive "ואם-בחקתי תמאסו," "If [we] reject [Hashem's] laws" (VaYikra 26:15). In the last Pasuk of the Berachot, Hashem says, "ואשבר מטת עלכם ואולך אתכם," "I will break the bars of your yoke, and I will make you walk upright" (VaYikra 26:13). We see a similar Lashon when we say Birkat HaMazon: "הרחמן הוא ישבור עלנו," "May Hashem break the yoke off of our necks and enable us to walk upright to Eretz Yisrael."

What does it mean to walk "קוממיות," which is said both in this week's Parashah and in Birkat HaMazon?

Rashi on this week's Parashah defines "קוממיות" as walking "בקומה זקופה," "with an upright back." Based on the way "בקומה זקופה" is generally used by Chazal, one can define it as meaning walking with a level of confidence and self-assurance. Therefore, in this week's Parashah, Hashem promises us that he will award us with a life of confidence if we follow His laws.

However, the Gemara in Kiddushin 31a says, "אסור לאדם," "It is forbidden for someone to walk four Amot with an upright back." Rashi comments that walking with an upright back gives a person a level of arrogance that makes it seem that they are standing upright and pushing Hashem away. If there is a negative view of walking בקומה זקופה in the Gemara, why does Hashem bless us with that ability if we follow His laws? That seems contradictory!

The Chatam Sofer answers this question by looking at the previous Pasuk in BeChukotai. The Pasuk reads, "והתהלכתי among you, and you will be my people" (VaYikra 26:12). What does it mean that Hashem will "walk amongst us?" Rashi answers this by saying that Hashem will walk amongst us in Gan Eden. If we follow Hashem's laws and learn His Torah, Hashem will walk with us. Therefore, the Chatam Sofer explains that when Hashem walks with us, we are allowed to walk בקומה זקופה. Our walking בקומה זקופה doesn't push Him away because He is here with us.

One can see from the Chatam Sofer that, in general, walking בקומה זקופה shows that we don't need Hashem and that our success is only a result of our own actions, thereby giving us a false sense of arrogance. When we follow in the ways of Hashem, if we walk בקומה זקופה, we are purely showing our faith in Hashem and that we have a level of confidence that all that Hashem does for us is for the best.

Therefore, let us all follow Hashem's laws and learn His Torah so that we can walk בקומה זקופה and show everyone the unwavering confidence that we have in Hashem.

The Essence of Chukim

By Yoni Zolkowitz ('22)

This article was originally published in Volume 30

Laws are an essential part of humanity dictating how society functions in our day-to-day lives. At the beginning of Parashat BeChukotai the Torah opens up by saying, "Im BeChukotai Telechu Ve'Et Mitzvotai Tishmoru VeAsitem Otam" (Vayikra 26:3). Shockingly, the Torah describes the need to follow Hashem's laws, before stating the need to follow His Mitzvot! Generally, the most important aspects of a list are listed first, in order to truly get the point across. Thus, since chukim are quoted before all other mitzvot, there seemingly is some special significance the

torah gives to these chukim. What is the nature of a Chok and why does it have such significance that it would be placed before all other Mitzvot?

Vayikra 19:19 also opens with a pasuk describing the need for Bnei Yisrael to observe these Chukim: “Et Chukotai Tishmoru”. Rashi comments on this Pasuk by stating that a Chok is a law where the reason behind the law being given to us, is not explicitly revealed by Hashem. Alternatively, one can read Rashi’s comment in a different light: there is no reason for the Mitzvah except the fact that it is Hashem’s will for Bnei Yisrael to perform this Mitzvah. According to this reading, doing these Chukim strengthens our relationship with Hashem as we are just conforming to Him to appease Hashem without necessitating a reason. This is comparable to a husband conforming to the will of his wife for the sake of Shalom Bayit. Ramban, when quoting Rashi, seems to understand Rashi like the second reading, but disagrees entirely. Ramban holds that the reason why these Chukim are given without a reason is that the logic behind these Chukim are so complex, that the human mind would not be able to truly grasp their logic and thus the Yetzer HaRah would fight back hard arguing that other nations would make fun of us. To clarify, the Ramban is saying that there is a reason for these Chukim, (unlike Rashi’s second approach where there is no reason for these Chukim), but the reason they are not revealed to us is because they are too difficult for our brains to truly understand. The Gemara (Kiddushin 61b), in fact, establishes a direct linkage between following Chukim and receiving a Bracha as well as not following them and receiving a curse. This demonstrates the great importance of these Chukim. Furthermore, Parashat BeChukotai continues on by stating the sizable reward for following these Chukim: One’s enemies will no longer be a threat, we will receive a great deal of rain, and lastly that Hashem will be among us. Why does following these Chukim result in this type of a blessing? Because the fact that we would do Chukim, something that we do not have the capability to understand, for the purpose of serving Hashem, yields benefits. We receive a lot of rain to improve our bodies, so that we can do the spiritual work and serve Hashem correctly without any worries about one’s body and its needs getting in the way. Our enemies will be scattered so that we will be at peace and have no worries to distract us from Torah. Lastly, Hashem will be

among us as a result of our deepening our spiritual relationship with Him.

Boaz - A General Tzaddik and Role Model

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

We have devoted considerable attention to Naomi and Rut’s side of Perek 3. Now let us turn our attention to Boaz.

Boaz - Tzaddik, Chassid and Gadol HaDor

First, the Targum (1:6) referring to Boaz as “Boaz Chassida” and (4:21) as “Boaz Tzadika”. Rut Rabba (5:10) describes Boaz as the Gadol HaDor. In this Shiur we will try to support this extremely positive evaluation of Boaz.

Why No Rebuke?

TABC Talmid Rami Levin asks well – if Naomi and Rut’s plan/actions were sinful why does Boaz not rebuke her/them? Instead, Boaz profusely blesses and praises Rut!

We might base on answer off the following Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 606:1) זה שאמר ויהי בחצי הלילה. זה שאמר דוד חייב אני לקום להודות לך הכתוב חצות לילה אקום להודות לך, כך אמר דוד חייב אני לקום להודות לך על מה שעשית לזקני וזקנתי בחצי הלילה שנאמר ויהי בחצי הלילה ויחרד האיש וילפת, שאילו התחיל לה קללה אחת מהיכן הייתי עומד נתן בלבו וברכה ברוכה את לה' בתי

(זה is a Pasuk in Tehillim - 119:62). David HaMelech is grateful that his great grandfather chose to react kindly to Rut for had Boaz reacted with anger, David would not have been born! Boaz easily could have slipped into a rage at Rut for disrespecting him and his space. Boaz, though, chose to restrain his anger. Moreover, he went out of his way to make Rut feel comfortable in an extremely awkward situation.

In a corollary to Chazal’s (Kiddushin 70a) principle of כל הפוסל במומו פוסל – whoever praises another is praising the positive elements inherent in his own personality - we suggest that the Bracha and praise (especially about her great Chessed) bestowed by Boaz upon Rut is a reflection of himself. Thus, Boaz praising Rut for her great Chessed projects his own Chessed in the manner in which he reacts to Rut’s outrageous intrusion. TABC Talmidim note that the reason Boaz is so kind to Rut is that she is a Giyoret and new to Judaism. He reasons that she likely does not realize she is acting incorrectly by Torah standards. Boaz thereby follows the Torah’s command (presented no less than thirty six

times!) to be kind to the Geir. Other TABC Talmidim noted that Boaz is also being kind to Rut since she is an Almanah and the Torah specifically forbids hurting an Almanah, with stiff warnings accompanying this prohibition.

The bottom line is, Boaz sets a powerful model for managing his emotions and acting with kindness in a situation where one could be easily slip into a rage.

Torah vs. Alcohol

Let us now return to Pasuk 7 where Boaz is described as **וַיֵּיטֵב לְבוֹ** is ordinarily understood as becoming inebriated as we find in Esther 1:10, **הַשְּׂבִיעִי**, **כְּטוֹב לֵב-הַמֶּלֶךְ**, **בַּיּוֹם**. The same appears in Shmuel II 13:28 **כְּטוֹב לֵב-אֶמְנוּן בַּיּוֹם**. However, in this case, Rashi (following as he usually does in the footsteps of Chazal) explains that he learned Torah.

We already focused on how this is a beautiful characterization of Talmud Torah, let us consider the implications for understanding this fateful night in Boaz's granary.

Perek 3 Pesukim 7 through 15 clearly support Chazal/Rashi's interpretation of **וַיֵּיטֵב לְבוֹ** in our context. Boaz's reaction is completely measured and sober. He hardly acts like one under the influence of alcohol! If so, why then does the Pasuk not simply state that Boaz learned Torah? Perhaps Megillat Rut uses the term **וַיֵּיטֵב לְבוֹ** since Boaz used Torah in a good and constructive way in a similar manner that the alcohol devotee uses his drink in a destructive manner – as a means to transcend day to day life.

Here, though, lies the huge difference – alcohol consumption leads one to lose control of his emotions and make decisions which he will severely regret in the long run (like Achashveirosh). One who lovingly embraces Torah and internalizes its priceless messages, on the other hand, allows himself to control his emotions and make decisions which will bring him great joy in the long run.

Boaz, inspired and strengthened by the Torah he just learned, makes excellent decisions – both Bein Adam LeChaveiro (refraining from pouring his wrath at Rut for having the Chutzpah to break into his barn and lie die next to Boaz in the dead of night) and Bein Adam LeMakom (restraining himself from Rut who, according to the Midrash, was an extraordinarily beautiful woman) for which he and his descendents can be proud in the

long run (despite for the discomfort he experienced in the short term).

וַיִּלְפַּת

Perek 3 Pasuk 8 records **וַיִּלְפַּת הָאִישׁ וַיִּתְּרֶד**. While **וַיִּתְּרֶד** is a fairly common word which connotes fear and intimidation, **וַיִּלְפַּת** is a relatively rare word and more challenging to understand. Rashi and Ibn Ezra explain **וַיִּלְפַּת** in terms of Boaz's shock at the unexpected visitor.

Now, for an utterly shocking Gemara! Sanhedrin 19b **מאי וילפת אמר רב שנעשה בשרו ראשי לפתות**. Talk about TMI (too much information)!! Really! Why do Chazal think we need to know this?

Let us consider Rashi at the end of Parashat Kedoshim (citing Rabi Elazar ben Azariah) for an answer **רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר מנין שלא יאמר אדם נפשי קצה בבשר חזיר, אי אפשי ללבוש כלאים, אבל יאמר אפשי, ומה אעשה ואבי שבשמים גזר עלי, תלמוד לומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים להיות לי, שתהא הבדלתכם מהם לשמי, פורש מן העבירה ומקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים**. One should not dismiss non-kosher food as repulsive. Rather one should regard it as appetizing but we refrain due to Hashem's command.

Sanhedrin 19b teaches that Boaz was **אפשי, ומה**. It vividly conveys the idea that Boaz is very much attracted to Rut. He refrains from the wrong behavior not due to lack of interest.

The following story, told by Rav Mordechai Kaminetzky, poignantly conveys this idea:

I once sat on an overseas flight next to a talkative executive who was skeptical about his own Jewish heritage. During the first hours of the flight, the man peppered me with questions, mostly cynical, about Judaism.

Then the meal came. I was served a half-thawed omelet that seemed to be hiding under a few peas and carrots. The half-cooked egg was nestled between a small aluminum pan and its quilted blanket of tape and double-wrapped aluminum foil. Next to me, the executive was served a steaming piece of roast pork on fine china, with a succulent side dish of potatoes au gratin and a glass of fine wine.

As if to score big, the executive tucked his napkin into his collar and turned to me. He stared at my pathetic portion and with sympathetic eyes sarcastically professed, "I'd love to offer you my meal, but I'm sorry you can't eat it!"

I did not buy into his gambit. "Of course I can eat

it!" I smiled. "In fact, I think I'll switch with you right now!" His smile faded. He was famished and in no way did he want to give away his portion. But he was totally mystified at my response. I saw the concern in his face. He was looking forward to eating this meal.

"I can have it if I want it. And if I don't want it I won't eat it. I have free choice and control over what I eat and what I don't. The Torah tells me not to eat this food and I have made a conscious choice to listen to the Torah. I therefore choose not to eat it."

Then, I went for broke: "Now let me ask you a question. Can you put the cover back on the food and hold yourself back from eating it?"

He smiled sheepishly and said, "You are not allowed to eat it. I, however, cannot not eat it." And with that he dug in.

A Tikkun for Yehuda and Lot

Finally, Boaz asking Rut (in Perek 3 Pasuk 9) מִי-אֶת, is a powerful example of Tikkun (later generations correcting the mistake of an earlier generation). Recall Bereishit Perek 38 וַיִּרְאֶה יְהוּדָה, וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לְזוֹנָה: כִּי כִסְתָהּ, פָּנֶיהָ. טו וַיֹּט אֶלֶיהָ אל-הַדֶּרֶךְ, וַיֹּאמֶר הִבֵּה-נָא אֲבוֹא אֵלַיָּהּ, כִּי לֹא יָדַע, כִּי כִלְתּוֹ הוּא; וַתֹּאמֶר, יְהוּדָה דֹּם-חַיִּתָּהּ לִי, כִּי תָבוֹא, אֵלַי. Yehuda does not bother to inquire as to the identity of the woman he encounters. Same with Lot. Boaz, unlike Yehuda and Lot, treats Rut and himself with respect. He controls his emotions unlike Lot and Yehuda (and Achashveirosh) whose emotions controlled them.

Conclusion

It is incumbent upon each of us to contemplate whether our emotions control us or if we control our emotions?! Talk about דְּבָרִים הַעֲוִמִּים בְּרוּמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם!! I hope we have succeeded in appreciating why Chazal view Boaz as an exceptional Tzaddik and most powerful role model!

Postscript – Beautiful Words from TABC Talmid Yitzi Weiss ('20)

Why is Boaz a Gadol Hador, a tzaddik, and a Chassid? It is not impressive to be a good person when everything in your life is going well. When a person is blessed with a beautiful, fully-functioning family, a good marriage, and financial success it is not impressive for that person to treat G-d and others well. Rather, it is expected. (Sure, you can say that there is a challenge that he should not say "Kochi Ve'Otzem Yadi," "My success is owed to myself," and he should recognize Hashem, but, nonetheless, his

challenges are minimal.) It is easy to act in a dignified manner when life is at its highs.

However, a person's character is really put to the test when they are put in a tough position. For instance, when Bnei Yisrael were faced with the Yam Suf in front of them and the Egyptian army charging from behind, they immediately began to complain. Then again, when they were thirsty for water, and the list goes on. Yet the same people sing so beautifully by Az Yashir when the sea is split for them.

Almost everyone will act appropriately when life is going well. It is how we deal with the hard times that defines us. Bnei Yisrael was a nascent nation with a long way to go when they left Egypt, and this reality is quite evident through the way they respond in a time of difficulty.

Alternatively, when a person can accept a hard time and, instead of folding, remain principled, and stick to their guns, it is an amazing thing and a true testament to the stability of one's character.

This time of Boaz's life was not an easy time. He had recently lost his wife, and he was presently worried about his livelihood (intruders stealing from him). Despite these circumstances, Boaz falls blind to instinct. He composes himself and reverts to his principles: his Emunah in Hashem. He opens a Sefer and sits down to learn. Through this peaceful internal encounter, his worry and loneliness (slicing through his heart) are relieved. At last, his heart feels "good". He repaired his wounds by letting G-d in.

In this way, Boaz achieves the level of a Chassid and a Tzaddik. His character has been tested in a hard time and he has prevailed. He understands that in a tough time all you can do is reach out to Hashem or reach out to a friend and let them in. All you can do is address the situation at hand in a healthy and productive way. This character trait, the ability to revert back to your principles and think clearly in a tough time, is my humble understanding of what it means to achieve the status of a Chassid and a Tzaddik.

The exact opposite is exhibited through the actions of Achashveirosh. His reaction to his insecurities is to drink. This unhealthy and counterproductive band-aid is the reaction of someone whose character is uncivilized. One who fails to understand that you cannot treat a deep, infected cut with a band-aid, mostly because

they are too afraid to see what is underneath it. Additionally, his decision under the influence was to have his wife killed - again addressing his insecurity, by putting a band-aid over it rather than addressing the real problem at hand. Achashveirosh is a prime example of a person with no moral backbone. He will fold every time. Finally, though, Boaz achieves something otherworldly. Perhaps his greatest test/difficulty yet is at his feet. On top of finally falling asleep through the noise of his troubles, Boaz is now frightened in the middle of the night to find an intruder at his feet. However, rather than reacting how we all may have, Boaz composes himself and then asks who she is. Immediately after, he praises her. This encounter, with respect to the added context, is out of this world. The character displayed within these lines is the most sharpened there is.

Getting scared represents instinct. One cannot make a calculated decision in a moment like this. When one is scared their truest nature is revealed. By Boaz responding the way he did in a time like this, he shows his true nature on the highest level. But, he was not born like this. Boaz worked and worked on himself until he could defy instinct. At this point, he has reached a level where he has transformed his being to the extent that he has changed his instinct/nature. He is the person he has created through hard work. This level is where he gained the “Gadol HaDor” title. This level is truly groundbreaking.

I once heard a great insight when I was in Eretz Yisrael at the Aish HaTorah building. A Rebbe explained to us that “we are placed into this world as a homo-sapien and it is our job that we leave a refined human being”.

We are all imperfect. We all have a ton of work to do. If we can work on ourselves to the extent that our natural instinct is overridden by our strong backbone of principles, we, like Boaz, can change our nature.

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