

"If Tomorrow Your Child Asks You"

A Passover Discourse by the Rebbe

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Glossary

Chabad: An approach to inspired living through engaging the mind in the contemplation of the divine. Relies heavily on Lurianic Kabbala and teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and his students.

Maamar: (pl: maamarim) A spoken meditation on matters of the divine. Meant to be memorized and pondered, especially before morning prayers.

Drush: (pl: drushim) An exploration of a classic text, usually scripture, for deeper meanings.

Text

Deuteronomy 6:20–25

כ. כִּי יִשְׁאַלְךָ בְּנֶךָ מָחָר לֵאמֹר מַה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים
וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ-הוֹי אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָכֶם:

20. If tomorrow your child asks you, "What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which יְיָ-הוֹי our God has commanded you?"

כא. וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבְנֶךָ עֲבָדִים הָיינוּ לְפָרְעוֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם
וַיֹּצִיאֵנוּ יְיָ-הוֹי מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה:

21. You shall say to your child, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and יְיָ-הוֹי took us out of Egypt with a strong hand.

כב. וַיִּתֵּן יְיָ-הוֹי אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים גְּדֹלִים וְרָעִים
בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּפָרְעוֹה וּבְכָל בֵּיתוֹ לְעֵינֵינוּ:

22. And יְיָ-הוֹי gave signs and wonders, great and terrible, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes.

כג. וְאוֹתָנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם לְמַעַן הִבִּיא אֶתְנוּ לְתֵת לָנוּ
אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ:

23. And he brought us out of there, so that He might bring us and give us the land which He swore to our fathers.

כד. וַיִּצְוֵנוּ יְיָ-הוֹי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה
לִירְאָה אֶת יְיָ-הוֹי אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל הַיָּמִים
לְחַיֵּתנוּ כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

24. And יְיָ-הוֹי commanded us to perform all these statutes, to fear יְיָ-הוֹי our God, for our good all the days, to keep us alive, as of this day.

כה. וְצִדְקָה תִּהְיֶה לָנוּ כִּי נִשְׁמַר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל
הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת לִפְנֵי יְיָ-הוֹי אֱלֹהֵינוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּנוּ:

25. And it will be for our merit that we will be careful to do all these commandments before יְיָ-הוֹי our God, as He has commanded us."

Haggadah

The wise child, what does he say?

"What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which יְיָ-הוֹי our God has commanded you?"

The wicked child, what does he say?

"What is this service to you?"

He says *you*, excluding himself.

By so excluding himself from the community, he has denied the main principle...

The Maamar

1. The problem with the wise child

If tomorrow your child asks you, “What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which ה-ה-ה our God has commanded you?”

—Deuteronomy, 6:20

The Hagadah identifies this child as the “wise child”:

The wise child, what does he say?

“What are the testimonies...”

—The Hagadah

Our rebbes and leaders of Chabad ask a simple question: Since he’s called wise—and true wisdom is Torah wisdom—he certainly must know about mitzvot. If so, what is he asking when he says, “What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws...”?

We can take this question a little further. Look at how the passage continues:

You should tell your child... And ה-ה-ה commanded us to perform all these statutes...for our own good...

The prescribed answer explains to the child the advantage of fulfilling mitzvot—that they are for our own good, etc. The implication is that we’ve interpreted the child’s question, “What are the testimonies...” as meaning, “What good are these mitzvot?” If so, this itself demands an explanation: How is it possible that a wise child should ask such a question?

Taking this yet further, we find an even greater puzzle: Analyzing the prescribed response, we discover two general thrusts:

“G-d took us out of Egypt...and commanded us...to do all these statutes.”

In other words, since He freed us from Egyptian bondage, we are now bonded to Him, to fulfill His mitzvot.

That fulfilling these mitzvot is “for our own good.”

The very fact that we are instructed to inform the child of these two ideas implies that to him both are revelations. So, if he doesn’t know what mitzvot are about—not only that mitzvot are for our own good, but even that we are required to do the mitzvot with “yoke of heaven” upon our shoulders—how, then, can we call him *wise*?

Another question to ask—and this is also a common question in the drushim: Look at the last words of the child’s question:

“...which ה our God has commanded you?”

Note the *you*—and not *us*. Compare this to the account in the Hagadah of the wicked child:

The wicked child, what does he say?

“What is this service to you?”

He says *you* and not *us*. By so excluding himself from the community, he has denied the main principle...

Yet the wise child has used the same language—and is still considered not wicked, but wise!

True, the wise child has prefaced that *you* by saying *our G-d*. If so, we can no longer err to think that he is excluding himself from the community. Nevertheless, we still need some explanation why he chooses to say *you*. Why not say, “...that our G-d has commanded us”? Or simply say, “that G-d has commanded” and stop there!

1b. The classic response

Here's the essential point of explanation provided in the drushim. It relies on a distinction between the way the forefathers performed mitzvot and the way we perform them post-Sinai:

For the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, fulfilling mitzvot was principally a spiritual job. Whatever physical activity involved was meant only as a vehicle to the spiritual activity.

For us, after the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, the main thing is to actually do something. Doing a mitzvah is not simply a preparation or a vehicle for mental focus—on the contrary: the main thing is action.

Take an example from a Passover-related mitzvah, eating matzah on the seder night: If a person will sit and focus his mind on all the Kabbalistic secrets of eaten matzah—but, G-d forbid, leave out the actual eating—he won't draw anything new into the world. If, on the other hand, he fulfills the mitzvah actively—even if he had no mental focus at all—he draws light into the world.

The wise child's question then, is:

"How can you possibly elicit a disclosure of the Infinite Light through a physical action (doing a mitzvah)?"

That explains why he says, "What are the testimonies... which ה'־הָּ our God has commanded you?" By saying *you*, he is specifying that he is asking about the mitzvot *after Sinai*. He is saying that since your job after the giving of the Torah is principally one of just doing—unlike the job of the forefathers—how can you elicit a disclosure of the Infinite Light this way?

The response is to explain that "we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out from Egypt...to do all these statutes..."

Meaning: The Egyptian exile and the exodus were a preparation to the giving of the Torah. Once the Torah was given, we were empowered that through doing mitzvot ("...to do all these statutes..."), we will elicit from higher than that which the forefathers could reach through their spiritual service, We will reach all the way to eliciting *The Essence*.

2. Questions on the classic response

A few things here require explanation. We seem to have explained why, after including himself with the rest of us by saying "which ה' our G-d commanded," the wise child uses the word *you* instead of *us*. This is because he is asking about the mitzvot as they are after the Torah was given and not about the mitzvot of our forefathers. Yet you would think that this would have been understood just as well if he had use a more inclusive term, saying, "that ה' our G-d commanded *us*."

We also need to explain why the wise child specifies "What are the testimonies, the statutes and the judgments..." Since his question pertains to mitzvot in general, what's his point in categorizing them? Especially when you consider that he's categorizing them according to the mental focus of the mitzvah:

Statutes (chukim חוקים) are mitzvot about which G-d says, "I have instituted a statute, decreed a decree, and you have no permission to deliberate over it." In other words, your intent in fulfilling them is simply that they are G-d's command.

Testimonies (eidot עדות) are mitzvot that provide testimony to an event of the past. For example, Shabbat testifies to G-d's creation of the world, as well as to our liberation from slavery in Egypt. Passover testifies to the events of that liberation. Sukkot testifies to the divine protection afforded us in our Exodus from Egypt through the Sinai Desert. Tefillin are a sign that since G-d liberated us from Egyptian bondage, we are bonded to Him. Obviously, all of these are meant to be performed with that understanding in mind—otherwise, why would they be called *testimonies*?

Judgments (mishpatim ומשפטים) are mitzvot that have an obvious utility to them. For example, honoring and respecting parents and elders contributes to a stable society, as does respect of private property and refraining from belligerence towards others. Even more than eidot, these are to be performed not just because G-d commanded them, but also because of their apparent reason.

For the wise child to use this categorization of the mitzvot here is puzzling, since, as we said, his question is about how the *physical act of the mitzvah* can have any effect—as opposed to the mental or spiritual focus that goes along with it.

Another puzzling issue is that, while the wise child asks concerning all three categories of mitzvot—eidot, chukim and mishpatim—the prescribed response, "...so G-d commanded us to do all these statutes," mentions only one: chukim.

Yet another puzzle: Let's examine again the three categories of mitzvot used by the wise child. We said that mishpatim are mitzvot that the human mind would obligate even had they not been commanded—such things as robbery, theft and honor due to parents. Eidot are those that are a symbolic memorial—such as Shabbat, Passover, Sukkot and Tefillin. Concerning mishpatim, the sages said, "If they were not commanded, we would learn modesty from the cat and respect of another's property from the ant." But let's say we had not been commanded to do the eidot. It's doubtful that we would choose on our own to commemorate these events in these ways. Yet, nevertheless, once we *have* been commanded to do things this way, we can intellectually accept that.

Chukim, on the other hand, are those mitzvah for which human intellect can find no space even once the Torah has commanded them. They are performed in the way we are told: "I have instituted a statute, decreed a decree."

If so, the order in which the wise child has placed these categories seems faulty. He could have said, "Mishpatim, Eidot and Chukim," thereby ordering them from most rational to most obedience; or "Chukim, Eidot and Mishpatim," the other way around. But the order of "Eidot, Chukim and Mishpatim" that he uses does not seem to satisfy any criteria.

3. A key from the previous Rebbe's maamar

We can gain some understanding of all this by first prefacing something my honored teacher and father-in-law, the rebbe, said in a maamar that began with this same verse. (He said this maamar on his first Passover in America, after he settled here.)

He also dwelt on this issue of the wise child reference to *you* rather than *us*, and how this seems to render him similar to the wicked child. He adds a point in that maamar: True, the wise child says "ה' our G-d" and thereby includes himself in the Jewish community, accepting upon himself to do whatever he must do as a Jew. Yet this is only when it comes to the mainstay. When it comes to the specific issues of chukim, eidot and mishpatim, there he says *you*.

From the language used in the maamar, we have an insight into our question. We also asked why the wise child says *you* and not *us*. But the question here is more specific: Why is it that when it comes to general principles—accepting the yoke of heaven along with his fellow Jews—the wise son doesn't leave us any room to err? There he explicitly includes himself. Why only when he refers to specifics—eidot, chukim and mishpatim—only then does he leave us room to wonder why he leaves himself out of the picture?

3a. The seed of the explanation

Phrasing the question this way will allow us to solve the puzzle. You see, the explanation could possibly be as follows:

In mitzvot, there are two elements:

All mitzvot are commands from ה'. This element is an equal and common denominator.

Mitzvot are divided into three categories of eidot, chukim and mishpatim.

These two elements are also factors in our mindful intent when performing mitzvot. In that intent, there are also two elements:

A general intent that by doing this mitzvah I am fulfilling G-d's command. This intent is the same no matter what mitzvah you are doing.

A specific intent dependent on the mitzvah—whether because it testifies to some event (eidot), or because so G-d has decreed (chukim), or because even if I hadn't been commanded it would make sense to keep this (mishpatim).

The question of the wise child, "What are the eidot, the chukim and the mishpatim..." is then:

"Since all mitzvot are G-d's will and command, what does it matter that some are eidot, some chukim and some mishpatim?"

That's why the maamar is harping on this that even once he has said *our G-d* concerning the generalities, we might still err to think that he excludes himself from the community when it comes to the details—and therefore should have said *us* instead of *you*: What the maamar is pointing out is that it is possible to parse these two sections of his statement, one referring to the general focus of every mitzvah, and the other referring to the specifics. That, in fact, is essential to the wise child's question:

"Since all mitzvot are G-d's will and command, what does it matter that some are eidot, some chukim and some mishpatim?"

4. Three elements in every mitzvah

All this can be understood according to another key issue discussed in that maamar. We are told that these three categories of eidot, chukim and mishpatim are not just categories, but really elements of every mitzvah.

The mitzvot of chukim and mishpatim are also called **eidot**—as it says in Psalms, “He established eidot in Jacob...”

The same when it comes to **chukim**: the reasons provided for eidot and mishpatim only apply to the general whole of the mitzvah, but not to its details. When it comes to details, we’re back to “I instituted a statute, I decreed a decree.”

And similarly with **mishpatim**: In the mitzvot of eidot and chukim, there is also an element of mishpatim.

There’s a larger idea behind this. You see, in the disclosure of G-dliness that happens through mitzvot, there are three general levels:

The light that is fitted to the worlds that G-d created. In general, we call this “ohr hamemalleh אור הממלא”—meaning, “the light that fills everything.”

The light that is beyond investment into any world, but still has some relation to them. In general, we call this “ohr hasovev אור הסובב”—meaning, “the light that encompasses everything.”

The quintessential Infinite Light (Atzmut Ohr Ein Sof אין סוף) that absolutely transcends any relationship to worlds.

The light that fills all—ohr hamemalleh—can be grasped intellectually as well. That’s why it’s drawn into the world through the element of mishpatim—the rational side of mitzvot.

The light that encompasses all—ohr hasovev—cannot be grasped inductively. The only way to approach it through a kind of negative, deductive reasoning. Knowing of something that your mind cannot directly approach is a surrender of the mind to something greater than itself. Therefore, the way the ohr hasovev is extended into the world is through us fulfilling chukim—since chukim are all about surrendering your intellect, “you have no permission to deliberate over them.”

Once we get to the quintessential Infinite Light, however, we are talking about something that is not relative to any world or level. So neither can we say that this is outside the realm of intellect. Like it’s explained in Tanya, that someone who says about G-d that He is impossible to understand is like someone who says about some lofty and deep concept that it’s impossible to touch it with his hands. The Tanya continues that “anyone hearing such a statement would laugh at it.” This kind of negative metaphor—saying that one thing is not at all like another—is only useful when those two things have some relationship between one another. Intellect and tactility are two distinct realms that have no relationship between them.

(Perhaps it’s possible to add: In the analogy of intellect and tactility, since both are finite creations, there is some sort of relationship there—which is not there in the analog. So really we should say that it’s even more absurd to say that we cannot understand G-d than it is to say that you cannot touch an idea.)

That is why drawing the quintessential Infinite Light cannot be accomplished through chukim—abnegation of intellect: When it comes to the quintessential Infinite Light, the statement “intellect has no place” is not applicable. The reason that mitzvahs are able to draw the quintessence of the Infinite Light is not because they transcend intellect, but simply because they are the will and dictate of that quintessence.

Mitzvah	Relationship	Brings...
Eidot עדות	Reasonable	Quintessential Infinite Light
Chukim חוקים	Beyond Reason	Light that encompasses all
Mishpatim משפטים	Rational	Light that fills all

4b. Eidot

This brings us to the mitzvot that are called eidot—testimonies. The reason all the mitzvot (even chukim and mishpatim) are called by the name eidot is because they draw and reveal the inherent concealment of the quintessential Infinite Light, which is yet higher than the encompassing light.

This is why it is called testimony. A court only requires testimony on something that is unknown. When it comes to something obviously apparent, testimony is superfluous—it's there before us.

Even when it comes to the sort of matter that the Talmud says, "inevitably will become public knowledge," testimony is not required. In such cases, the court only requires sufficient evidence.

The same applies with the non-physical: The ohr hamemalleh (light that fills all) is something obviously apparent and intellectually understood.

The ohr hasovev (encompassing light) transcends investment in created worlds—similar to something that will "inevitably become public knowledge." We could say that it is a kind of concealment that is liable to disclosure. Why? Because once we grasp the ohr hamemalleh that is invested within our reality, we realize that it must be only a reflection of something much greater. After all, it is invested in a particular instance, namely this world. So we come to a knowledge that there must be a light that transcends this world, and ultimately, any world. We call this the ohr hasovev: the source of the glimmer of light invested within our world.

The idea of eidot, on the other hand, relates to the quintessence of the Infinite Light, beyond even sovev. It is that which is not relatively concealed, or liable to disclosure, but concealed absolutely and in essence. Mitzvot are called eidot, then, because they draw and reveal the quintessential Infinite Light that transcends even the encompassing light.

Mitzvah	Equivalent	Below	Above
Eidot עדות	Testimony	The unknowable	G-d Himself
Chukim חוקים	Evidence	Events liable to disclosure	G-d's transcendence
Mishpatim משפטים	Nothing	Common public knowledge	G-d's immanence

5. Chukim and engraving

A few more concepts and definitions		
Term	Direct Translation	Meaning
Etzem עצם	bone	an essence, the thing itself
Ohr אור	light	information about a thing
Gilui גילוי	disclosure, revelation	the perception of the thing externally
Otiot אותיות	letters	articulations of information

A few more concepts and definitions		
Term	Direct Translation	Meaning
Ketter כתר	Crown	intermediary stage between Etzem and creation
Bittul ביטול	Nullification	as something loses something of itself in the context of something greater

Let's explain the advantage of eidot over chukim in greater detail. After all, in chukim G-d's raw will is also expressed openly. Providing reasons for a mitzvah makes it more palatable, but also conceals the raw will inside. In chukim, we are not distracted by reason—since chukim are openly super-rational desires. What, then, is the advantage of eidot in expressing G-d's innermost will?

We can understand this through something else explained in the maamar, that "chukim are from the same etymology as *chakikah*." Chakikah means engraving. If you follow that maamar through, you will see that there are two things he wants to bring out with this.

The first is the advantage engraved letters have over written letters: when you engrave letters, they are not extrinsic to the material upon which they are engraved. The maamar relates this to the aspect of Ketter.

What does the maamar mean by comparing Ketter—which is interchangeable with sovev (the encompassing light)—to engraved letters? Perhaps because when the ohr hamemaleh is revealed it is a bounded disclosure, and therefore almost as though it were extrinsic to the etzem from which it extends. A disclosure of the ohr hasovev, since it is unbounded just as the etzem, is not extrinsic to the etzem.

[In the footnote, the Rebbe compares this to the color white, and to the four letter name of G-d, called the "shem ha-etzem"—the essential name.]

Another idea of chukim in the sense of engraving is that through the chukim an engraving is made in the world. This is cited in the Midrash¹ as an interpretation of the verse, "If it were not for my covenant day and night, I never set the statutes of heaven and earth."² The Midrash relates this to the chukim of Torah, saying that they are "the statutes with which I engraved the heavens and the earth." The maamar explains this "engraving" of heaven and earth as the bittul effected in the world through drawing the sovev—which is itself the engraving above.

5b. The problem with chukim

Now, although we said that engraving does not add anything to the etzem itself, nevertheless a change is still being effected in the engraved material, so that it does not remain as it was before the engraving. For example, if you engrave letters in a stone: At first, this was a simple stone, and now it is decorated with letters. (This is particularly significant when the engraving is in a luminous, sparkling stone. In the place of the engraving, that stone no longer sparkles as much).

Another issue (aside from the change (degradation) in the stone by the engraving) is that engraving is all about an empty space. Something is now missing from the stone. In other words, the engraving itself is in a way the opposite of the stone.

Let's apply these two ideas to the analog of the ohr hasovev: On the one hand, we can say that the degradation of the light to become ohr hasovev to the worlds is like the change and degradation effected in the stone—that it is no longer simple (and neither does it shine and sparkle as much). It's no longer in its original, prime state. We can also say that by this occurring, there is now a possibility for a world to exist (a world comes into existence through the medium of the ohr hasovev). The word *world* in Hebrew is directly related to the word *helem*, which means concealment—because the very

¹ Midrash Rabba, Vayikra 35:4

² Jeremiah 33:25

existence of a world is the opposite of revealed light. This is just the same as engraving, by which something of the stone is lost.

Perhaps then, all this can be applied to the chukim: they are called chukim, related to chakikah (engraving) for both of the reasons above.

The idea is that these are called “chukim” in consonance with the statement of our sages, that G-d says, “I have instituted a statute, decreed a decree, and you have no permission to rue over it.” There are two things going on here. One is that the will for chukim is (not as it is at His very quintessence, rather) in a posture of descent, so to speak, stepping down to dismiss reason (“you have no permission to rue after it”). That is like the change and degradation in the stone caused by the engraving.

Then there is another way of looking at it: There is now a mind (the one that this will for chukim is dismissing) that exists in such a way that its understanding and comprehension is the opposite of this will—to the point that it is necessary to dismiss it and say that you do not have permission to rue over this.

Accordingly, we have a better understanding of the advantage of Eidot over Chukim: The whole idea of chukim are mitzvot in a posture of descent, negating something (namely intellect) that is its opposite. Eidot, on the other hand, are the will for mitzvot as they exist within His quintessential being.

Chukim and Transcendence		
?	☞	☜
Engraving	Intrinsic	Compromised
Laws of Nature	Effect Bittul	Create negative space

6. Applied

We’ve discussed the distinction between Eidot on the one hand and Chukim and Mishpatim on the other in cosmic terms: Chukim and Mishpatim are within the forms of light that exist in relationship to the cosmos—Mishpatim in the light that is invested within the created worlds (memaleh) and Chukim in the light that transcends investment (sovev). Eidot are in the essential Infinite Light that is beyond any relationship with the cosmos.

Now we can apply this same scheme to your personal divine service: Chukim and Mishpatim lie within the realm of human intellect (at least, that level of the soul that relates to intellect). In other words, meditation.

(With a distinction: Concerning mishpatim, the meditation is in the reasons for mitzvot. This includes the meditation that even the mitzvahs that are chukim have reasons, only that the reasons for these mitzvot are in G-d’s own wisdom, not extending to the intellect of created beings. And concerning chukim, the meditation is that all the mitzvot—even those that are called mishpatim—are G-d’s will, a will that transcends reason, even the reason that exists in G-d’s own wisdom.)

The idea behind eidot, on the other hand, lies in *the person himself*. As the verse says, “You are My witnesses.” “You” doesn’t just mean that you *bear* testimony, but that you yourselves are both the testifier and the testimony. Since the soul of every single Jew is a “share of G-d Above, *mamesh*, being rooted in the quintessence (higher than the root of Torah and mitzvot), therefore the very existence of a Jew testifies to that quintessence. It’s just that the disclosure of this root of the soul is through the eidot of the mitzvot.

7. Hamshacha versus Gilui

Device	Translation	Deals with...
Hamshacha	drawing, extending	the thing itself

Device	Translation	Deals with...
Gilui	disclosure, opening up	information about the thing

It could be said that the main idea of mitzvot is that they are eidot—an extension of the quintessence of the Infinite Light. The chukim and mishpatim aspects of the mitzvot (how they extend the ohr hasovev and the ohr hamemaleh) is secondary: The whole point of drawing (hamshacha) that quintessence into the world through mitzvot is that it should be “out in the open” (gilui). But, since that quintessence transcends disclosure, therefore the gilui of this transported quintessence (eidot) is through the ohr hasovev and the ohr hamemaleh (chukim and mishpatim). First off, there’s the eidot—drawing the quintessence itself. Then—so that it can be disclosed—there’s a gilui of the ohr hamemaleh, through the chukim-concept of mitzvot. Then—so that the gilui can be absorbed—there’s a gilui of the ohr hamemaleh drawn through the mishpatim-concept of the mitzvot.

So now we can try to understand the question of the wise child. We said that his question was: Since the mitzvot are all G-d’s commands, why are they divided into eidot, chukim and mishpatim? This fits also to the earlier explanation—that his question is: How is it possible to effect a disclosure of G-dliness through the post-Sinai mitzvot, since their whole focus is just getting it done?

7a. Explanation of the Wise Child’s Question

Now comes the explanation: That G-dliness is drawn into the world by doing mitzvot is not so amazing—they are, after all, G-d’s will. The wise child’s question is on how through doing mitzvot we draw a *gilui* of G-dliness. *Gilui* would seem to be related to a spiritual service, not physical action.

That’s why he enumerates eidot, chukim and mishpatim. He doesn’t just say, “What are these mitzvot?” Mitzvot draw G-dliness into the world because of their common denominator—that they are G-d’s dictate and will. The division into eidot, chukim and mishpatim is another idea—gilui, disclosing that G-dliness openly (through eidot, subliminally; through chukim transcendently; through mishpatim a gilui that is absorbed inwardly).

The question of the wise child is, “These mitzvot of post-Sinai, which their main focus is physically getting done—their whole point is to bring G-dliness here. So how are eidot, chukim and mishpatim relevant, since that’s all about gilui?”

8. The Answer to the Wise Child

We answer the wise child, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. And G-d took us out from there...”

What we are telling him is that at the giving of the Torah (to which the Egyptian exile and exodus were a prelude), we were given the capacity to draw the highest hamshachot. But not only that: we were given the capacity that those hamshachot that we draw through physical-action mitzvot will be with gilui.

That’s why we say, “And G-d commanded us to do all these chukim, to revere...” The word revere is “yirah” which are the same letters are “r’iyah”—seeing (as the maamar states). We are saying that the hamshachot that we do through the mitzvot (“commanded us to do”) will be with gilui, to the point that they will be visible to us. The main gilui through our action of mitzvot will be in the time to come. Then the vision will be on the highest level, to the point of “seeing Havaya our G-d.” That means seeing the essence of the Infinite, blessed be He.

That’s why we say to him that G-d “commanded us to do all the *chukim...*”: When we do the mitzvot only because of their reasons, the hamshachot of the mitzvot remain subliminal. The only way that the hamshachot of mitzvot can be with gilui is when their performance (even of eidot and mishpatim) is because they are simply G-d’s commands—like the chukim.

9. Why is a Wise Child Asking This?

Nevertheless, after all we’ve said, we still need further explanation why a child who is called wise by the “Torah of Truth” asks this question. Since he is wise, it’s reasonable to assume that he is aware of the revolution that the giving of the Torah caused in the world. He knows that at Matan Torah, the power was given to draw the highest hamshachot into the world by doing action mitzvot, and that these hamshachot will be open, with gilui. So what is his question, “What are the testimonies...?”

We can explain this with a reference to something discussed elsewhere, concerning the stories of the forefathers that are written in the Torah. The question is, what are these stories doing there? Whatever the forefathers did was only a preface to what we accomplish in a post-Sinai world.

It must be that even now, there is something we must do that is similar to the work that the forefathers did. What is that? It concerns the imperative that every day the Torah must be (like new, or even more, actually) new in our eyes. The point is that this is not just a sense of value and endearment of Torah and mitzvot. It concerns also the way we learn that Torah and the way we fulfill those mitzvot. Every day they have to be on a yet higher level, as the dictum, “in matters of holiness, you must go higher, but not lower.” Not just higher, but incomparably higher, and to the point that you look at the Torah and mitzvot you did previously and they are (as though they were insignificant, or) insignificant relative to the Torah and mitzvot of this day today.

That’s how even now, after the Torah was given, there still must be a kind of work that’s similar to the work of the forefathers of pre-Sinai. The giving of the Torah happens every day. That’s why we say, “Blessed are You...*giver* of the Torah” in present tense, and not “who gave the Torah.” So each day, you must be on a yet higher level. Which explains why you must serve G-d in the same modality as the forefathers did in your preparation for the giving of the Torah of this day.

Now we can explain the question of the wise child, “What are the testimonies...which G-d our G-d commanded *you*.” Since the Torah and mitzvot of the wise child are actually new each day, therefore he is perpetually in a pre-Sinai state. That’s why he says *you* and not *us*—alluding to the fact that he himself still stands before the giving of the Torah.

10. The Night of Passover

There’s a connection here to be made with the wise child’s question and the night of Passover. Although the question, “What are the testimonies...” is quite simply a question on all of Torah and mitzvot, nevertheless, the night of Passover is the main day for this question. This is because Passover is the birth of the Jewish nation.

This fact is used to explain the connection between the night of Passover and the mitzvah of *chinuch*—to raise children, training them in the Jewish way. That *chinuch*, after all, begins the moment the child is born.

So there is your connection: Since the wise child is rising higher and yet higher continuously, he asks “What are the testimonies,” because he stands perpetually before the giving of the Torah, at a point where he can’t relate to anything at all, like a child who was just now born.

11. The Response

This is the meaning of the response, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. And Havaye took us out of Egypt with a strong arm...”: Even someone who is at the level of child just born (including this level in its most simple sense, not as the wise child who is at this level through all the ascents he has made), and more than that, even someone who is in a situation where he is a slave to Pharaoh in Egypt (prior to the birth of the Exodus), G-d takes out even that person with a mighty hand.

A mighty hand indicates a tremendous degree of revelation, to the point of “then the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, was revealed to them in all His glory, He Himself, and He redeemed them. This is a jump from one extreme to another—from the lowest depth (slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt) to the highest heights, the revelation of G-d Himself in all His glory.

11a. Sign Off

And so it should be for us, that “As the days that you left Egypt, so I will show them wonders” in a *geulah* that jumps from one extreme to the other, out of the doubly intense darkness of exile. And especially in the generation of the “heels of the moshiah” when the darkness is even greater than that, this is the time when we should come immediately to the *gilui* of “And the glory of Havaye will be revealed and all flesh will see...” And sovereignty will be G-d’s, with the coming of the righteous moshiah, speedily in our days *mamesh*.