

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

I frequently have a feeling that Hashem wrote a week's parsha thinking of current events. The Tochachah gives me this feeling again. The essence of the message of chapter 26 is that God gave us blessings and curses – blessings if we go in Hashem's way (grow in Torah and mitzvot) or curses if we ignore them (especially shmittah, Shabbat for the land of Israel). In this sense, the path for B'Nai Yisrael is up to us. If we study Torah and live with the mitzvot, and if we observe the mitzvot with joy, then Israel will survive and we shall have rewarding lives. However, if we ignore the blessings that Hashem makes available to us, the land will vomit out our people, and horrible curses will make our lives miserable. Why would people given such a wonderful promise give up these blessings for the curses of ignoring God's mitzvot? Even with these curses, however, God will keep His promise to our Ancestors. He will redeem us, bring us back to the land, and give us another opportunity to walk with Hashem.

Rav Kook reminds us of blessings hidden in the curses of the Tochachah:

"I will make the land so desolate that [even] your enemies who live there will be astonished. I will scatter you among the nations, and keep the sword drawn against you. Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins." (Lev. 26:32-33)

The Ramban noted that a remarkable blessing lies hidden among all of these punishments.

"What it says, 'your enemies who live there will be desolated' — this is, in fact, good news. It proclaims that during all of our exiles, our Land does not accept our enemies.

The hidden blessing is that God gave Israel to B'Nai Yisrael – and that gift is permanent. Because Hashem reserved Israel exclusively for the Jews, no other people have ever or will ever be able to make the land flourish. Rav Kook refers to Ramban's observations of the land in 1267 and Mark Twain's observations in 1867. In both cases, the authors wrote about the desolate land, arid and empty of signs that the land could be fertile or productive. Even today, cross from Israel into the surrounding areas and there is little to see except remains of low walls that our Jewish ancestors built more than two thousand years ago. When God throws the Jews out of Israel, the land waits for Him to decide that it is time to remember His promise to our Avot and bring us back to the land. By making the land desolate in the absence of the Jews, Hashem ensures that Israel will always remain exclusively a Jewish country.

Of all the countries whose founding principles relate to the Torah, the United States comes closest. In the United States, we read the Tochachah this year on the Shabbat before Memorial Day, a time when we remember the soldiers who gave their lives to preserve freedom for our country. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a chaplain in the Navy, served in Japan (and became fluent in Japanese), and served during summers for many years after leaving the service. Rabbi Cahan expressed his love for his country for the two countries with the most to offer to Jews – Israel and the United States. According to the Internet, 85 percent of the Jews in the world live in Israel or the United States. While Israel is the only country that God promised to the Jews, threats to any country now come from any place in the world. Fortunately, strong support for Israel from the United States helps protect Israel and keep the country free. One can see

Hashem working behind the scenes in providing a base of Jews to help keep Israel strong – and a core of Jews in many other countries to ensure that an enemy seeking to destroy all the Jews would need to work in many countries to succeed. The dispersion of Jews, unfortunate in many ways, also protects us in case the land throws the Jews out of Israel again. Hopefully another Tochachah will not occur within the lifetime of any of my friends or family.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Bechukosai: A Most Beautiful Orchard (5763)

by Rabbi Label Lam

If you will go in My statutes and My commandments you will keep and you will perform them I will give your rain their time and the earth will give its produce and the tree of the field its fruit...
(Vayikra 26:3-4)

That you should toil in Torah study (Rashi)

If you do not listen to me and you do not do all these commandments...(Vayikra 26:14) To toil in Torah study (Rashi)

The Torah pulls no punches. Why should we? Toiling in Torah or not makes us or breaks us. How does it work? What's the dynamic?

Rabbi Yaakov said: *One who walks on the road while reviewing (a Torah lesson) and he interrupts his review and exclaims, "How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!" – Scripture considers it as if he bears guilt for his soul.* (Mishne Avos 3:9)

What's the great crime involved with taking the time to admire the great works of The Creator? The Chovos HaLevavos devotes a large segment of his classic work on the need to research the workings of the world to appreciate the kindness and the genius of The Creator. The Rambam says that's the way to come to appropriate fear and love of The Almighty. So?

Bride and groom were shmoozing on the phone when the groom sensed his bride was no longer there listening. He became alarmed, wondering what had happened to her. After many minutes she returned to the “dangling conversation” apologetically. Assuring her “husband to be” that she was safe, she explained that she had been staring at the diamond in her engagement ring and that she had become so bedazzled by its beauty that she just let the phone go.

The groom expressed his deep disappointment. She couldn't imagine what she had done so wrong. This was the ring that he had given her. She assumed he would be flattered. He explained, “The ring I gave you to remind you of me and as a symbol of my love for you when I am not there. When I am here talking with you how can you allow the ring to distract you?” It's much like mother who responded to an admiring compliment, “What a cute baby!” – “If you think the baby's cute, you should see the pictures!”

The Mishne describes someone who interrupts the process of his learning Torah to declare his admiration for a tree or a plowed field. In the process of Torah learning we are actually listening to and actively engaged in a conversation with The Almighty. The stunning quality of the creation is like that diamond that serves to awaken within us a sense of love and awe. We understand that beauty is a stimulant not a substitute for the essential relationship.

A question continually reoccurred as we took a breathtaking ride upstate New York and through to Montreal a few weeks ago. The trees and the plowed fields inspired us all along the way. Why does the Mishne focus on these two items the "tree" and the "plowed field"? What extra message is implied by these two specific items?

A tree stands as a marvelous example of what The Creator can do. After all "only G-d can make a tree"! From that little computer chip-like seed exits such luscious results all called magically from that dark earth. Surprise! Inside each fruit are the architectural plans for many more trees. It's a wondrous piece of work.

A plowed field represents what a man can make of himself. The Maharal says that humanity was called "Adam from "earth" to point out the purity of his potential. If cleared and plowed systematically a plot of land can be enormously productive. If left to chaotic forces however, through benign neglect, the mind of a man becomes more and more crowded with weeds.

What's wrong with this picture? One gazes upon a tree and then a plowed field. Think! Think potential! What if we wed what The Almighty has to offer with the best of what a man can be? How can one fail to envision an orchard?

Such is the subtle reminder to the one having disconnected his self from the process to become a spectator rather than a player to get back to business. Through the toil of sowing seeds of wisdom within the yet pure soil, the earth of even the human heart can be transformed into a most beautiful orchard.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5763-bechukosai/>

Bechukotai -- Wanted: Dead AND Alive

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

When introducing the blessings, the Parsha states, "If you will go in My laws, and observe My commandments..." The wording of this introduction seems redundant. What does it mean to "go" in the laws that would not have been included in observance?

The Maharal explains that "going" refers to growth in Torah and our relationship with Mitzvos. In other words, observance alone is something that can have us slipping into stagnation. To "go" in Torah means to go deeper so that we have deeper understanding and depth in observance.

Some people think that such growth is only for the advanced, such as Torah scholars. Indeed, Torah scholars constantly strive to achieve new levels of greatness in Torah. But this concept of "going" in Torah applies to every Jew. We may not all be able to spend many hours learning Torah and delving into its deepest messages. But we should each have serenity time: time which is set aside to "go" in Torah, to advance and become greater.

Sometimes, a person really does want to study and advance in Torah. It just seems that the obligations of life get in the way.

The story is told of a wealthy man who often invited poor people to his home for dinner. His generosity was such that the table was set beautifully; he offered much food to his guests. But he had one fault. He was very curious.

As soon as the poor guest would sit down, the host would pepper the guest with questions about his family and hometown. Trying to be courteous, the poor person would try to answer the questions politely. But, by the time he did so, the course was over, and the poor man didn't get to eat.

No one was quite sure if the wealthy man was being mean or was just insatiably curious. It really made no difference. Invariably, his guests left hungry.

One day, a guest arrived in town from the very town where the wealthy man had grown up. The locals warned the beggar not to accept an invite from this wealthy man. If he would end up in this wealthy man's home, he would surely never be able to eat. He would have to fill the man in on all the details of the town of his youth. The beggar listened to the warning respectfully and then proceeded to accept the invitation to the wealthy man's house.

As they sat down to eat, the wealthy man asked him where he was from. When the beggar responded that he was from the town that the host grew in, the host began asking questions. "So how is the butcher doing?" he asked. The beggar replied, "The butcher?! He's dead." The wealthy man was a bit shocked. He asked, "And what about the mayor?" Between mouthfuls, the beggar answered, "Oh, he's also dead." The wealthy man continued to inquire about the townspeople, but the response was always the same.

Finally, the wealthy man sensed that something was up. He asked, "Is there anyone left alive in the town?"

The beggar replied, "Actually, when I am eating, the whole world is dead."

Perhaps that attitude can work for us when we try to enjoy a few minutes of Torah growth and learning but life seems to get in the way. We live in a society that seems to have us always "on call." We seem to pay allegiance to our phones, texting, email, and more. Instead, for a few minutes, we need to make believe that all is dead. We can silence our phones, close our computers, and proceed to savor the delights of Torah.

I knew a great businessman who told his secretary to hold the calls while he devoted himself to half an hour of Torah study at midday. He said, "Make believe I'm dead." With an engaging smile he explained, "Everyone should be able to manage without me for a half hour."

Torah study is the key to Torah growth. The rewards for "going" in Torah are the blessings of the Parsha. Sometimes it pays to play dead for a few minutes. The reward for playing dead is to experience life.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Traditional Modernity: Thoughts for Parashat Behukotai

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his book, *The Perspective of Civilization*, Fernand Braudel utilizes a concept that he calls "world-time." Braudel notes that at any given point in history, all societies are not at the same level of advancement. The leading countries exist in world-time; that is, their level of advancement is correlated to the actual date in history.

However, there also are countries and civilizations which are far behind world-time, whose way of life may be centuries or even millennia behind the advanced societies. While the advanced technological countries exist in world-time, underdeveloped countries lag generations behind; some societies are still living as their ancestors did centuries ago. In short, everyone in the world may be living at the same chronological date, but different societies may be far from each other in terms of world-time.

Braudel's analysis also can be extended to the way people think. Even though people may be alive at the same time, their patterns of thinking may be separated by generations or even centuries. The characteristic of Modern Orthodoxy is that it is modern, that it is correlated to the contemporary world-time. Being part of contemporary world-time, it draws on the

teachings of modern scholarship, it is open to modern philosophy and literature, and it relates Jewish law to contemporary world realities.

On the other hand, “non-modern” Orthodoxy does not operate in the present world-time. Its way of thinking and dealing with contemporary reality are pre-modern, generations behind contemporary world-time.

The differences between so-called right-wing Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy are not differences in sincerity or in authentic commitment. Rather, the differences stem from different world views, from living in different world-times. A Modern Orthodox Jew does not wish to think like a medieval rabbi, even though he wishes to fully understand what the medieval rabbi wrote and believed. The Modern Orthodox Jew wishes to draw on the wisdom of the past, not to be part of the past. The philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy is not at all new. Rather, it is a basic feature of Jewish thought throughout the centuries. In matters of halakha, for example, it is axiomatic that contemporary authorities are obligated to evaluate halakhic questions from their own immediate perspective, rather than to rely exclusively on the opinions of rabbis of previous generations. The well-known phrase that “Yiftah in his generation is like Shemuel in his generation” (Rosh haShanah 25b) expresses the need to rely on contemporary authorities, even if they are not of the stature of the authorities of previous generations. We are obligated to be “Modern Orthodox,” to recognize present reality and to participate in contemporary world-time.

One of the weaknesses of contemporary Orthodoxy is that it is not “modern” in the sense just discussed. There is a prevailing attitude that teaches us to revere the opinions of the sages of previous generations, and to defer to those contemporary sages who occupy a world-time contemporary with those sages. Who are the sages of the present world-time, who absorb the contemporary reality, the contemporary ways of thinking and analyzing? To be Modern Orthodox Jews means to accept our limitations, but it also means that we must accept our responsibility to judge according to what our own eyes see, according to our own understanding. It means to have the self-respect to accept that responsibility.

Modern Orthodoxy and pre-Modern Orthodoxy do not engage in meaningful dialogue because they operate in separate world-times. The sages of each generation are influenced by the social and political realities of their time. If many of our sages in the past believed in demons and witches, if they thought that the sun revolved around the earth, or if they assigned inferior status to women and slaves — we can understand that they were part of a world that accepted these notions. We do not show disrespect for them by understanding the context in which they lived and thought. On the contrary, we are able to understand their words better, and thus we may determine how they may or may not be applied to our own contemporary situation. It is not disrespectful to our sages if we disagree with their understanding of physics, psychology, sociology, or politics. On the contrary, it would be foolish not to draw on the advances in these fields that have been made throughout the generations, including those of our own time.

There is no sense in forcing ourselves into an earlier world-time in order to mold our ways of thinking into harmony with modes of thought of sages who lived several hundred or even several thousand years ago. This week's Torah portion begins: “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and do them...” The Torah uses three verbs to urge us to follow the mitzvoth: walk, keep, do. The emphasis is on action. It has been pointed out that the word for Jewish law is halakha, which means the path on which we should walk. Walking entails movement, not stagnating. Rabbi Haim David Halevy, among others, has noted that Judaism could not have survived all these many centuries unless the halakha was a living, moving organism that kept in tune with the times. As new developments and challenges arose, the halakha faced them directly. To live in modern world-time is a prerequisite to being faithful to Jewish tradition.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/being-true-oneself-and-othersthoughts-parashat-behar>

**Children in Synagogue; Putin; Smart Phones; Chat Rooms:
Rabbi M. D. Angel Responds to Questions from the Jewish Press***
by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Is it proper to bring very young children to shul?

Many parents want their children to become accustomed to attending synagogue from an early age. That's fine; but parents must assume responsibility for their children during services. If the children become restless, noisy, and disruptive to others, then parents need to bring them out of the sanctuary until they settle down.

Many synagogues provide child care during services, so that children can spend some time in the main sanctuary and the rest of the morning in child care/youth programs/youth services.

If children are very young, it's very difficult to expect them to stay quiet for a long stretch of time. As they grow older, the time they spend in services can be gradually increased.

It is essential for parents to be extra sensitive to the needs of the entire kahal when they bring their children to synagogue. It is essential for the kahal to be very understanding and patient when it comes to the needs of parents and young children. Striking the right balance isn't always easy. But it can be done with the goodwill of all the members of the community — young and old.

Is it proper to daven for the demise of Putin in order to save lives in Ukraine, and stop him from additional aggression? What about a supporter of Russia davening for victory in taking over Ukraine?

It is proper to pray for peace. It is proper to pray that human beings will all strive to live up to their potential as having been created in Hashem's image. It is proper to seek Hashem's guidance for a troubled humanity...for refuat hanefesh and refuat haguf.

It is not proper to use prayer as a magical gimmick or as a p.r. event. Prayer is not a tool for manipulating the actions of the Almighty, but a humble gesture of dependence on Hashem.

Bruriah taught that it's best not to pray for the demise of sinners...but to pray for the elimination of the sins themselves. Our prayers should seek Hashem's help in showing tyrannical leaders the errors of their ways; moving them to reconsider their destructive policies; guiding all leaders on all sides to genuinely consider what is right and best for their own citizens.

It is proper to pray for peace and human understanding. It is proper — and vital — for these prayers to be accompanied by suitable actions that help make our world a better, safer, and happier place.

**Is it proper now to own a smartphone? When is it appropriate to use one and when not?
Does using the filter solve the problem?**

Each of us has the right and responsibility to make decisions that affect our lives. When we face change — technological or otherwise — we need to be able to evaluate the positives and negatives — and then decide what's best for us.

Smart phones are incredibly useful in so many ways. They are amazingly helpful in maintaining quick and easy communications. They provide instant information on the weather and the news. The apps make it easy for us to drive without getting lost; to order an Uber driver or a pizza; and so many other features that simplify our lives.

Yes, it's possible to over-use or mis-use a smartphone. But that is true of many things. The question isn't whether it's proper to own a smartphone; the question is are we responsible enough to use smartphones wisely.

If you wonder whether or not you should own a smartphone, ask for advice from others who do own one. Find out if this device is something that will enhance your life or be a waste of money. Then make your own decision. Whatever you decide is not final; you can re-evaluate as time goes on and as circumstances change.

Think clearly. Make your own decision. Adjust your decision if and when needed.

**Is it proper to click and follow the personal social media accounts of the opposite gender?
If so what about chatting socially with them using the platform's direct messaging?**

It would seem unwise to click and follow the personal social media account of anyone outside your immediate family and circle of friends, whether of the same or opposite gender. It is also a bad idea to chat with anyone you don't know personally.

Unfortunately, people are lured into activities and conversations without realizing the long-term (or even short-term) implications. It is all too frequent to hear of people who have been financially or physically harmed due to careless use of social media and chatting platforms. People may think that these things only happen to others and that they can handle things without getting into trouble. But why put yourself at needless risk? Why waste your valuable time?

The yetser hara is very powerful and relentless. It's best not to give it an opening by engaging in problematic online behavior. Remember: you are answerable to the Almighty Who is fully aware of your actions. You are not alone, even if you are in a room by yourself.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/children-synagogue-putin-smart-phones-chat-rooms-rabbi-m-d-angel-responds-questions-jewish>

Bechukosai – The Treasure of Torah
by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

This week's Torah portion depicts two scenarios, one of national devotion to G-d and one of national rejection of G-d. We are given promises of a true Utopia should our nation serve G-d as one in the ultimate fashion. If we fail as one and make the ultimate mistake of rejecting G-d's Torah and even denying G-d Himself, we are warned of indescribable anguish, destruction and devastation. (See Ramban Vayikra 26:11)

The verse depicting our national acceptance and devotion to G-d states, "If you will walk in My statutes and safeguard My mitzvos and do them." (Vayikra 26:3) The Torah seems to be giving three conditions for truly conducting ourselves as G-d's nation. We must walk in G-d's statutes, safeguard His mitzvos, and do them. What does the first clause of walking in G-d's statutes mean beyond safeguarding and keeping the mitzvos?

Rash"i quotes a Medrash that explains the first clause to mean that we must walk and engage in the statutes themselves; in other words we first must engage and toil in Torah study. If we begin by devoting true effort in our Torah study, and then safeguard G-d's mitzvos being careful to understand them correctly, and then we do the mitzvos, this is the formula to truly be G-d's nation on earth. (Rash"i Vayikra 26:3-4)

Similarly, when the Torah describes the unfortunate converse, the Torah begins with two clauses, "And if you will not listen to Me and will not do all of these mitzvos." (Vayikra 26:14) Here, too, Rash"i notes that the first clause seems superfluous. What does not listening to G-d mean beyond not fulfilling His mitzvos? Again, Rash"i explains that listening to G-d is referring to the step before action. Listening to G-d is referring to our commitment to pay attention to what G-d is telling us and "to toil in Torah to know the explanations of the wise men." Rash"i continues and explains that this is the first step our nation took in turning away from G-d. If we don't care to listen to G-d and to toil to understand G-d's Torah as He intended, we set ourselves on a path leading to the complete rejection of G-d's Torah and ultimately even to the denial of G-d's existence. (Rash"i Vayikra 26:14-15) (It should be noted that Rash"i says this only applies if one is not toiling in Torah because they are rejecting G-d.)

Why is toiling in Torah study so central to our role as G-d's nation and our relationship with G-d? Why is not enough for us to simply learn the basic laws and follow the mitzvos meticulously? What if one is naturally gifted and does not need great effort to understand deep concepts – why should they need to toil in their study?

Perhaps the true meaning and purpose of toiling in Torah can be found in the phrases the Torah uses to reference this effort – “walk in My statutes” and “listen to Me.” Torah is G-d’s statutes – it is His Will and His plan for this world, how He wants to relate to us, and even how He wants us to relate to Him.

Rash”i is teaching us that the first step in our service of G-d is to truly “listen to Him” and really hear what He has to say. It is well known how difficult it is to truly listen to another human being, to truly hear the full scope of their perspective and truly understand where they are coming from. It takes much effort, practice and self-control to even begin to walk in another person’s shoes. If this is true when it comes to understanding another human being, with whom we share so much in common, how much more must it be true of any effort to understand G-d’s perspective? To “walk in G-d’s statutes” and metaphorically try and in some small way walk in G-d’s “shoes” is an extremely difficult task. We can only accomplish this task if we are ready to toil and truly give our mind and our hearts over to understanding what G-d is truly telling us.

Torah is our marriage contract with G-d, describing His perspective, and His hopes and dreams. As in any relationship, the first step is to devote ourselves to understanding that perspective and those hopes and dreams. By toiling in Torah, our efforts themselves become the foundation for our relationship with G-d.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Give Earth a Break

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

Note: Rabbi Ovadia’s Dvar Torah for this week is a beautiful essay on the Book of Ruth, which we shall be reading in shul in little more than a week (Shavuot). Because his Dvar Torah is too long for this compilation, Rabbi Ovadia arranged for us to include it as an attachment to the E-mail version of the Devrei Torah. Alternatively, you may download it from PotomacTorah.org.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia’s Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia’s original in Sefaria.

Bechukotai: Tochacha: Cause & Effect

By Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach *

What is the connection between the blessings of Bechukotai and the curses of the tochacha that follow it? Let’s look closely at the blessings. The cause and effect are clear – “Im bechukotai telechu – if you follow my decrees,” then “venatati gishmeichem beitam – I will provide rains in their time” (Lev. 26:3).

Which are the decrees that must be followed? If we look back just a few pesukim, we are told “et shabtotai tishmoru – keep my sabbaths” (Lev. 26:2). We know from Parshat Behar last week that the sabbaths are the sabbaths of the land, the shmita.

Shmita is a description of how to be in the right relationship with the land. For an agricultural society, this was of the utmost importance. Ensuring that the land would be able to produce continually was essential for B’nei Yisrael to survive. Hashem told them, if you do your part and take care of the earth, the rains will come in their time.

Unfortunately, the reverse is true as well. If we do not take care of the land, the rains will come out wrong. This is a scientific fact. Global warming is tied to our decisions about how we treat the land. About 1/4 of all greenhouse gas emissions are agriculture related, and those greenhouse gasses are causing our planet to warm. If we are not careful to use regenerative agriculture which traps carbon back in healthy soil, the planet will continue to warm. This will directly affect the hydrological cycle. Warmer air can hold more moisture, and when that moisture does eventually converge into a

storm system, the rain is more intense. Meanwhile it will take longer for rain to come in drier areas, leading to prolonged drought. We will see the fulfillment of the tochacha: "uzratem l'rik zarachem – you will plant your seeds in vain" (Lev. 26:13).

Now is the time to follow Bechukotai. Now is the time to take action and enter into the right relationship with the land so that we can receive the reward of "gishmeichem beitam – the rains in their proper times."

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach, an experimental educator, is pursuing graduate level studies in Jewish education and in the environment.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/05/bechukotai22/>

Social Influence and Awareness

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

And in America we all want to believe we are fully autonomous, self-sufficient islands always taking into account all the factors of a situation and passing them through our individual rationality in order to come to an individual decision that we have made as individuals.

But as much as I and you wish to believe that this individualism were so, we cannot escape the reality of social influence.

Whether we buy something based on its popularity, modify our opinions ever so slightly to fit in with the social group we engage with at the moment, or even just glance at others in a social situation to see how the group responds, we cannot deny that we look to guidance from our social group whether live or on the Internet.

This might seem bad but it is not. I'm glad to rely on friends' recommendations for products and services. We make thousands of tiny decisions every day from our choices of coffee, what to wear and how to behave. I'm sure we'd drive ourselves crazy if we had to philosophically reflect on every single one. This is just a human tendency. Part of our makeup as ultra social beings to look to the group.

But the dark side of this is when the group becomes self-destructive. Like the suicidal cult of Jim Jones, humans in a group can calmly and joyfully walk to their deaths if they see others doing it. As Robert Cialdini notes in his book *Influence*, suicides among teens shot up after Netflix released their series "13 Reasons Why," which dealt with teen suicide. If it's acceptable to show on TV, then surely this is normal right? And if something is normal that means it's acceptable right? Right?

Cialdini continues to document that with every disseminated tragic news story, similar tragedies shoot up in places that receive it the most. Suicide stories even lead to more plane crashes. And stories about shootings beget more shootings.

Thanks to those studying human behavior, we are all becoming more aware of our behavioral tendencies like our susceptibility to social influence. Awareness of them can allow us to steer them in a more positive direction. With "today's horrible thing" constantly showed to us through the media, we must up our awareness more than ever.

To me, that's the positive side of the curses mentioned in this week's Torah portion. God seals the covenant with Israel with a stark reminder of the violent consequences that happens to a society that loses touch with its core values.

Some shuls like to read this part quietly. I have done it. After all, it's scary and it does bring more attention to it.

But some shuls had a custom to skip it altogether. And to this, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (commonly known as the Chofetz Chayim) raised his voice in disapproval in his halachic work the *Mishnah Berurah*. He compared this skipping practice to a person trying to avoid falling into a hole by tying a blindfold around his eyes.

Awareness is key. To be clear, I don't mean awareness of news stories, current events or social issues. I'm talking about self-awareness. Knowledge of how we react to the events in our lives. Awareness of the processes by which our mind-body system works behind the scenes.

Awareness like this requires something of us that may be a tad more challenging than awareness of the latest news. But it may be the most important tool we have.

So on this Shabbat we celebrate our capacity to be self-aware. Our capacity to be aware of all of ourselves, what we like and what we may like to avoid.

But once we develop this, we can accept ourselves. We can accept the entirety of our natures. We can then become better drivers of our destiny.

Shabbat Shalom.
Rabbi Moshe Rube

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah Bechukotai: Eternal Inheritance

The warnings-rebukes of Bechukotai are harsh. Grim admonitions of war and famine, exile and persecution if the Jewish people will refuse to listen to God and keep the Torah. Yet, in the midst of all the darkness, a ray of light glimmers.

"I will make the land so desolate that [even] your enemies who live there will be astonished. I will scatter you among the nations, and keep the sword drawn against you. Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins." (Lev. 26:32-33)

The Ramban noted that a remarkable blessing lies hidden among all of these punishments.

"What it says, 'your enemies who live there will be desolated' — this is, in fact, good news. It proclaims that during all of our exiles, our Land does not accept our enemies.

This is an amazing proof and promise to us. For throughout the settled world, you will not find a good and spacious land that was always settled, and yet is devastated to the extent that the Land of Israel is now. Since we left the Land, it has not received any other nation or people. All attempt to settle it, but none succeed."

When the Ramban arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1267, he witnessed the Land's desolation with his own eyes. As he wrote in a letter to his son:

"What can I tell you about the Land? It is much abandoned and greatly desolate. The holier the place, the more profound the destruction. Jerusalem is devastated the most, and the area of Judah more than the Galilee." ¹ 1

"An Inheritance to Israel"

Rav Kook noted that another verse alludes to this special connection between the Land and the Jewish people:

"[God] struck down great nations and slew mighty kings... all the kingdoms of Canaan. And He gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to Israel, His people." (Psalms 135:10-12)

Why did the psalmist repeat, "an inheritance, an inheritance to Israel His people"?

This, Rav Kook explained, refers to two great kindnesses. First, God delivered the Land of Israel from the Canaanite nations to the Jewish people. This was not a temporary conquest, but a nachalah, an eternal inheritance.

And what about the second kindness? God imprinted a special character on the Land. Due to its unique holiness, the Land is not suitable for any other nation. It is forever “an inheritance — an inheritance exclusively to Israel, His people.”

As a result of this special connection between the Land and the people, we possess a clear sign to know when Israel’s redemption is at hand. Rabbi Abba in Sanhedrin 98a taught that when the Land of Israel gives its fruit in abundance, that is an overt sign that the end of Israel’s exile draws near. As it says,

“And you, mountains of Israel, will give forth your branches, and bear your fruit to My people of Israel, for they will soon be coming” (Ezek. 36:8)

(Adapted from Olat Re’iyah vol. II p. 83)

1 Kitvei HaRamban 1:368. In 1867, exactly 600 years later, Mark Twain toured the Middle East. The famous American author described the country he saw in his travelogue:

“The further we went the hotter the sun got, and the more rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary the landscape became... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem.”
(The Innocents Abroad, p. 555).

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/BEHUKOTAI-79.htm>

The Logic of Hope (Bechukotai 5768)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

One of the greatest Jewish contributions to the civilisation of the West is the idea of hope. Not all cultures give rise to hope. To the contrary: at the heart of many cultures is the idea that time is cyclical. What has been, will be. History is a set of eternal recurrences. Nothing ever really changes. Life is tragic. One of the classic expressions of this is contained in the book of Ecclesiastes:

*What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes, though, is a dissident voice within Tanach. For the most part, the Hebrew Bible expresses a quite different view: that there can be change in the affairs of humankind. We are summoned to the long journey at whose end is redemption and the messianic age. Judaism is the principled rejection of tragedy in the name of hope.

The sociologist Peter Berger calls hope a ‘signal of transcendence,’ a point at which something beyond penetrates into the human situation. There is nothing inevitable or even rational about hope. It cannot be inferred from any facts about the past or present. Many cultures, from ancient Greece to the present day, have held that hope is an illusion, a childish fantasy, and that a mature response to our place in the universe is to accept its fundamentally tragic nature and to cultivate the stoic virtue of acceptance. Judaism argues otherwise: that the universe is not deaf to our prayers, blind to our aspirations. We are not wrong to strive to perfect the world, refusing to accept the inevitability of suffering and injustice.

Nowhere is this more strikingly in evidence than in this week’s sedra. The 26th chapter of Leviticus is one of the most frightening in all literature: the tokhahah, the curses attendant on Israel’s disobedience to its divine mission. In graphic prose, we read a preview of history gone wrong. Israel will experience defeat and disaster. It will lose its freedom and its land. The people will go into exile and will suffer terrible persecutions. It is our custom to read this passage sotto voce, in an undertone. It is hard to imagine any nation undergoing such catastrophe and live to tell the tale, let alone to survive. Yet the passage does not end there. At its climax is one of the great consolations in the Bible:

I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land . . . They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the Lord.

Israel may suffer, but it will never die. It may experience exile, but one day it will return. It may undergo the most terrible persecution, but it will never have reason to despair. The placement of this prophecy at the culmination of the curses is one of the most fateful of all biblical assertions. No fate is so bleak as to murder hope itself. No defeat is final, no exile endless, no tragedy the last word of the story.

There is an echo of this in the great vision of Ezekiel. The prophet sees a valley of dry bones which gradually come together, take on flesh and live again:

Then he said to me: 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost [avdah tikvatenu]; we are cut off." Therefore prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel . . ."

Nothing in all of literature so graphically describes the fate of the Jewish people between the Holocaust and the rebirth, in 1948, of the State of Israel. Almost prophetically, Naftali Herz Imber alluded to this text in his words for the song that eventually became Israel's national anthem. He wrote: *od lo avdah tikvatenu*, 'our hope is not yet lost.' Not by accident is Israel's anthem called *Hatikvah*, 'the hope.'

Where does hope come from? Berger sees it as a constitutive part of our humanity:

Human existence is always oriented toward the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity . . . An essential dimension of this 'futurity' of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering.

Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, pp. 68-69

Only hope empowers us to take risks, engage in long-term projects, marry and have children, and refuse to capitulate in the face of despair:

There seems to be a death-refusing hope at the very core of our humanitas. While empirical reason indicates that this hope is an illusion, there is something in us that, however shamefacedly in an age of triumphant rationality, goes on saying 'no!' and even says 'no!' to the ever so plausible explanations of empirical reason. In a world where man is surrounded by death on all sides, he continues to be a being who says 'no!' to death – and through this 'no!' is brought to faith in another world, the reality of which would validate his hope as something other than illusion.

A Rumor of Angels, p. 72

I am less sure than Berger that hope is universal. It emerges as part of the emotional vocabulary of Western civilization through a quite specific set of beliefs: that God exists, that He cares about us, that He has made a covenant with humanity and a further covenant with the people He chose to be a living example of faith. That covenant shapes our reading of history. God has given his word, and He will never break it, however much we may break our side of the promise. Without these beliefs, and we would have no reason to hope at all.

History, as conceived in this week's sedra, is not utopian. Faith does not blind us to the apparent randomness of circumstance, the cruelty of fortune, the seeming injustices of fate. No one, reading Leviticus 26, can be an optimist. Yet no one sensitive to its message can abandon hope. Without this, Jews and Judaism would not have survived. Without belief in the covenant – and its insistence Yet in spite of this – there would be no State of Israel, nor any significant Jewish history after the Holocaust. Jews kept hope alive. Hope kept the Jewish people alive.

Are You Missing the Entire Point? An Essay on Parshat Bechukotai

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2022

"If you walk contrary with Me"

The Tochechah section in Leviticus 26 contains several repeated expressions, including, "If you walk contrary (bekeri) with Me." According to an interpretation cited by Rashi, this refers to the sin of interpreting every event in life as an accident (mikreh). When something bad happens, it is often easy to write it off as an accident. This can minimize the impact of such an event, disregarding its greater implications for one's life.

When one thinks of the last fifty or one hundred years, it is clear that this problem still exists in modern times. During this period, highly significant events occurred and various processes unfolded that greatly influenced the world and its inhabitants. Regarding each one of these events and processes, it is important to determine the lesson to take away from it. What can we learn from this? What is the conclusion to be drawn from it, and what should be changed as a result? These questions are relevant whether we are speaking about the Holocaust, about the establishment of the State of Israel, or about assimilation, which, although it may not seem as dramatic as the other events, is no less significant for the Jewish people in the long run.

Today, assimilation has reached proportions the likes of which we have not seen in over two thousand years. The majority of the Jewish people has no interest in Judaism. Not since the Hellenistic period, perhaps, have we lived in a time when to be a Jew is a matter of nationality, race, family, and other factors, but not a matter of religion. Statistics today show that for every second that goes by, there is approximately one less Jew in the world; not because he is killed, but because he assimilates among the non-Jews.

This situation, which pertains not just to anomalous individuals but to the entire community, is a tremendous change for us, and we have already forgotten how to deal with such a problem. We know how to deal with one apostate or what to do in the case of a minor misfortune; but how do we cope with the kind of traumatic phenomenon that affects an entire people? Assimilation today is an entirely different kind of problem from what we have dealt with in the past; it is a crisis like no other.

This situation is an example of what Parshat Bechukotai calls "If you walk contrary with Me"; it is clear that we have learned nothing from our history. To be sure, there are certainly individuals who have learned from past events. Those who abandoned their faith after the Holocaust had suffered through an incredible horror, and essentially said, "Master of the Universe, we cannot carry on anymore; we cannot say that our suffering was simply bad luck. If You exist, You are not watching; and if You are watching, then such a thing would not have happened." These people did not "walk contrary"; they did not attribute world events to chance. The events in our lives have significance, and if they indeed have significance, one cannot remain complacent in response to them; one must draw conclusions from them. But the people as a whole did not respond like these individuals did; instead, they learned nothing at all.

There are those who see a bird flying and chirping and are able to understand what the bird is saying. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov said that after reaching the Land of Israel, he learned why a heap of straw lies in the street lengthwise and not widthwise. Granted, these are arcane matters. But in our case, we are not speaking here about a heap of straw in the street or about hearing a bird chirping. We are talking about catastrophes, events that have shocked the whole world. Yet no response, no conclusion, and no upshot has been drawn from all of this – nothing at all. Everyone carries on as before.

Blaming others

When, occasionally, someone does attempt to infer some lesson, the conclusion drawn is generally that someone else is to blame. It is in our nature to look around and search for a guilty party, to determine on whom to pin the blame. Blaming others is often a way of saying that everything that happened proves that one's approach was correct, and it was this other person who caused all the world's problems. Thus, nowadays there are Jews whose main principle of faith is that Zionism brought about the Holocaust. On all the other principles they are willing to compromise, but not on this one.

Conversely, when something good happens, it is the common practice of many people to take credit for it. Others were useful by not getting in the way, or at best they may have helped a bit, but I was the one who saved the day, whether by reciting psalms or by the force of my gun.

One way or another, everything that happens, whether good or bad, makes no impact and effects no change. This is the precise definition of "If you walk contrary with Me."

The parshah describes the horrifying consequences of this kind of attitude toward G d:

If you walk contrary with Me and will not obey Me, I will go on smiting you...And I will send the beast of the field among you, which will rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, and your ways will become desolate. And if in spite of these things you will not be corrected unto Me, but walk contrary with Me...I in turn will smite you sevenfold for your sins. And I will bring upon you an avenging sword...When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven... and you will eat and not be satisfied...And you will eat the flesh of your sons.1

All this because "you walk contrary with Me.2

There is a kind of mechanism in man whereby even when he is hit with one affliction after another, he remains unmoved. When retribution comes, everyone immediately looks at his neighbor instead of deep within himself and, as a result, nothing changes. So long as one knows who caused all these afflictions, it is easy to live with all the troubles. In spite of all the admonishment, everything remains as it was before.

One who does not walk contrary is one who attaches meaning, importance, and significance to everything that happens around him. But learning a moral lesson regarding oneself and not automatically looking to someone else is very uncommon.

During the Sinai Campaign, the previous Belzer Rebbe, who was well known for his holiness and piety, stood for two full days in prayer. He was not suspected of being a Zionist, nor did he suddenly become one. But this was a time of great crisis in the world, and there are times when a person changes his mind in response to a crisis, even if not by dramatic declarations.

The hope is that, beyond a certain point, a person can no longer truly claim that a momentous event was a chance occurrence, and he will then understand that he requires rectification and that he must examine his deeds.

"We and our fathers have sinned"

Toward the end of the Tochechah, there is another matter that is surprising in several respects: "They will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, in that they were unfaithful to me and walked contrary with me."3 The confession is not only for sins but also for "walking contrary with G d" – that is, for the imperviousness that does not allow one to see things correctly. But what is the meaning of "they will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers"? Every time we recite the Viduy and confess our sins, we use this very formula: "But we and our fathers have sinned," and perhaps for this very reason we no longer notice how odd it is. It makes perfect sense to confess one's own sins, with which one is well acquainted. I have sinned, gone astray, transgressed. But what right do I have to drag my father and grandfather into a confession of these sins?

It is only natural for a person to automatically justify the practices to which he has grown accustomed. People often defend their dubious practices by claiming, "This is how I was brought up, this is my style, this is my custom." Hence, when one wants to make a real confession, this confession cannot suffice with one's own problems. One cannot merely atone for one's own sins within one's own sphere, claiming that these are the only things that fall within one's sphere of responsibility and within the sphere of one's teshuvah. Rather, one should consider that perhaps "we and our fathers have sinned." He should be willing to examine not only his own personal sins but also the sins of his fathers. Perhaps an error was made that encompasses more than what one did yesterday afternoon. One may have to go back five years, ten years, twenty years – perhaps there is an error that has persisted for generations.

Hence, the Torah says, "Those of you who survive will deteriorate because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies, and they will deteriorate also because of the iniquities of their fathers. They will then confess their sins and the sins of their fathers"4 – because that is part of the reckoning. True soul searching must include not only the personal picture but the broader picture.

Whenever any major event happens, one must always ask: What does this mean? What does it imply? What are its implications? Such a comprehensive examination is always challenging for everyone involved, but it must be done; for if it is not comprehensive, the whole examination loses its significance.

Abhorrence

Not every sin is specified in the parshah, but there is one expression that appears twice, in two different but parallel contexts. At the beginning of the parshah, the Torah says, "I will set My presence among you, and I will not abhor you,"5 and a few verses later, at the beginning of the Tochechah, it says, "If you reject My statutes and abhor My laws, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break My covenant;"6 and the expression recurs repeatedly.

Generally, when discussing the performance of the mitzvot, one speaks of the practical side: what one must do and what one must not do, and how one must act in regard to laws, statutes, commandments, or covenants. Here, however, the expression concerns a different aspect of the mitzvot. Were they abhorrent or loathsome to you? This is an expression that does not relate to one's actions. Abhorrence pertains to a sphere that is outside and beyond the performance itself. It asks: In what manner did you perform the mitzvot? What did you feel toward them? With what emotion did you perform them?

Again, the issue here is not the actions one has taken that led to a transgression. The question of abhorrence relates to a different aspect. The process that leads to "you abhor My laws" begins with indifference. Indifference is soon followed by loathing, a feeling that the mitzvot are repulsive. Thus, a person can continue doing all that is required of him in practice, and yet loathe and abhor it. He carries out all the orders, but does not care at all about them; in fact, they disgust him.

On the verse, "because you did not serve G d your Lord with joy and with gladness over the abundance of all things,"7 it is said in the name of the Ari8 that this is the root of, and reason for, all the punishments of the Tochechah. It is not because "you did not serve G d your L rd" but because "you did not serve with joy." Because you do not serve G d with joy, you suffer the whole, long Tochechah, ninety-eight curses in all. The reason for this is that what lies beneath deeds that are not performed with joy is "you reject My statutes and abhor My laws." It may seem unnecessary to perform a mitzva joyfully. Is it not enough to perform the laws in comprehensive detail? Must we be happy about it as well? The Torah's answer is yes – we must serve with joy.

In previous generations, when people would hear the recitation of the Tochechah in the synagogue – "If you walk contrary with Me"; "If you reject and abhor" – they would tremble in fear. In order to deflect self-scrutiny, many people would rationalize that the Tochechah applies only to the Torah reader, and not to them. This kind of thinking is vulgar and improper, not to mention ignorant. Nevertheless, it reflects an attitude of hearing the words of the Torah and experiencing a legitimate reaction – quivering with fear, feeling that the punishment described in the Tochechah may fall on him at any moment.

Nowadays, when the Tochechah is read in the synagogue, if the reader misses a cantillation mark or a vowel point, the congregants will stop him and tell him to repeat the verse with the proper pronunciation. The truth is that, in doing this, the congregants are following halachah. Why should this parshah be any different from all the other parashot in the Torah? Nevertheless, it should alarm us that the Tochechah, which used to inspire such terror, has been reduced to a zakef katan or a mappik heh.

Similarly, many people use the recitation of Shema simply as an opportunity to emphatically draw out the pronunciation of the letter zayin in the words "lemaan tizkeru;"9 everything else stated in the Shema is irrelevant. "You shall love G d your L rd"10 is unimportant; but to draw out the zayin – that is of real substance.

These examples show that many seemingly pious people do not actually care about the mitzvot; there is only contempt and abhorrence toward them.

"Why is the land destroyed?"

In his introduction to *Tiferet Yisrael*, the Maharal writes at great length on the verse, “Why is the land destroyed... Because they have forsaken My Torah.”¹¹ The Talmud explains that “they have forsaken My Torah” means “they did not first recite the blessing for the Torah.”¹²

At first glance, the Talmud’s explanation seems difficult to understand. For sins like bloodshed, forbidden sexual relationships, and idolatry, G d does not react so harshly. They are certainly considered serious sins, but they are not the sins for which the land was destroyed and the Temple razed. G d surely does not react this harshly to other offenses of similar insignificance. So why is the sin of neglecting the blessing for the Torah treated with such severity?

The Maharal answers that the people who “did not first recite the blessing for the Torah” were connected to the Torah without G d’s involvement. They followed all the mitzvot, but did not appreciate the very root of the matter. G d was irrelevant to them, and it was because of this attitude that the land was destroyed.

The Midrash states that “G d overlooked idolatry, forbidden sexual relationships, and bloodshed, but did not overlook contempt for the Torah.”¹³ It is not that G d forgave these major sins, only that these sins can always be rectified in this world or the next through teshuvah, whether it is on one’s deathbed or even after his death. But regarding the sin of contempt for the Torah there apparently is no atonement.

The Talmud describes the Shechinah’s departure from the Sanctuary, detailing its movement from station to station, corresponding to its exile: From the Ark-cover to the cherub, from the first cherub to the second cherub, from the second cherub to the threshold of the Holy of Holies, and from there to the courtyard and then to the Altar, and so forth, until “it ascended and abode in its place.”¹⁴ But why should we care that the Shechinah has departed? Why does it matter precisely where G d dwells? If He wants to live on the second floor, let Him live on the second floor; what does that have to do with me? This is the root of the problem: Man does not care about G d, and so he is left only with the external aspect of everything.

The Tochechah comes in response to this attitude of contempt and abhorrence – and not necessarily because of the performance. G d promises that if we follow His laws, He will look at us, “and I will not abhor you.”¹⁵

It could have been that when a person behaved in a certain way, he would simply make G d feel nauseous; G d would look at him and feel like vomiting. G d, therefore, promises: “I will not abhor you.” Despite all the sins, “I will not reject them or abhor them.”¹⁶

FOOTNOTES:

1. Lev. 26:21–29.
2. 26:27.
3. Lev. 26:40.
4. Lev. 26:39–40.
5. Lev. 26:11.
6. Lev. 26:15.
7. Deut. 28:47
8. Rabbi Isaac Luria.
9. Num. 15:40; the purpose of this custom is to ensure that the word does not sound like “tiskeru,” which would distort the meaning of the verse.
10. Deut. 6:5.

11. Jer. 9:11–12.
12. Bava Metzia 85b.
13. Lamentations Rabba, introduction, 2.
14. Rosh HaShana 31a
15. Lev. 26:11.
16. Lev. 26:44.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel, z”l, (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), one of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud. © Chabad 2022.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5115519/jewish/Are-You-Missing-the-Entire-Point.htm

Bechukotai: Experiencing G-d’s Goodness

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky * © Chabad 2022

G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people, “If you advance in My rules.”
Leviticus 26:3

G-d’s “rules” are those commandments that defy rational explanation. The word for “rule” in Hebrew (chukah) actually means “engraved.”

When a letter is engraved onto something, the letter becomes a permanent part of it. This is not the case when a letter is written on something, for then the letter remains a separate entity from it. In the same way, it is by observing G-d’s “rules” that we truly unite with Him.

The reason for this is because just as letters are engraved in stone by removing what was there before, observing G-d’s “rules” requires us to “remove” — i.e., negate — our egos. With our egos out of the way, we can connect to G-d in the fullest way possible. This is why G-d made His blessings dependent especially on our observance of these types of commandments. When we empty ourselves of our ego, we can view G-d’s rewards not as the motivation for complying with His will, but as intrinsic components of our relationship with Him.

G-d is absolute goodness, so when we relate to Him without the interference of our egos, we can experience His goodness purely, as His self-revelation to us.

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Birth of Hope

This week we read the Tochacha, the terrifying curses warning of what would happen to Israel if it betrayed its Divine mission. We read a prophecy of history gone wrong. If Israel loses its way spiritually, say the curses, it will lose physically, economically, and politically also. The nation will experience defeat and disaster. It will forfeit its freedom and its land. The people will go into exile and suffer persecution. Customarily we read this passage in the synagogue sotto voce, in an undertone, so fearful is it. It is hard to imagine any nation undergoing such catastrophe and living to tell the tale. Yet the passage does not end there. In an abrupt change of key, we then hear one of the great consolations in the Bible: Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away... I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the Lord. (Lev. 26:44-45)

This is a turning point in the history of the human spirit. It is the birth of hope: not hope as a dream, a wish, a desire, but as the very shape of history itself, "the arc of the moral universe," as Martin Luther King put it. God is just. He may punish. He may hide His face. But He will not break His word. He will fulfil His promise. He will redeem His children. He will bring them home.

Hope is one of the very greatest Jewish contributions to Western civilisation, so much so that I have called Judaism "the voice of hope in the conversation of humankind."^[1] In the ancient world, there were tragic cultures in which people believed that the gods were at best indifferent to our existence, at worst actively malevolent. The best humans can do is avoid their attention or appease their wrath. In the end, though, it is all in vain. We are destined to see our dreams wrecked on the rocks of reality. The great tragedians were Greek. Judaism produced no Sophocles or Aeschylus, no Oedipus or Antigone. Biblical Hebrew did not even contain a word that meant "tragedy" in the Greek sense. Modern Hebrew had to borrow the word: hence, tragedia.

Then there are secular cultures, like that of the contemporary West in which the very existence of the universe, of human life and consciousness, is seen as the result of a series of meaningless accidents intended by no one and with no redeeming purpose. All we know for certain is that we are born, we live, we will

Shabbat Parashat Bechukotai

die, and it will be as if we had never been. Hope is not unknown in such cultures, but it is what Aristotle defined as "a waking dream," a private wish that things might be otherwise. As seen through the eyes of ancient Greece or contemporary science, there is nothing in the texture of reality or the direction of history to justify belief that the human condition could be other and better than it is.

Judaism is not without an expression of this mood. We find it in the opening chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes. For its author, time is cyclical. What has been, will be. History is a set of eternal recurrences. Nothing ever really changes:

What has been will be again,
What has been done will be done again;
There is nothing new under the sun. (Eccl. 1:9)

Ecclesiastes, though, is a rare voice within Tanach. For the most part, the Hebrew Bible expresses a quite different view: that there can be change in the affairs of humankind. We are summoned to the long journey at whose end is redemption and the Messianic Age. Judaism is the principled rejection of tragedy in the name of hope.

The sociologist Peter Berger calls hope a "signal of transcendence," a point at which something beyondpenetrates into the human situation. There is nothing inevitable or even rational about hope. It cannot be inferred from any facts about the past or present. Those with a tragic sense of life hold that hope is an illusion, a childish fantasy, and that a mature response to our place in the universe is to accept its fundamental meaninglessness and cultivate the stoic virtue of acceptance. Judaism insists otherwise: that the reality that underlies the universe is not deaf to our prayers, blind to our aspirations, indifferent to our existence. We are not wrong to strive to perfect the world, refusing to accept the inevitability of suffering and injustice.

We hear this note at key points in the Torah. It occurs twice at the end of Genesis when first Jacob then Joseph assure the other members of the covenantal family that their stay in Egypt will not be endless. God will honour His promise and bring them back to the Promised Land. We hear it again, magnificently, as Moses tells the people that even after the worst suffering that can befall a nation, Israel will not be lost or rejected:

Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He

scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. (Deut. 30:3-4)

But the key text is here at the end of the curses of Leviticus. This is where God promises that even if Israel sins, it may suffer, but it will never die, and it will never have reason to truly despair. It may experience exile, but eventually it will return. Israel may betray the covenant but God never will. This is one of the most fateful of all biblical assertions. It tells us that no fate is so bleak as to murder hope itself. No defeat is final, no exile endless, no tragedy the story's last word.

Subsequent to Moses, all the prophets delivered this message, each in his own way. Hosea told the people that though they may act like a faithless wife, God remains a loving husband. Amos assured them that God would rebuild even the most devastated ruins. Jeremiah bought a field in Anatot to assure the people that they would return from Babylon. Isaiah became the poet laureate of hope in visions of a world at peace that have never been surpassed.

Of all the prophecies of hope inspired by Leviticus 26, none is as haunting as the vision in which Ezekiel saw the people of the covenant as a valley of dry bones, but heard God promise to bring us "back to the land of Israel."^[2] (Ezek. 37:11-14)

No text in all of literature is so evocative of the fate of the Jewish people after the Holocaust, before the rebirth in 1948 of the State of Israel. Almost prophetically, Naftali Herz Imber alluded to this text in his words for the song that eventually became Israel's national anthem. He wrote: od lo avda tikvatenu, "our hope is not yet lost." Not by accident is Israel's anthem called HaTikva, "The Hope."

Where does hope come from? Berger sees it as a constitutive part of our humanity: Human existence is always oriented towards the future. Man exists by constantly extending his being into the future, both in his consciousness and in his activity... An essential dimension of this "futurity" of man is hope. It is through hope that men overcome the difficulties of any given here and now. And it is through hope that men find meaning in the face of extreme suffering.^[2]

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Only hope empowers us to take risks, engage in long-term projects, marry and have children, and refuse to capitulate in the face of despair: There seems to be a death-refusing hope at the very core of our humanitas. While empirical reason indicates that this hope is an illusion, there is something in us that, however shamefacedly in an age of triumphant rationality, goes on saying “no!” and even says “no!” to the ever so plausible explanations of empirical reason. In a world where man is surrounded by death on all sides, he continues to be a being who says “no!” to death – and through this “no!” is brought to faith in another world, the reality of which would validate his hope as something other than illusion.[3]

I am less sure than Berger that hope is universal. It emerged as part of the spiritual landscape of Western civilisation through a quite specific set of beliefs: that God exists, that He cares about us, that He has made a covenant with humanity and a further covenant with the people He chose to be a living example of faith. That covenant transforms our understanding of history. God has given His word, and He will never break it, however much we may break our side of the promise. Without these beliefs, we would have no reason to hope at all.

History as conceived in this parsha is not utopian. Faith does not blind us to the apparent randomness of circumstance, the cruelty of fortune, or the seeming injustices of fate. No one reading Leviticus 26 can be an optimist. Yet no one sensitive to its message can abandon hope. Without this, Jews and Judaism would not have survived. Without belief in the covenant and its insistence, “Yet in spite of this,” there might have been no Jewish people after the destruction of one or other of the Temples, or the Holocaust itself. It is not too much to say that Jews kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive.

[1] Jonathan Sacks, *Future Tense: A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), 231–252.

[2] Peter Berger, *op. cit.*, 68–69.

[3] *Ibid.*, 72.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will cause evil beasts to cease from the land; neither shall the sword go through your land.” (Leviticus 26:6)

What kind of world will exist “at the end of the days,” the period of the Messiah and human redemption? Will the basic structure of the universe, the rhythm of our lives remain exactly the same – the sixty minutes to the hour, two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen – with the only major difference being the miracle of a vast multitude of different drummers recognizing the One God and His chosen orchestral leader (Israel)?

If so, this means that our present realities can be sanctified, ennobled – but need not be utterly destroyed. Or will the messianic age have to inaugurate an entirely new world, an indelible change in the nature of the universe, radically different physics and physical existence? I would like to suggest that such not-only-theoretical speculation can be discerned as the preoccupation of the great sages of the Mishna, and their two alternate theological views give rise to two different translations of a word in this Torah reading. The opening of Behukkotai sounds remarkably redolent of the messianic dream, the goal of human history. God promises the Israelites that if they but maintain His laws and commandments, their physical needs will be taken care of with good crops and good harvests, and the ever-present danger of wild animals will be removed:

“And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. I will cause evil beasts to cease (v’hisbbati) from the land; neither shall the sword go through your land.” (Leviticus 26:6)

How are we to understand the concept: “cause to cease”? The Midrash (*Torat Kohanim*) records that Rabbi Yehuda defines v’hisbbati as God causing these “evil beasts” to disappear from the world, that God will destroy them. However, Rabbi Shimon interprets the word to mean that God will cause the evil of these beasts to cease: their evil nature will be destroyed, but the beasts themselves will not be destroyed.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson of blessed memory, reveals another ideological difference of opinion between these two sages. He suggests that they consistently differ as to what is more significant, the external action or the internal intention. For example, if an individual desecrates the Sabbath without having intended to do so – imagine he was washing his hands without realizing that the faucet he had turned on was directly above his business competitor’s garden and he in fact was unintentionally causing the flowers to grow when he turned on the faucet – Rabbi Yehuda declares him culpable and Rabbi Shimon frees him from guilt. For the former it is the action that counts: a Jew ended up watering a garden on the Sabbath; for the latter it is the intention, and in our case in point he only intended to wash his hands.

They similarly disagree about garbage removal from the house to the public domain on the Sabbath: Rabbi Shimon frees the individual from biblical culpability, since he did not intend to use the garbage – the object of his act of carrying from domain to domain – and he therefore was not engaged in a meaningful creative activity; his only intent was to remove the garbage from his home, and not to derive benefit from it in any way. Rabbi Yehuda declares him guilty nevertheless, because after all he committed the act of carrying, and

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Halakha is not concerned about the reason for which he carried.

The final example relates to the problem of oil left over in a lamp which had been lit before the start of a festival. Rabbi Yehuda forbids use of this oil because when it had initially been lit, the householder put it out of his mind for festival use, thereby rendering it muktzah, forbidden to be moved until the end of the festival day. Rabbi Shimon, however, permits it, because now that the light has gone out, the householder can use the oil in a manner permitted on the festival, and permissibility for him is only dependent on present intent. In this light, the initial differences of opinion between them assume a different perspective. For Rabbi Shimon, as long as I no longer intend to eat the leavening or as long as the animals have no intent to damage, these objects in effect ceased to exist; for Rabbi Yehuda the act of destruction is the only way for the objects to cease to exist.

Building on the Lubavitcher Rebbe, I would like to place a slightly different spin on the disputes we have just catalogued from a more theological point of view. How does Judaism deal with the problem of evil in the world? Is evil an objective force which must be destroyed, or can even evil be uplifted and redeemed, if only we perceive the positive essence of every aspect of creation and utilize it for good? Rabbi Shimon truly believes that the ultimate task of the individual is to sanctify everything; he in effect cancels the concept of muktzah (set aside, not for Sabbath or festival use) from the religio-legal lexicon, maintaining that virtually everything can be brought within the domain of the sacred if the human mind only wishes to use it for such a purpose. Rabbi Shimon is after all the great mystic of Jewish tradition, the teacher of the *Zohar*, the advocate of uniting all worlds and uplifting even the most far-flung sparks; “there is no object devoid of holiness,” teaches Jewish mysticism. On the other hand, Rabbi Yehuda is not so optimistic and does recognize the existence of evil. Hence he emphasizes the biblical command “and you shall burn out the evil from their midst” (Deut. 17:7).

The period between Passover and Shavuot is the progressive count of days between the physical and incomplete redemption of the broken matza and our advancement after 49 days to the spiritual, all-embracing redemption of the Torah we received at Sinai. The hametz (leavening) is the symbol of that which swells and expands, of raw emotions and physical instincts; it is made to “cease to exist” by destruction on Passover.

On Shavuot, however, it will be sanctified, transformed into two holy loaves of *halla* (hametz) brought on the altar to God. What was forbidden (evil) seven weeks ago has now been redeemed. If anything, Shavuot is a manifestation of the redemption of evil, of our

vision of the possibility of dedicating every aspect of our existence to God.

Rabbi Yehuda insisted on destroying the *hametz* on Passover, obliterating it from the world; Rabbi Shimon understood that it would only be necessary to re-route its function, to look at it in a different way.

Rabbi Yehuda insists that the evil beasts will be destroyed in the messianic period, a time when all that is evil will be obliterated from the earth; Rabbi Shimon maintains that the fundamental nature of the world will not change, the wild animals will still roam the forests, but their evil will be transformed, their force and vigor will be utilized positively. Rabbi Yehuda sees the millennium as devoid of Amalek, the nation bent on the destruction of Israel; our Bible commands us to “destroy the memory of Amalek” (Deut. 25:19). Perhaps Rabbi Shimon would indeed see the millennium as being devoid of the memory of the ancient Amalek, for Amalek at that time will repent and convert to Judaism. Does our Talmud (Gittin 57b) not record that the grandchildren of Haman (the Aggagi Amalekite) taught Torah in Bnei Brak?! I pray for the vision of Rabbi Shimon, and for the sanctification of every aspect of our lives and our natures.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissacher Frand

A Medrashic Machlokes in Bechukosai that Tracks with a Halachic Machlokes in Pesachim

Parshas Bechukosai begins with the blessings the Ribono shel Olam promises if we will keep the Torah. It is very encouraging.

Unfortunately, the Torah also shares the “flip side” of this situation: “And if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments...” [Vayikra 26:14].

One of the beautiful blessings that the Ribono shel Olam promises Klal Yisrael is, “And I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you; I will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land, and a sword will not cross your land.” [Vayikra 26:6] We must realize – as we see from Tanach – that (at least at one time in history) there were lions that were indigenous to Eretz Yisroel. This is the whole story of “the lion converts” [Melachim II 17:25-41]. In Biblical times, people worried about wild animals roaming the countryside and thus “I will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land” was a significant blessing.

I would like to share an observation that is somewhat atypical of the type of insights we usually say on Chumash, but I think it is brilliant nevertheless:

There is a dispute in the Yalkut Shemoni regarding the promise that Hashem will cause wild beasts to withdraw from the land. Rabbi Yehuda says it means that these wild beasts will be withdrawn from the world entirely.

Wild animals will cease to exist: No lions, no leopards, and no cougars – all these animals of prey will become extinct! Rabbi Shimon interprets this blessing to mean that the animals will still exist but they will become pacified so that they do not attack. The lions, leopards, cougars, etc. will become tame and domesticated, but they will still be around. According to Rabbi Shimon, this promise of “withdrawing the wild animals” is akin to the promise of Yeshaya [11:6] that the wolf will live in peace with the sheep in Messianic times. The wolf will still be around, but its nature will change.

The great Rogotchover Gaon writes a beautiful piece of lomdus [subtle halachic analysis], in his Tzafnas Pa’neach. He comments that this Medrashic dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon in Yalkut Shemoni corresponds to another dispute between them in the Talmud. In the Mishna in Pesachim [Chapter 2 Mishna 1], Rabbi Yehuda holds that the mitzvah of destroying Chometz can only be fulfilled by burning the Chometz. The Sages in that Mishna (who the Rogotchover assumes is Rav Shimon) hold that Chometz can be destroyed in any fashion. It does not need to be burned. It may simply be crushed up and thrown into the wind or tossed into the sea.

The Rogotchover explains that we learn the obligation that one needs to get rid of his Chometz from the pasuk “Tashbeesu se’or m’bateichem” [eliminate leaven from your homes] [Shemos 12:15]. The verb Tashbeesu that we find by Chometz is the same root word that we find here in Bechukosai: v’heeshbati chaya ra’ah min ha’aretz” [I will destroy wild animals from the land]. The Rogotchover says that Rav Yehudah and Rav Shimon have a far-reaching dispute regarding how to translate the word shveesa. Rav Yehuda holds that when the Torah uses the word shveesa, it means to actually eradicate something, to make it non-existent. Therefore, here in Bechukosai when we are taught v’heeshbati chaya ra’ah, it means they will not be around at all, just like tashbeesu se’or means the Chometz will cease to exist (by being incinerated). Rav Shimon disagrees. A person only needs to remove the essence of the Chometz. Simply make it inedible. It can still be here, it just needs to be crumpled up, thrown in the ocean, doused with Clorox, etc. It still exists but it loses its nature and essence. That is the definition of tashbeesu. Therefore, when it says over here v’heeshbati chaya ra’ah min ha’aretz, it also means that the animals might still be around, they will just lose their essence – their evil nature that makes them animals of prey.

Blessings, Past and Future: Removal of Yoke vs Breaking of Yoke

The (conditional) blessings at the beginning of the parsha conclude with the pasuk, “I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from being their slaves, I broke the staves of your yoke (motos ulchem) and I led you erect.” [Vayikra 26:13]. Frankly, I am

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not exactly sure what the term (per ArtScroll translation) “stave of your yoke” means. I assume that there is some kind of piece that is inserted into the yoke of an animal that holds the yoke in place, a type of hinge. Whatever it is, Hashem promises to break these “motos ulchem” which metaphorically caused us to be imprisoned in Egypt as slaves, thereby enabling our freedom and Hashem’s ability to lead us from there proudly and standing upright into Eretz Yisrael. This pasuk is a source for something that we say almost every day. Namely, one of the “Ha’Rachamans” in bentsching [Grace after Meals]: HaRachaman Hu yishbor uleinu mei’al tzavareinu; v’hu yolecheinu komemiyus l’artzeinu. [May the Merciful One break our yoke from our necks and bring us standing tall to our land.]

This “HaRachaman” is very similar to the pasuk here in Bechukosai, but with one very big difference. In bentsching we say that He will break the yokes from our necks – He will throw them away! Why, when the Torah talks about this, does it merely talk about breaking the staves or pegs or hinges of the yokes, rather than the yokes themselves? What is the difference?

I heard a very nice parable in the name of a Rav Shlomo Zalman Ulman, z”l: When a farmer – at the very end of his harvest, or at least when he is going to stop harvesting for a while – completes his job, he does not break the yoke that was upon the animal. He knows that he is going to need to use this animal again in a couple months for additional work. He knows he will need the yoke again for plowing, harvesting, or other work so he certainly does not want to break it. Therefore, the farmer removes the yoke from the oxen by taking off the staves or hinges that keep the yoke in place, but he does not get rid of the yoke itself.

However, when a farmer who has been working the land for sixty years decides, “It is time to hang it up!” he concludes, “That is it! No more farming for me.” — What does he do? He takes off the yoke from his animal and tosses it away. He breaks it! “I am never going to use this again. I am finished with farming!” The yoke is too old to resell, so he breaks it!

When the Ribono shel Olam originally made this promise, He was aware that “Now I am going to temporarily remove this yoke from you, but unfortunately, in Jewish history, there are going to be other periods of Galus in which you are going to have the yoke placed upon you again.” Therefore, the Ribono shel Olam merely says, “I will break the staves of your yoke. I will not discard the yoke, because unfortunately, the yoke is going to be used again sometime in the future.”

However, in the HaRachamans in bentsching, we pray to the Almighty that the All Merciful One shall in the future permanently break the yoke from upon our necks. We pray that, once

and for all, He should smash the yokes of the enslavement of our exiles that we have suffered repeatedly in our history, and that He should lead us finally, once and for all, upright to our Land.”

A Time and Place Where the Tochacha and Olam HaBah had Real Market Value

The pasuk we just discussed [Vayikra 26:13] is the end of “the good news.” Then begins the terrible Tochacha [Curse of (conditional) misfortune]: “But if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments....” Then the Almighty says, “I will break the pride of your might...” [Vayikra 26:19] and the terrible things that we have witnessed unfortunately throughout Jewish history will come to pass.

The prevalent custom regarding the Tochacha is that the Baal Koreh or the Gabbai take the Aliya, and whichever one takes it makes the preceding and subsequent Brachos without being formally “called up” to the Torah. In Europe, the minhag was — as Rav Dovid Povarsky, zt”l, cites — that the Gabbai would seek out an impoverished individual who was in dire need of funds and pay him to accept the Aliyah. Nobody wanted the Aliyah so they actually had to financially pressure people to take it. He cites that the going rate was three rubles to take the Aliyah. In those days, three rubles was a lot of money.

[As a humorous aside, there is a famous Yiddishe joke that one time in shul they were up to the point where they needed to read the Tochacha and they had hired a poor person to come but the fellow had not shown up. The Baal Koreh was waiting and waiting. Finally, the person arrives and they ask to him, “Where were you?” He responds, “Do you think this is the only Tochacha that I get an Aliyah for? A person cannot make a decent living from a single Tochacha!”]

Rav Dovid Povarsky points out in his sefer that we see how in Europe, this really meant something to people. They were afraid to get the Aliyah. The content of these pesukim was real to them. They took it personally. The only way they could find someone to take the Aliyah was to hire someone who was desperate.

Even though this perhaps does not speak well of society — because they are taking advantage of a poor person — in positive terms, it does demonstrate how real the prophecies of the Torah were to them. Nowadays, unfortunately, we are too casual about the Tochacha. A person takes the Aliyah and thinks nothing of it. Ten minutes later, he goes down to the Kiddush, makes a Lechayim and does not give it a second thought.

Rav Dovid Povarsky writes further that the great Rav Yisrael Salanter, who was so meticulous about other people’s feelings, was not happy about the custom that the Kehillos would hire indigent individuals to take the

Aliyah. He used to go around from shul to shul and take the Aliyah himself rather than subject poor people to the shame and humiliation that accepting this Aliyah implied. One time, Rav Yisrael got up and said “I want this Aliyah” and the Baal Koreh refused to read it because he did not want the curses to fall upon his revered leader. Rav Yisrael then moved the Baal Koreh to the side and read the Tochacha himself! These anecdotes point out how real the Tochacha was to prior generations.

I am reminded of a story with a similar lesson. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes that he remembers an incident in Europe when he was a child. During recess, they played a game similar to “Jacks” called “Kugelach.” One child lost all his “Kugelach” while playing the game and was very upset about it. He said to another child, “I will sell you half my ‘Olam haBah’ for three Kugelach.” Rav Yaakov wrote, “Of course, we understand what an embarrassment it is for anyone to sell his share in the World-to-Come, and a child is a child so he is willing to sell his Olam haBah, but it shows that for the people of that generation, Olam haBah was something real. It was a real commodity. It meant something.” This spoke to the Emunah that was prevalent in Europe in those times. Unfortunately, such Emunah is not as prevalent in our day and age.

A Story with the Klausenberger Rebbe and a Vorte From the Kotzker Rebbe

Immediately after the Tochacha, the Torah continues with the parsha of Eruchin [Evaluations] every person has a certain set value (based on his or her age range and gender). A person can donate his “Eruch” [val[value]the Beis HaMikdash. An entire section in the Torah and a whole Tractate in the Talmud are devoted to the laws of Eruchin.

In past years, we discussed why the Parsha of Eruchin follows the Parsha of the Tochacha. It is somewhat of an anti-climactic ending to Parshas Bechukosai. If we were to write Parshas Bechukosai we would probably end it at the conclusion of Chapter 26: “These are the decrees, the ordinances, and the Torahs that Hashem gave, between Himself and the Children of Israel, at Mount Sinai, through Moses.” Where would we have put the laws of Eruchin? We would have stuck them somewhere else in Sefer Vayikra! However, Parshas Bechukosai, with the dramatic Tochacha that should literally send shivers down a person’s back — especially with our knowledge of the hindsight of history — ends with this very technical section of the laws of evaluations.

The Kotzker Rebbe once said a vort, but rather than say his vort and then tell a story; I want to tell the story and then say the vort.

Rav Mordechai Kamenetsky writes up this incident, and I have seen it in other places as well. The Nazis, yemach shemam [may their name be blotted out] a sinister habit when

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they came into a town and rounded up the Jews. They wanted to first humiliate the Jews. It was not bad enough to cart them off and kill them; they first humiliated them before sending them to their deaths.

They would take the primary Rabbinic figure in town and pick on him and humiliate him. When they came to the village in which the Klausenberger Rebbe, zt”l, (who survived the war) lived, they brought him into the town square and gathered all the people. The Nazi guard threw him down to the ground and kicked him. The Nazi then sneeringly said to him, “So, you still think that you are the Chosen People?” The Klausenberger responded “Yes.” Then the Nazi guard hit him with the butt of the rifle. He repeated his question, “You still think you are the Chosen People?” The Klausenberger Rebbe again responded, “Yes.”

The Nazi said, “You stupid Jew! How could you say that? How could you say you are the Chosen People? Look what I am doing to you.” The Klausenberger Rebbe told the Nazi guard, “As long as we are not kicking and beating innocent people we are the Chosen People and you are not!” This means — even when a person is degraded physically, emotionally, and psychologically, he can still maintain his sense of humanity and his sense of dignity. Such a person is still a member of the Chosen People.

The Kotzker Rebbe once explained that the reason why the parsha of Eruchin follows the parsha of the Tochacha is that the Torah is trying to teach us that no matter what befalls a person, he must always keep in mind that a person always has value. A human being has an “Erech”, come what may, even after the greatest degradation and the greatest humiliation — nevertheless, a person has an Erech-Atzmi [a personal value].

The Klausenberger Rebbe’s reaction personified that concept: As long as I am not beating an innocent person, I am considered an Am HaNivechar (a member of) the Chosen People].

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

There is always room for hope. This powerful message is presented to us in a wonderful Haftorah for Parashat Bechukotai from the prophet Jeremiah. It accompanies our parasha, in which we read the Tochecha — a long list of curses. This long list follows a much shorter list of blessings. The blessings are given to us in a brief form because they are presented to us in a general way, with wide ranging blessings to be given to those who follow the words of Hashem. But the Tochecha — the curses — are mentioned explicitly. According to our sages, this is in order to warn us — perhaps even shock us — with regard to the negative consequences of our misdeeds.

Reading the Tochecha is quite a depressing experience and that's why we read it in an undertone in synagogue. And our sages so wisely chose a magnificent Haftorah to accompany the Tochecha. Jeremiah, of course, was somebody who knew what national tragedy was all about because he prophesied at the time of the destruction of the first temple, and toward the end of his prophecy he declares "Mikveh Yisrael Hashem", 'the hope of the people of Israel is God'. We should never lose our hope in Hashem. Perhaps in the dark tunnel that we may be travelling through, we might not see any light at the end of it, but there is always light there! Hashem is always with us, and we should place our hope in Him.

"Refaeini Hashem v'erafei", 'Heal me Hashem, and I will be healed'. "Hoshieini v'ivasheia", Save me and I will be saved, "ki tehilati ata", for you are my praise. We pray to Hashem: please heal me – and I look forward to being healed! Please save me, oh how great it would be to be saved! But even if that doesn't happen, 'tehilati ata' – God you are my praise, I will forever praise you, because I know that in the context of the big picture, whatever you are doing is for my good and for the good of the world.

This very sentiment is conveyed to us by King David in psalm 27, a psalm written for a period of wartime! Concluding with the words 'kaveh el Hashem' – have hope in Hashem, "Chazak v'ameitz libecha" – be brave and of good courage, 'v'kaveh el Hashem' – and have hope in Hashem. It is at times such as these that we need to be brave, we need to be courageous. We need to take steps to save ourselves but all of our actions should be preceded and followed with hope in Hashem.

Perhaps the finest example of this is the title given to the national anthem of the State of Israel, 'Ha tikva' – The hope, 'Od lo avda tikva-teinu, Ha'tikvah bat sh'not al-payim' for 2000 years we never lost hope! Through thick and thin, through so many tragic experiences we placed our hope in Hashem – and Baruch Hashem today we can sing HaTikva with joy and with pride, knowing that Hashem was with us all the way. He fulfilled his promise in parashat Bechukotai: 'v'haaretz izkor', I will remember the land – and today, we are blessed and privileged to have Medinat Yisrael.

Without doubt, 'Mikveh Yisrael Hashem' the hope of the people of Israel is God Himself, and there is always room for hope.

OTS Dvar Torah

The Covenant Between Israel and God

By Rabbi Shlomo Brown, Executive Director of Midreshet Lindenbaum

Which covenant is this week's Torah portion alluding to? Why does the land of Israel pledge allegiance to the Jewish people, even when they don't observe God's commandments or adhere to this covenant?

This week's portion centers on a scathing reproach. A reproach that is intrinsically tied to

the covenant between the Jewish people and God.

The word "covenant" is repeated eight times. In seven of those instances, the "covenant" refers to the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people: "I will maintain My covenant with you", "...and you break My covenant", "Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob", "I will remember also My covenant with Isaac", "and also My covenant with Abraham", "I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them", and "I will remember in their favor the covenant with the ancients." In one instance, however, the connotation is similar yet not identical: "I will bring a sword against you to wreak vengeance for the covenant."

The Torah does not explicitly state what it means by a "covenant," assuming that the meaning is obvious. The mention of this covenant recurs throughout the reproach. If Bnei Yisrael follow the laws of the Torah and observe its commandments, God will maintain His covenant with them, but if the People of Israel violate the covenant with God, He will bring a sword against them to wreak vengeance for the covenant. This is what is referred to as mida keneged mida – measure for measure. Yet even then, Hashem will not forget His covenant, and even if the Children of Israel violate this covenant, He will not. He will invariably return them to the land of Israel.

The first covenant that Hashem made was the "Covenant of the Rainbow." It was a covenant between God and all of humanity: "That", God said to Noah, 'shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between Me and all flesh that is on earth.'"

Hashem made His covenant with our forefather Abraham at the "Covenant Between the Pieces": "On that day Hashem made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I assign this land." Hashem promises Abraham's progeny the land of Israel.

Yet something seems missing from this covenant. At the "Covenant of the Pieces", there were two parties, and each party undertook to fulfill its part of the deal. The Torah completes what it had left out of that covenant in this portion, when discussing the covenant of circumcision:

"I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God. God further said to Abraham, 'As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant.'" (Genesis, chapter 17)

Hashem promises to uphold His side of the

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covenant, i.e. that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Israel, and in exchange, the Children of Israel would be required to keep their side of the covenant; namely, the observance of circumcision. As the Seforim explained in the Katzir Haomer: "Just as [the verse states]: 'as for Me, this is My covenant with you' (verse 4), keep my covenant, for if not, the covenant will not be upheld."

Anyone of sound mind can appreciate that circumcision is a commandment that represents the People of Israel's side of the covenant, but the Jewish people's commitment isn't limited to merely observing circumcision. It has committed to observing all of the commitments.

Hashem reasserts the covenant he had made with Abraham by making this covenant with the Jewish people in the Sinai desert, and in the plains of Moab. In the Sinai desert:

"Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of Hashem and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that Hashem has commanded we will do!" (Verse 3)...

"Then he took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, "All that Hashem has spoken we will faithfully do!" (Verse 7)...

"Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that Hashem now makes with you concerning all these commands." (Verse 8)...

In the plains of Moab: "These are the terms of the covenant which Hashem commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb." (Verse 69)

When the Jewish people uphold their share of the covenant, they are found deserving and inherit the land of Israel, while when they violate that covenant, the land of Israel itself punishes them:

"I will make your skies like iron and your earth like copper... Your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit."

After the people of Israel are exiled from their land, the land observes its sabbaths, the sabbaths that the Jewish people had failed to observe when they resided in that land:

"Then shall the land make up for its sabbath years throughout the time that it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; then shall the land rest and make up for its sabbath years. Throughout the time that it is desolate, it shall observe the rest that it did not observe in your sabbath years while you were dwelling upon it." (Leviticus 35: 34-35)

It is important to note that when the land penalizes the people of Israel, it maintains its loyalty to the Jewish people, and does not

accept any other nation in their stead. "I will make the land desolate, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled by it." Rashi interprets this verse as follows: "This was a kindly measure for Israel that the enemies would find no satisfaction in their (the Israelites') land and so it would become desolate of its inhabitants..." This "loyalty" that the land of Israel keeps toward the Jewish people is ingrained into the character and unique nature of the first covenant Hashem made with our forefather Abraham, when, at first, Hashem had promised the land to the descendants without demanding "something in exchange." The Jewish people's part in the covenant is only mentioned in the case of circumcision. This is to teach us that the land of Israel is tied to the people of Israel, even when the Jewish people are not connected to their land. In light of this, we understand that Hashem will remember His covenant:

"Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob; I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham; and I will remember the land" ... and the Jewish people shall return to their land. And return they have.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Ameilut ba-Torah: A Formula for Halachic Commitment and Chochmat ha-Torah

"Im be-chukotai teileichu ve-et mitzvotai tishmeru va-asitem otam." The Torah initially depicts the pinnacle of halachic commitment that warrants abundant reward by invoking the mysterious, ambiguous words, "im Bechukotai teileichu". The Sifra (cited also by Rashi) renders this pivotal phrase, "shetihyu ameilim ba-Torah", emphasizing a labor intensive, immersive commitment to Torah study.

It is significant that the same word - "amel" - is utilized in Massechet Avot (6:4) describing an orientation to Torah life and characterizing the conditions of its attainment: "kach hi darkah shel Torah: pat ba-melech tochach...ve-chayay tza'ar tichyeh uva-Torah atah amel, im atah oseh kein ashrecha vetov lach." Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:6) codifies this "amel" perspective ("u-vaTorah tihyeh amal") as well. Moreover, in this context, he substantially expands this requirement by linking it with two other critical principles of personal religious attainment. He connects the ameilut lifestyle with the notion of lefum tza'ara agra (Avot- reward corresponds to sacrifice and sometimes suffering) and also establishes it as a sine qua non for achieving the "keter Torah".

A further examination of Rambam's expansive treatment of the conditions for Torah growth (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:12,13 and Perush ha-Mishneh Avot 5:19) reinforces the indispensable role of toil, self-sacrifice and total immersion. It also indicates that the ameilut imperative is the linchpin and yardstick not only for religious sincerity and halachic commitment, but equally to the ambitious,

crowning attainment of "chochmah", Torah wisdom! (a particularly premium accomplishment in the Rambam's halachic-religious scheme...). In these sources, the Rambam speaks about maintaining and sustaining (ha-Torah mitkayemet) one's religious and scholastic efforts and of the attainment of profound Torah wisdom, *chochmah*, almost interchangeably! [This is apparent by the selection of sources in the Talmud and midrash that he selected to integrate, as well as by comparing his formulations with the sources themselves. I hope to elaborate the nuances of the Rambam's special approach and presentation of these themes elsewhere.] It is evident that Rambam understood that maximal investment of effort and toil, and equally, maybe especially, the attitude that is implicit in this intense level of commitment, not only reflects sincerity and idealism, but also impacts the accessibility and quality of Torah study and religious growth.

Perhaps this perspective is implicit in the Torah's language itself - "Bechukotai teileichu" - in light of the Sifra's focus on amelut ba-Torah. Or ha-Chayim queries why amal ha-Torah should be characterized as a "chok". Or ha-Chayim, Kli Yakar, Maharal (Gur Aryeh) and other mefarshim were intrigued by the use of the verb "teileichu" in conjunction with *chukim*, specifically in this context. Or ha-Chayim was further mystified by the plural usage of "chukotai". We may suggest that the Rambam perceived the ameilut orientation as a facilitator of "chochmah" precisely because Torah wisdom, particularly "chochmah" itself, is not easily accessed even by rigorous investment absent a total immersion and the eager orientation of an ameilut culture that transcends mere time and effort. While the dimensions of "da'at" - referring to data-knowledge, and *binah*- applied logic or analytical capacity (meivin davar mitoch davar) can be mastered over time, "chochmah", connoting a more intricate, nuanced, and profound wisdom that is more than the sum of its components, requires a culture of ameilut. [Obviously, defining these categories- da'at, *binah*, *chochmah*- rigorously and precisely constitutes an independent topic of great significance with a long history . For our present purposes, I am only interested in a cursory or rudimentary presentation of the different dimensions of Torah knowledge.] Mastery of the halachic system requires not merely enormous time and effort associated with any wide-ranging vast corpus, but also demands the cultivation of a different way of thinking and a different orientation about the role of halachic law as a system of ideal and Divine values (See Ramban ,beginning of Kedoshim etc. and the writings and teachings of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l). The term *chok* is perhaps employed here because it accentuates the inner Divine logic that embodies a distinct class of halachot, but that subtly apply to all of halachic law (and is partly the basis of its interconnectivity- see Hilchot Sanhedrin 4:8). [See Rambam's discussion of the primacy of

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chukim in the conclusion to Hilchot Temurah and Meilah etc. This may also be related to the Rambam's notion of "achdut ha-maskil ve-hamuskal" as a critical dimension of Torah study and avodat Hashem, especially as understood by Rav Soloveitchik in his classic essay "U'vikashtem Misham", and certainly is a critical perspective in understanding the underlying motifs of Brisker methodology.]

In light of this approach, we may better appreciate selected insights illuminated by various mefarshim, alluded to previously. Beyond their particular focus, in the aggregate, they highlight the singular character of halachic law and Torah study that demands not only the investment of enormous sustained and rigorous effort, but also the overriding orientation or pervasive culture of ameilut. Or ha-Chayim posits that the plural use of *Bechukotai* signifies that beyond the vast scope of the total halachic system, every single halachic institution or presentation requires additional multiple erudition: the interplay of the oral and written *Torot*, 4 methods of Biblical interpretation, seventy dimensions or faces of the Torah, and so on. He further speculates that this usage validates, indeed mandates the appropriate personal creativity-chidush of qualified talmidei chachamim! These comments stand independently, but surely reinforce a larger aspiration of and path to *chochmat ha-Torah*! Maharal posits that the term "teileichu" connotes that serious, rigorous Torah study triggers ever more profound comprehension and appreciation of Torah ideals. One may posit that "teileichu", like Avraham's paradigmatic "lech lecha" constitutes a transformative journey in which the revelation of singular Torah values refines, revises, and even redefines the very identity of the committed and immersed party. This is absolutely consistent with an ameilut orientation that not only accesses information, but that opens provides a pathway to true "chochmat ha-Torah"! Or ha-Chayim (and Kli Yakar) speculates that the term "teileichu" implies that one's commitment is so intense and transformative that it engenders a natural compliance. Ameilut habituates halachic conduct, but likely also generates the internalization of halachic norms into values, achieving the ultimate standard of *avodat Hashem*. [See Rambam, Shemonah Perakim ch. 6], and truly facilitating the ideal of "chochmat ha-Torah".

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

IF...

If you will go in My decrees and keep My Mitzvos and perform them; then I will provide rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (Vayikra 26:3)

If you will go in My decrees...If you follow My decrees by engaging in intensive Torah study, with the intention that such study will lead you to observe ... (Rashi: Sifri

But if you do not listen to Me and do not perform all these commandments and if you despise My statutes and reject My ordinances, not performing any of My Commandments, thereby breaking My covenant then I too, will do the same to you; ... Your enemies will rule over you; you will flee, but no one will be pursuing you. And if, during these, you will not listen to Me, I will add another seven punishments for your sins: (Vayikra 26:14-18)

1 But if you do not listen to Me: to toil in the study of Torah in order to know the understanding of the Sages 2 and do not perform: If you do not learn the Torah, you will not perform its Commandments properly 3 and if you despise My statutes: This refers to one who despises others who perform the Commandments 4 and reject My ordinances: refers to one who hates the Sages 5 not performing: refers to someone who prevents others from fulfilling the Commandments 6 any of My Commandments: refers to one who denies that I (G-d) Commanded them. This is why the verse says "any of My commandments" and "not any of the commandments." 7 thereby breaking My covenant: This refers to one who denies the main tenet, namely, that G-d is the Omnipotent Creator of all existence. (RASHI)

What Rashi outlines succinctly is the anatomy of a total abandonment of Torah and Mitzvos. This little piece needs to be studied over and over again and in great depth. How does someone plummet from the top of the ladder to the lowest of rungs to the point they are despising Mitzvos, hating Sages, preventing others from fulfilling Mitzvos, and denying HASHEM? How does one lose it all? How does one get it all back?

There is a historical record to examine to test the veracity of this phenomenon. Wherever Yeshivas were established Jewish communities have not only survived but they have thrived. Where there was no Yeshiva, even if there was a large Orthodox population, eventually it dwindled. By way of crude analogy, where they learned Mishne between Mincha and Maariv, it's very nice but if that's all there is in terms of learning, then it's like have a gas a station with a ten minute lube job. What if a car breaks down? If there's a Torah scholar -a Posek in the present, that's akin to having a mechanic on premises. Very important, but where are the new cars, the next generation coming from? When there's a Yeshiva K-8 and a High School, and a Beis Miidrash and Kollel then new couples, future generations are rolling off the assembly line every year. It's like living in Lansing Michigan.

This is the untold story of Jewish Community life across the fruited plain and throughout our entire history. Learning Torah electrifies and animates a Jewish community because it enlivens whole families and wakes up the

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individual who engages himself in Torah learning.

It's not so impossibly hard to resuscitate a spiritually comatose community, family, or individual. There is a formula, a cure. Start learning, on whatever level, but start! The Torah spells out two giant "IF" propositions above. One has a definitively positive promise and the other big "IF" confidently forecasts unfortunate doom.

There is another "IF" statement from an earlier time, right before the "giving of the Torah" on Mt. Sinai. HASHEM says to Moshe, "And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation." These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel." (Shemos 19:5) Rashi says, "And Now: If now you accept them upon yourselves they will be sweet from here and further, because all beginnings are difficult." The only difficult part is in the starting. After that both the process and the result promise to be sweet... IF...

Home Weekly Parsha BECHUKOTAI 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading marks the end of the book of Vayikra. This, the third book of the Torah, is replete with laws, commandments, and descriptions of Temple services. It is also the book that contains the fundamental principles of human relationships, as envisioned by the Torah and Jewish tradition. It is a book about holiness, but not only about ritual holiness or Temple service, but also the holiness of human beings and human relationships.

The great principle of the Torah is included in this book – to be able to love and treat another human being as one can love oneself and wish to be treated by other human beings. It is this balance between ritual practice and exalted social and psychological values that in many ways characterize the essence of Judaism and of traditional Jewish life. By combining these two facets of the commandments granted to us on Mount Sinai, Judaism asserts its eternity, its service to our Creator and to the human beings that he created.

Though we often divide the commandments that appear in this book into two separate sections – those that relate to God and those that relate to our fellow human beings – in reality it is only in the totality of two taken together that one can see and experience the true nature of Judaism and Jewish life. Since both sections are equally commanded, so to speak, by the total, they are not to be viewed as two distinct sections of Jewish life, but, rather, as the two components that create the totality of Jewish life and our eternal existence.

With the exception of the story of the tragedy of the sons of Aaron, the entire book of Vayikra is free of narratives. This is unique, for the other four books of the Chumash contain a great deal of narrative. The commentators note this exception, and state that one of the reasons for this is to emphasize to all later Jewish generations that even though the narrative story of the Jews and of Judaism is vitally important, that story can never be communicated in a meaningful and eternal fashion, without the observance and study of the laws and commandments that form such a basic part of Jewish life.

The future of the Jewish world is determined by loyalty to tradition and observance of commandments. As important as knowledge of history is – and I consider it to be very important – history alone can never preserve us. There are many great schools in the world that teach and delve into the history of past civilizations and great empires. The studies may be fascinating and increase our sense of scholarship, but they do nothing to revive those civilizations and empires that have passed from the scene, never to return.

It is only through the actual enactment and discipline of commandments on a daily basis that we can be confident that the narrative of the Jewish people will continue and grow. It is in this knowledge that we are strengthened by this moment of completion of this holy book of the Chumash Vayikra.

Shabbat shalom
 Rabbi Berel Wein

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

The Politics of Responsibility

BECHUKOTAI

The twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Vayikra sets out, with stunning clarity, the terms of Jewish life under the covenant. On the one hand, there is an idyllic picture of the blessing of Divine favour: If Israel follows God's decrees and keeps His commands, there will be rain, the earth will yield its fruit, there will be peace, the people will flourish, they will have children, and the Divine presence will be in their midst. God will make them free.

"I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high."

Lev. 26:13

The other side of the equation, though, is terrifying: the curses that will befall the nation should the Israelites fail to honour their mission as a holy nation:

"But if you do not listen to Me and do not carry out all these commands... I will appoint over you sudden terror, wasting diseases, and fever, which will make your eyes fail and your spirit languish. In vain shall you sow your seed, for your enemies will eat its yield... And if, in spite of all this, you will still not listen to Me, I shall punish you seven times over for your sins... I will make your sky like iron, your land like bronze... I will turn your cities into ruins... I will lay waste the land... As for the survivors, I will bring such insecurity into their hearts in their enemies' lands that the sound of a windblown leaf will make them run as if they fled the sword; and they will fall, though no one is chasing them.

Lev. 26:14-36

Read in its entirety, this passage is more like Holocaust literature than anything else. The repeated phrases – "If after all this... If despite this... If despite everything" – come like hammer-blows of fate. It is a passage shattering in its impact, all the more so since so much of it came true at various times in Jewish history. Yet the curses end with the most profound promise of ultimate consolation. Despite everything God will not break His covenant with the Jewish people. Collectively they will be eternal. They may suffer, but they will never be destroyed. They will undergo exile but eventually they will return.

Stated with the utmost drama, this is the logic of covenant. Unlike other conceptions of history or politics, covenant sees nothing inevitable or even natural about the fate of a people. Israel will not follow the usual laws of the rise and fall of civilisations. The Jewish people were not to see their national existence in terms of cosmology, written into the structure of the universe, immutable and fixed for all time, as did the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians. Nor were they to see their history as cyclical, a matter of growth and decline. Instead, it would be utterly dependent on moral considerations. If Israel stayed true to its mission, it would flourish. If it drifted from its vocation, it would suffer defeat after defeat.

Only one other nation in history has consistently seen its fate in similar terms, namely the United States. The influence of the Hebrew Bible on American history – carried by the Pilgrim Fathers and reiterated in presidential rhetoric ever since – was decisive. Here is how one writer described the faith of Abraham Lincoln:

We are a nation formed by a covenant, by dedication to a set of principles and by an exchange of promises to uphold and advance certain commitments among ourselves and throughout the world. Those principles and commitments are the core of American identity, the soul of the body politic. They make the American nation unique, and uniquely valuable, among and to the other nations. But the other side of the conception contains a warning very like the warnings spoken by the prophets to Israel: if we fail in our promises to each other, and lose the principles of the covenant, then we lose everything, for they are we.^[1] Covenantal politics is moral politics, driving an elemental connection between the fate of a nation and its vocation. This is statehood as a matter not of power but of ethical responsibility.

One might have thought that this kind of politics robbed a nation of its freedom. Spinoza argued just this. "This, then, was the object of the ceremonial law," he wrote, "that men should do nothing of their own free will, but should always act under external authority, and should continually confess by their actions and thoughts that they were not their own masters."^[2] However, in this respect, Spinoza was wrong. Covenant theology is emphatically a politics of liberty.

What is happening in Vayikra 26 is an application to a nation as a whole of the proposition God spelled out to individuals at the beginning of human history:

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you act well, will you not be uplifted? If you fail to act

well, sin is crouching at the door; it longs to have you, but you must master it.”

Gen. 4:6-7

The choice – God is saying – is in your hands. You are free to do what you choose. But actions have consequences. You cannot overeat and take no exercise, and at the same time stay healthy. You cannot act selfishly and win the respect of other people. You cannot allow injustices to prevail and sustain a cohesive society. You cannot let rulers use power for their own ends without destroying the basis of a free and gracious social order. There is nothing mystical about these ideas. They are eminently intelligible. But they are also, and inescapably, moral. I brought you from slavery to freedom – says God – and I empower you to be free. But I cannot and will not abandon you. I will not intervene in your choices, but I will instruct you on what choices you ought to make. I will teach you the constitution of liberty.

The first and most important principle is this: A nation cannot worship itself and survive. Sooner or later, power will corrupt those who wield it. If fortune favours it and it grows rich, it will become self-indulgent and eventually decadent. Its citizens will no longer have the courage to fight for their liberty, and it will fall to another, more Spartan power. If there are gross inequalities, the people will lack a sense of the common good. If government is high-handed and non-accountable, it will fail to command the loyalty of the people. None of this takes away your freedom. It is simply the landscape within which freedom is to be exercised. You may choose this way or that, but not all paths lead to the same destination.

To stay free, a nation must worship something greater than itself, nothing less than God, together with the belief that all human beings are created in His image. Self-worship on a national scale leads to totalitarianism and the extinction of liberty. It took the loss of more than 100 million lives in the twentieth century to remind us of this truth.

In the face of suffering and loss, there are two fundamentally different questions an individual or nation can ask, and they lead to quite different outcomes. The first is, “What did I, or we, do wrong?” The second is, “Who did this to us?” It is not an exaggeration to say that this is the fundamental choice governing the destinies of people.

The latter leads inescapably to what is today known as the victim culture. It locates the source of evil outside oneself. Someone else is to blame. It is not I or we who are at fault, but some external cause. The attraction of this logic can be overpowering. It generates sympathy. It calls for, and often evokes, compassion. It is, however, deeply destructive. It leads people to see themselves as objects, not subjects. They are done to, not doers; passive, not active. The results are anger, resentment, rage and a burning sense of injustice. None of these, however, ever leads to freedom, since by its very logic this mindset abdicates responsibility for the current circumstances in which one finds oneself. Blaming others is the suicide of liberty.

Blaming oneself, by contrast, is difficult. It means living with constant self-criticism. It is not a route to peace of mind. Yet it is profoundly empowering. It implies that, precisely because we accept responsibility for the bad things that have happened, we also have the ability to chart a different course in the future. Within the terms set by covenant, the outcome depends on us. That is the logical geography of hope, and it rests on the choice Moses was later to define in these words:

I call Heaven and Earth as witnesses against you today: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life – so that you and your children may live.

Deut. 30:19

One of the most profound contribution Torah made to the civilisation of the West is this: that the destiny of nations lies not in the externalities of wealth or power, fate or circumstance, but in moral responsibility: the responsibility for creating and sustaining a society that honours the image of God within each of its citizens, rich and poor, powerful or powerless alike.

The politics of responsibility is not easy. The curses of Vayikra 26 are the very reverse of comforting. Yet the profound consolations with which they end are not accidental, nor are they wishful thinking. They

are testimony to the power of the human spirit when summoned to the highest vocation. A nation that sees itself as responsible for the evils that befall it, is also a nation that has an inextinguishable power of recovery and return.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Bechukotai (Leviticus 26:3-27:34)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – And I shall provide peace in the land and you shall lie down at night without fear.” (Leviticus 26:6)

This Torah portion comes at the end of The Book of Leviticus, called by our Sages “the Torah of the Kohen-Priests” – the religious leadership of Israel whose task it was to minister in the Holy Temple and to teach Torah to the nation. A public remnant of their priestly function exists to this very day, when the Kohanim bestow the priestly benediction upon the congregation during the repetition of the Amidah, every morning in Israel, and during the major Festivals in the diaspora.

The problem with this priestly benediction, however, is the concluding words of the blessing recited by the Kohanim before intoning the benediction: “Blessed art thou Oh Lord our God King of the Universe who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love.”

What is the significance of these words, “with love”? And if the Kohanim do not feel the emotion of love towards the congregation, does that invalidate their benediction?

Where do we find any kind of parallel for the necessity of an emotion of love as prerequisite for a blessing?

I believe we will discover the answer to our question, as well as the proper interpretation of the priestly benediction, in the process of an investigation into the meaning of the difficult text in the beginning of our Torah portion.

The reading of Behukotai begins:

“If you will follow my decrees and observe my commandments..., then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce... You will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land. I shall provide peace (shalom) in the land and you shall lie down at night without fear... A sword will not cross your land. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall before you by the sword. Five of you will pursue a hundred and hundred of you will pursue ten thousand and your enemies will fall before you by the sword...” (Leviticus 26:1-8)

How can I possibly understand this text? On the one hand, the Bible guarantees that if we as an entire nation will follow the Biblical commandments in the land of Israel, the soil will provide you with the requisite nourishment and there will be peace – shalom – in the land; no sword will cross the land. But then, on the other hand, in the very next verse, the Bible tells us that we will pursue our enemies with the sword and a hundred of our men will slay a thousand of the enemy. Is this a picture of shalom, of peace? Even if we are defeating our enemy by the sword, this does not mean that we have no casualties at all! This hardly suggests a cessation of the sword altogether! In this context, what did the Bible mean in its earlier verse, “And I shall provide peace – shalom – in the land” (Leviticus 26:6)?

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra provides the answer with his one-word commentary on the word shalom, peace: benechem, “amongst yourselves”.

The Bible is telling us that if we follow the commandments and live in peace and harmony amongst ourselves in Israel; if there be no swords of interneccine civil wars within the nation, then we will be able to soundly defeat any enemy who might rise up from without to destroy us. Shalom means internal peace, the love of our Israelite siblings – which can only come after we vanquish our enemies roundabout!

This is a critical message – especially during this time of the year. The Sages of the Talmud teach us that we must waive weddings, haircuts and group festivities from Passover until Lag B’omer because 24,0000 disciples of Rabbi Akiba died during this period; the Geonim explain that these disciples were killed during the abortive Bar Kochba rebellion against Rome. Their fatal flaw was their lack of respect for each other,

because of which that generation was not worthy of the redemption Bar Kochba had been supposed to bring about.

The lesson is the same: only if we Jews are at peace with each other internally will we be able to overcome our external enemies who threaten to destroy us.

And even more to the point, our Biblical portion of Behukotai teaches that the primary meaning of the word shalom is peace within Israel; it is as if the Torah is teaching that our problems with the Palestinians are far more simple to work out than our problems with each other, within the family of Israel!

Now I believe we can resolve our initial query. The priestly benediction requests that “God bless you and keep you; God cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; God lift up His face towards you and grant you peace.” The culmination of the benediction is shalom, peace. The Kohanim introduce the benediction by defining its most important feature: “God has commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love” – not that the Kohanim must feel love when they bless, but that their blessing for Israel is love; that all Jews feel love for one another. Our nation must achieve the internal peace and brotherly love which will make Israel invincible vis a vis their enemies. This is our greatest challenge!

Shabbat Shalom!

Drasha

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Bechukosai

Land Lessons

This week we read the tochacha, the admonitions and prescient warnings of disasters that will befall our people almost as a natural reaction to our misdeeds. The frequent use of the words tachas, meaning instead of, remind us of the quid pro quo that was meant to help us understand the meaning of Heavenly retribution. Had we heeded the lessons and understood the message of Heavenly admonition, then perhaps the Jewish nation would have been exiled only once.

G-d does not exact retribution. He teaches. He gives us difficult tests for us to endure and hopefully grow from. Each punishment is a calculated lesson, something we can learn from.

It was not always to be the case. A seventy year-exile in Babylonia made us no wiser, and ultimately we were back, if not by our own choice, then by our misdoings, to an enduring exile less than half a millennium later. And despite brief respites, physical and spiritual, we still are scattered in the Diaspora. Perhaps it is worth looking at one tit-for tat reprisal, mentioned this week, that ought serve as a lesson for us all.

In the portion of Behar, read last week, the Jewish people were commanded to let the land lie fallow every seventh year. They didn't. As a result they were exiled, and then the Torah tells us: “I will scatter you among the nations; I will unsheathe the sword after you; your land will be desolate, and your cities will be a ruin. Then the land will be appeased for its sabbaticals during all the years of its desolation, while you are in the land of your foes; then the land will rest, and it will appease for its sabbaticals. All the years of its desolation it will rest, whatever it did not rest during your sabbaticals when you dwelled upon her.” (Leviticus 26:33-35)

The Talmud in Shabbos (33a) tells us that Hashem's goal — that the land shall rest — will ultimately be accomplished. . If the people do not let the land rest while they inhabit it, then it will rest in their absence.

The calculation is frighteningly precise. There were seventy Sabbaticals that Israel had dishonored before and during the period of the First Temple. As the Babylonian exile lasted for seventy years, the land was compensated for the “rest” of which had never been observed.

But the question is obvious. Does land need rest? Does land get tired? The reason for Shmittah is not for the land but rather for us to rest from the mundane world of toil and physicality, and to leave our existence in the hands of the Almighty while we bask in His commands and study His laws. Why then does the land lying fallow in the desolation of our enemies help it or us? How is the message of Shmittah taught that way?

In his book about the 20th Century, Peter Jennings tells the story of Tom Sgovio. Tom was born in 1916 to immigrant parents who were enamored with the visions of Marx and Engels, and the equality they espoused would come under Communist rule. As a youngster Tom was active in the Communist movement, joining rallies and protests, even getting arrested for various pro-Communist activities.

Following the glowing reports of liberals like George Bernard Shaw, he brushed off the lurid descriptions of life under Stalin by Hearst and the American press and yearned for the Lenin's Utopia.

Disheartened at the state of poverty of this nation in the 1930s, he was convinced by Stalin's propaganda machine that in the Soviet Union life would be blissful. In fact, he was going to receive a free education in the Art Institute of Moscow, something no impoverished American had a chance to have in this country. To his friends he boasted about the wonderful education that would be provided, free of charge, by Mother Russia.

Upon his arrival, he was whisked to a hotel designated for political immigrants, and life was difficult yet bearable. But in the ensuing few years, he drifted out of his “suggested” confines to see the bitter poverty, and the drunken squalor of the peasants who allegedly were enjoying life to the fullest.

Contrasting that to the luxury of the ruling class, he began to complain. His timing could not have been worse. Within weeks, a hand tapped him on the shoulder and he was under arrest, a victim of Stalin's purges. Days later he was transported to Siberia to spend the next four years languishing in one of Stalin's forced labor camps. But his biggest conciliation came when a fellow prisoner told him that though the means were unfortunate, he realized his objectives. “You came here for an education? Well you're getting one! You graduated the Academy of the Gulag. And you learned more about human nature than you'll ever learn at Oxford or Cambridge. Here you learned why communism will never work! Because you won't change human nature!”

People disobey Shmittah. They feel that they know who controls the future themselves. Shmittah is there to tell us that the land is not in our hands, and it is not in our control. We are to remind ourselves of that by following the dictates of Hashem and realizing Who really is in control. But unfortunately we did not. We thought we had it all figured, out and we can do as we pleased. And so we were sent into exile. And the land lay fallow for the amount of years that we illegally worked it. We received an education. It was not the way it was intended. We could have learned it by understanding the truth of creation and control. Unfortunately, we learned it in the gulag.

Dedicated by Yehuda and Beth Honig and Family in memory of Zoltan Honig

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The First Manual for Addict

Rabbi YY Jacobson

“My Contract Preceded His Contract”

Regression

The portion this week, Behar, is “the poor man's portion.” It is dedicated entirely to the poor. In Behar, the Torah legislates numerous majestic and sometimes breathtaking laws in order to protect and assist the poor person.

Among other items it discusses a regression in poverty: a person becomes so desperate that he is forced to sell his ancestral field or farm in the land of Israel; worse, a person is compelled to sell a home used for work in the fields; worse, the situation grows so difficult, a person is forced to sell his residential home.

Worse yet, the circumstances are so dire that he sells himself as a slave to another Jew. (This can usually only be for a maximum of six years. Even if he insists to remain longer, he must leave during the year of Jubilee, which came about every 50th year. If Jubilee comes around in two years, he goes free then. [1] A Jew can't sell him as a slave for more than 50 years.[2])

Worst is the following situation described in Leviticus (Behar) chapter 25 verse 47:

If a resident non-Jew gains wealth with you, and your brother becomes destitute with him and is sold to a resident non-Jew among you or to an idol of the family of a non-Jew.

In this case, he did not only sell himself to another Jew, where at least the culture and lifestyle are similar; but he sold himself as a slave to a non-Jew, where the entire lifestyle is different.^[3] The Torah then goes on to command his next of kin to redeem him from his master, by compensating the master for the money he paid to purchase the Jew and thus setting the slave free.

After he is sold, he shall have redemption; one of his brothers shall redeem him. Or his uncle or his cousin shall redeem him, or the closest [other] relative from his family shall redeem him; or, if he becomes able to afford it, he can be redeemed [through his own funds].

And if he is not redeemed through [any of] these [ways], he shall go out in the Jubilee year, he and his children with him.^[4]

In other words, according to Torah law, the Jewish slave can never sell himself for eternity. Redeemed or not, when Jubilee comes around, the Jewish slave automatically goes free.^[5]

Absentee Father?

When the Torah mentions the relatives who are to redeem the Jew who sold himself, the Torah enumerates first the brother of the slave, then, the uncle, the cousin, followed by any other relative.

But there is a blatant omission here: The one relative who should have been mentioned first. The father.

The Torah also omits the mention of a mother and sisters. Yet this is understood, for in most cases the mother and sisters were being supported by their husbands. They lacked the means to redeem the slave. The Torah also omits the slave's son. This too can be explained by the fact that the father usually supports the son, not vice versa.^[6] But why is the father not mentioned?

There is another question: The Torah enumerates the relatives who ought to redeem the slave in this order: brother, uncle, first cousin, any other next of kin, and finally the slave himself.

The reason why the Torah feels it necessary to enumerate all the family members instead of just saying "anyone of his family" is to teach us that there is an order of responsibility on who is to redeem the slave. The closest relative, a brother, must be first to step up to the plate.^[7] Then the uncle; then the first cousin, etc.

Accordingly, if the slave obtains the means to redeem himself, it is his responsibility to redeem himself before anyone else. If you have the money to give yourself freedom, you can't ask your brother or uncle to do it for you. If so, the Torah should have mentioned first the option of the slave redeeming himself. And yet, in reality, he is mentioned as the last option: After mentioning all the relatives, the Torah concludes "if he becomes able to afford it, he can be redeemed [through his own funds]."^[8]

The Disease

Each law in the Torah, even those not presently applicable, represents a truth that applies to all times, peoples, and places.

The above law is no different: though today—150 years after the Civil War which began in April 1861 and claimed 620,000 lives plus the US President—no one in the civilized world can sell himself as a slave, the concept behind this biblical law applies in our age as well, maybe even more than ever.

Today we also sell ourselves as slaves. There are people, young and old, women and men, teenagers and adults, who reach a place in life where they do not own themselves any longer. Something else owns them entirely. They have no control over their lives. They are addicts. Addiction is not a bad habit exercised frequently; it is a disease. The addiction OWNS the addict. He does not own himself or herself any longer.

Addictions come in many forms: drugs, alcohol, gambling, nicotine, sexual addictions, food, etc. We become addicts usually due to a profound void, or some major trauma or pressure in life. Sometimes it begins with fun and entertainment, but soon the innocent fun lover has become a slave to his or her addiction.

Powerlessness

Someone, who has an alcohol and gambling addiction, once shared with me what prompted him into recovery. He was in Atlantic City in a casino gambling away his fortune. It was late afternoon, he was drinking wine and gambling. A man approached him and said: Do you know it's Yom Kippur today?!

He suddenly realized that it was the time for the Neilah prayer, the fifth and final holiest service of the holiest day of the year. This gave him a sudden clarity that he was powerless over his gambling habit. It catapulted him to seek help.

That is why the first step of the 12-step program for recovery is: "We admitted we were powerless over our addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable." The first step toward liberation is to realize you are a slave; you really do not own yourself any longer. You have been sold.

The Role of a Father

Comes the Torah and tells us that it is our responsibility and privilege to help and redeem the addict, the slave, from his incarceration. The brother, the uncle, the cousin, or any relative must not spare money, time, and effort to help the addict set himself or herself free.

Yet the Torah neglects to mention the possibility of his father being the redeemer. Because if he had a father—a true father, a father who would have been there for his son in the way the father is supposed to be—this would have not come about.

We are not referring only to a biological father, but to an emotionally present father. A father is not only someone who gives his child food and shelter and takes him to his first baseball game. A father is not only the one who is responsible to pay the bills. That is, of course, part of fatherhood. But it is not the essence of the father.

What is a father? A father is the one who gives inner confidence to his children. The father, if he lives up to his calling, imbues in his children the conviction that they are great human beings, who can stand up to any challenge they encounter on the winding journey called life and live life to the fullest. Father is the one who empowers his children to know the depth of their dignity, the power of their souls, and the ability to forge their destiny successfully.

This is not a blame game. Sometimes the father tried hard and really meant well. He may have simply not had the tools to be there for his child in the way the child needed it, to provide him/her with the attachment the child desperately craved. Sometimes the father fulfilled his duty, but other circumstances have traumatized the child. Yet, the Torah is saying, the full emotional presence of a father (and of course a mother) achieves miracles.

Joseph did not lose his dignity and did not sell his soul to Potifar's wife because "he saw the visage of his father." He felt the presence of a father who believed in him even when he did not believe in himself. Never underestimate the power of a parent's deep and unwavering attachment even if a situation seems dismal.

I Want a Father

I heard the following story from Rabbi Sholom Ber Lispker, spiritual leader of The Shul in Bal Harbor, Florida.

A man requested a meeting with him, during which he unraveled the following tragic story. He was married, with a teenage son in the house. Yet he grew bored with his wife, fell in love with another woman, and ultimately divorced his wife.

After the divorce, the boy remained with his father and treated the new woman who would come visit his father often very disrespectfully, blaming her for the destruction of the family unit. The child, for good reason, spoke very obnoxiously to her.

When the father proposed to her, she made a condition. She would not marry him unless his teenage son would move out of their home in Bal Harbor, Florida. She does not want to see the face of that boy again.

The father, who is extremely wealthy, called in his child. He handed him an envelope with \$20,000 cash; gave him the keys to a new Ferrari; gave him a few credit cards for use, to be paid for each month by the father, and finally, he gave him keys to a beautiful flat on the ocean. The father then silently added one stipulation: Son, all of this is yours; take it and

enjoy, but you can't step foot into this house anymore... if you need me, give me a call, and I will come to visit you.

The boy took the cash, the credit cards, the keys, and threw them back at his father, and said: "I don't want your money, your car, your houses, your richness. All I want is a FATHER!"

Now, he was coming to Rabbi Lispker, to ask him what to do.

This is the tragedy of a father who never had the time or the courage to communicate to his child that one feeling: I am here for you. All of me, all of the time; I believe in you. You are truly awesome. You are a gift from G-d and I love you and remain proud of you.

A father is the one who communicates to his child the message the Baal Shem Tov's father, Rabbi Eliezer, shared with his five-year-old son before he died: "You need not fear anyone or anything in this world, but G-d."

Dad, Where Are You?

This is why there is no mention of the father in the process of redeeming the addicted slave. Had this addict had a "father," or had the child had the ability to feel and experience his father, he would not find himself in his current situation. The reason a child can become such a tragic slave is that he did not have a presence in his life who taught him about his Divine inner strengths, powers, and majesty. The greatest tragedy, said Chassidic master Rabbi Aharon of Karlin, is when a person forgets that he is a prince, a child of G-d.

If you believe you are a prince, you can withstand the greatest temptations; if you think you are valueless, the smallest temptations can drive you to the abyss. Or perhaps he had a father who gave it all. But the child was so hurt that he shut out his father, he can't even feel his father. Which only means that the father must never take it personally, and maintain an even stronger attachment.

In the End, It's Up To You

We can now appreciate why the Torah leaves the option of the slave redeeming himself for the last because in his current situation he is incapable of freeing himself. He is powerless.

But we must help him go free. The addict is powerless over his problem, hence his closest family members are commanded to come to his rescue; brothers, uncles, cousins, or any relative.

But ultimately they are only catalysts. They cannot solve his problem; they can only help him see his own situation with clarity. They can give him the support he needs to HELP HIMSELF. If he does not make the decision to set himself free from the shackles of addiction, nothing can save him.

This, then, is why the Torah lists the enslaved person as the final prospect; his family can help him realize his problem and provide adequate support, but ultimately only he holds the key to his freedom. In the end, the addict himself or herself must find the resources to go free.

The Source of Freedom

But CAN the addict free himself? How can he or she liberate themselves from their addiction or any other situation which seems to be all-powerful?

Comes the Torah and concludes:

On Jubilee, he will automatically go free. He and his children with him. Because the children of Israel are servants to ME, they are My servants; I have taken them out of Egypt.

Here is where the Torah reveals the true source of our freedom. How can the slave automatically be freed on the Jubilee year? The answer is: "the children of Israel are servants to ME, they are My servants." We have only one master, G-d, and any subsequent sale to another master is merely superficial; it's not a real sale.

In the words of Rashi: "Shtari Kodem." G-d says, "My contract precedes your contract." The divine contract proclaiming that He owns each of us precedes the contract of the slave owner. I may sign a contract with you for my house, but there is one problem: someone else has a previous contract!

I may sell my soul to addiction; I may sell my mind, heart, and schedule to addiction. But before all of the addiction began, my soul already belonged to G-d. On my deepest level, I am Divine. I am not an addict. I am a mirror of infinity, a fragment of G-d. My addiction may be

powerful but it cannot penetrate the essence of my being. My being belongs to G-d. There is a core self, sacred and wholesome, which is more powerful than all my trauma, abuse, and addiction.

All the addictions and desires that control me are ultimately external. Each and every one of us has only one true allegiance: Our oneness with the Infinite One. Thus, in the end, a "jubilee" will come and set us free.

The Camel

A mother and a baby camel were lying around, and suddenly the baby camel asked, "mother, may I ask you some questions?"

Mother said, "Sure! Why son, is there something bothering you?"

Baby said, "Why do camels have humps?"

Mother said, "Well son, we are desert animals, we need the humps to store water and we are known to survive for weeks without water."

Baby said, "Okay, then why are our legs long and our feet rounded?"

Mother said, "Son, obviously they are meant for walking in the desert. You know with these legs I can move around the desert better than anyone does!"

Baby said, "Okay, then why are our eyelashes long? Sometimes it bothers my sight."

Mother with pride said, "My son, those long thick eyelashes are your protective cover. They help to protect your eyes from the desert sand and wind as you trek hundreds of miles."

The Baby, after thinking, said, "I see. So the hump is to store water when we are in the desert, the legs are for walking through the desert, and these eyelashes protect my eyes from the desert. If so, what in heaven's name are we doing here in a cage in the Bronx Zoo?!"

We were not made to be locked in a cage. We were meant to be free. G-d's contract precedes every other "contract" you might make in life, including those in which you sell yourself to the tyrants of addiction.

Yogi Berra

In 1973 the New York Mets struggled in last place in the National League Eastern division midway through the season. The team's colorful manager, the legendary Yogi Berra, had done wonders in the past, leading the team to its first-ever World Series championship in 1969, but this season looked to most observers like a wash. Asked by a sports reporter for one of the New York papers if the season was over for the Mets, Yogi responded with what has become one of his most famous "Yogi-isms," a declaration that put an exclamation point on what was to be one of the most exciting comebacks in sports history: "It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over!"

As history shows, it indeed wasn't over. Yogi Berra's New York Mets went on to take the National League East division and capped off the season by winning the National League Pennant and going to their second World Series contest.

In your life "it ain't over" until G-d says it's over—and G-d says it's not over until you win. Your moral and spiritual victory is guaranteed, because "My contract precedes any other." [9]

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[1] Obviously, the sale had to reflect this fact. If Jubilee was close, the price was less.

[2] According to Torah law, Jews observed two special years Shmita (Hebrew: שְׁמִיטָה, literally "release"), and Yovel, or Jubilee. 14 years after the Jews entered the land of Israel and finished conquering and dividing the land, they began counting every seventh year. The seventh year of the cycle was called shmitah, during that year the land is left to lie fallow. All agricultural activity—including plowing, planting, pruning and harvesting—is forbidden by Torah law. Other cultivation techniques—such as watering, fertilizing, weeding, spraying, trimming and mowing—may be performed as a preventative measure only, not to improve the growth of trees or plants. Additionally, any fruits which grow of their own accord are deemed hefker (ownerless) and may be picked by anyone. After seven shmitos, 49 years, comes the 50th year known as Yovel or Jubilee. This year has all of the laws of a regular shmitah year, plus all slaves are set free and all fields soils are returned to their ancestral owner.

[3] According to Jewish law, only a man can sell himself as a slave, never a woman.

[4] Though his children were not sold into slavery, the master is obligated to support them throughout the ordeal (Rashi). Hence in a sense, they too are under his authority.

[5] This is referring to a situation where the non-Jew is living in the Holy Land under the jurisdiction of a Jewish State, and hence is obliged by the Torah law.

[6] In the case where the son is supporting his father, we can assume that if he didn't help his father out and allowed him to sell himself into slavery he probably won't redeem him. If he sold him once, he will sell him twice. But a father on the other hand, even if he sat by idly and let his son be sold into slavery, once he sees him in slavery, his fatherly love - which is a lot stronger than a son's love to his father- is aroused and surely he would make the effort to redeem him. Yet, the Torah chooses not to mention that option.

[7] According to Jewish law, if there is a father with means, he has the first responsibility to set his son free since he is closest in kin. Which only exacerbates the previous question of why the Torah omits the mention of a father.

[8] One possible answer is that according to natural circumstances, it is the most unlikely that the slave himself will find the means to set himself free. For if he would have any money he would not be forced to sell himself for the sake of money. Hence the Torah gives that option last since it is the most unusual.

[9] This essay is based on a talk delivered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbos Parshas Behar 5723, 1963. Published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 17 Parshas Behar.

## The Natural Blessing in the in Shmita Year

In the ideal situation existing in the Land of Israel, there is no need for miracles. Torah study and life lead naturally to holiness.

### Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The reward and punishment written in the Torah are intended for all of Clal Yisrael in this world, and they take place naturally. For if they had come miraculously, they would have abolished free choice, and human beings would not have been privileged to be partners in the tikkun (correction) of the world. This is also explained in the Torah portion Bechukotai, where it is clear that the promised reward for Israel when they walk in the ways of God and his Torah, will come in a natural way: the rains will fall on time, the land will give forth its harvest in abundance, and we will have a strong army that will succeed in defeating our enemies with crushing victory.

Had the goal been a miraculous one, it would have been preferable to remain in the desert and eat the manna that came down from heaven, as was the opinion of the Spies. However, the Torah commanded Israel to enter the land, to engage in the Torah and, according to its guidance, engage in yishuv shel olam (the settlement of the world), and out of this, gain great blessing, to the point where we have a surfeit of work, due to the great abundance.

### Leadership of the Land of Israel without Miracles

In the ideal situation in the Land of Israel, there is no need for miracles, because thanks to the study of the Torah and its guidance of practical life – holiness is revealed in a natural way, and this is how emunah (faith) is revealed in its' loftiest way. The miracles that Israel experienced in Egypt and in the wilderness were intended to reveal the foundations of emunah and the Torah, and in their light, guide Israel to the fullest of life in the Land of Israel.

However, this is not the proper leadership le'chatchila (ideally). Therefore, upon entering the land the observable miracles were abolished. The manna no longer fell from heaven, shoes and clothes wore out once again, the pillar of fire, the cloud, and the well ceased to accompany Israel, and Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to count all men from the age of twenty who go out to the army, in order to prepare them for the conquest of the land by natural means.

Those who believe that the main revelation of God is by way of a miracle, are alienated from the emunah ha'yichud (belief in the Oneness of God), and inadvertently claim that nature is supposedly detached from God, thereby sinning in heresy and avodah zara (idolatry). This is what our Sages said (Ketubot 110b): "Anyone who resides in Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who does not have a God. As it is stated: 'To give to you the land of Canaan, to be your God'... anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as though he is engaged in idol worship." This is because outside the Holy Land kedusha (holiness) is not revealed through nature, but only in what is beyond nature. However, in the Land of Israel, the Holy Land, through the mitzvah of yishuv ha'aretz, holiness is revealed by natural means.

This is what we say every day in the portion "If you are careful to pay heed to my commandments", (Deuteronomy 11:13-21), that if we engage in Torah and keep the mitzvot according to its guidance, and engage in yishuv shel olam, the rains will fall on time and the land will give forth its harvest, and we will be blessed by God in the work of our hands, we will eat and be satiated. However, if we do not hear the Voice of God, the blessing will depart from the land, and we will be cast out of the good land.

### Four Kings

Similarly, we learn in the Midrash (Eicha Rabba Petichta 30): "There were four kings, each of whom requested different things. They were David, Asa, Yehoshaphat, and Chizkiyah.

David said: 'I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them: neither did I turn back until they were consumed.' God answered him, and he killed his enemies.

Asa stood up and said: 'I lack the strength to kill them; instead, I will pursue them, and You do what is necessary.' God said to him "I will do it", and killed his enemies.

Yehoshaphat stood up and said: 'I do not have the strength either to kill them or to chase them; instead, I will sing, and You do what is necessary.' God said to him "I will do it", and killed his enemies.

Hezekiah (Chizkiyah) stood up and said: 'I do not have the strength either to kill them or to chase them or to sing; instead, I will sleep in my bed, and You do what is necessary.' God said to him "I will do it", as it is written: "And it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of Ashur."

### The Difference Between King David and Hezekiah

According to those who think that a miracle is better, Hezekiah is the greatest of kings, because a great miracle was performed for him, while David was the least of all, because all his wars were fought naturally, by means of his heroism and talent. However, the truth is the exact opposite. David's faith fills and sanctifies his whole being, and the all of nature surrounding him, sings poetry to the living God, and consequently, he raises a prayer to God to reveal His light in all areas of reality, all his powers are intensified, and he goes into battle and is victorious.

On the other hand, Hezekiah's emunah is in what is beyond nature, and therefore, it does not properly illuminate earthly life. For that reason, he did not get married (Berachot 10a). Consequently, he did not sing praise after he was redeemed (Sanhedrin 94a).

In his times, the prophets of Israel, Micah and Isaiah, began to prophesy of the impending destruction, and called for the correction of the sins between a man and his fellow neighbor, and to eradicate the corruption of the ministers (Isaiah 1). However, instead of dealing with the profound correction of social and practical life, Hezekiah tried to prevent the evil by forcing the people to become stronger in Torah study – especially in areas that do not deal with the guidance of practical life. "He inserted a sword at the entrance of the study hall and said:

Anyone who does not engage in Torah study shall be stabbed with this sword. As a result, they searched from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, and did not find an ignoramus. They searched from Gevat to Antipatris and did not find a male child, or a female child, or a man, or a woman who was not expert even in the complex halakhot of ritual purity and impurity" (Sanhedrin 94b).

But it was not a Torah study that properly guides the life of society and practical action. He did not fill life with content, and so the words of the Torah remained "Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little" (Isaiah 28:10). Proof is that immediately in the next generation, Menashe succeeded in inciting the people to avodah zara and to injustices between man and his neighbor, and their sentence was sealed for destruction and exile.

### The Saving of Hezekiah on Account of David

In addition, the miracle that happened to Hezekiah happened thanks to David, as it is written (Kings 2:19, 14): "For I will protect this city to save it, for My own sake and for the sake of David My servant." Our sages said (Berachot 10b):

"Even when the Holy One, Blessed be He, sent him peace and told him that he would recover from his illness, it was bitter for him, because he was saved thanks to David, and not because of the Torah study he had increased. The peace he enjoyed was also partial, as the cities of Judah were destroyed by Sennacherib, masses of Jews were killed and others taken prisoner, and only Jerusalem was saved.

At that moment, there was an opportunity for Hezekiah to continue in the way of David and bring redemption to Israel – as our Sages said (Sanhedrin 94a): "The Holy One, Blessed be He, sought to designate King Hezekiah as the Messiah and to designate Sennacherib as Gog and Magog" – however, the opportunity was lost because he did not sing praise.

And why did he not sing praise? Because his Torah dealt mainly with the honor of heaven, the honor of the Temple, the laws of impurity and purity, and less with the building of the land and the nation, education in justice and fairness, kindness and mercy, the mitzvot by means of which the word of God is revealed in all realities.

Despite this, Hezekiah, the righteous king, has a great legacy for generations – for that thanks to adherence to the Torah, the Jewish nation adhered to eternity and survival. And as our Sages said (Sanhedrin 94b): "The yoke of Sennacherib was destroyed due to the oil (shemen) of Hezekiah that would burn in the synagogues and study halls." This is the legacy of the Torah of Chutz le'Artz, which entails cleaving, devotion and emunah in what is beyond contemporary reality. An emunah that redemption will finally come to Israel by way of the Messiah, who will continue King David, and reveal the word of God in all areas of reality.

### Why Rely on the Heter Mechira

In light of this, I will address the question: why the proper instruction for farmers is to rely on the heter mechira and expropriate the obligation not to work in the shmita year, and not to rely on the blessing the Torah promised to those who keep shmita, as the Torah says (Leviticus 25:20-21): "In the seventh year, you might ask, 'What will we eat in the jubilee year? We have not planted nor have we

harvested crops.' I will direct My blessing to you in the sixth year, and the land will produce enough crops for three years?"

Answer: The promise was made in a situation where the shmita year is a mitzvah from the Torah, as many poskim wrote, among them S'ma (HM 67:2); Hagahot Yabetz and Chidushei Chatam Sofer (on Gitin 36); Pe'at Hashulchan (29:3); Yishuot Malko paragraph 53; Mahari Engel, Maran Harav Kook (Igeret 555) and others (and not as in the words of Chidushei HaRim, ibid. Gitin, and Chazon Ish Shiviit 18: 4).

#### Blessing in the Shmita Year By Way of Nature

Additionally, the Torah did not instruct Israel to rely on a miracle; rather, the blessing for the shmita year has to come as early as the sixth year – "I will direct My blessing to you in the sixth year." Our Sages explained that Israel would save from their harvest for six years, and thus they would have what to eat in the seventh year (Sifra ibid, Panim Yafot, ibid).

In other words, when all of Israel sits in its land according to the tribes, each tribe in its proper inheritance, the obligation of shmita is from the Torah, and then, the blessing comes in a natural way. For from the study of Torah in the shmita year, the general public learns to save six years in order to refrain from work in the seventh year, and from the study to save, learn to reject gratifications, control the yetzer of lust and laziness, and to be diligent.

Consequently, the people merit saving money in order to also invest and develop the land, to the point where there is no end to the blessing that grows from the holiness of the shmita year.

#### The Foundation of the Faith of Israel

If we delve deeper, we find that the foundation of emunah is dependent on this. Those who believe that Divinity is miraculously revealed in what is outside the world, do not see great value in man's work for his livelihood, and do not find fault with the fact that a large public needs support money from the state and private donors, because, in any case, everything depends on God, and if God wants, even without working, one can merit great blessing.

Therefore, they also tend to believe that those who refrain from working in the shmita year will be miraculously blessed. Consequently, they also do not see value in the study and development of science, because it deals with nature, and not with what is beyond reality. However, Rambam (Maimonides) wrote that the study of the wisdoms of nature is the study of ma'aseh Bereishit (account of Creation), and as the Gaon of Vilna said, whoever lacks the knowledge of a portion of the secular sciences, lacks a hundred portions of knowledge of the Torah.

It is now possible to understand the importance and centrality of the mitzvah of yishuv ha'aretz, since this mitzvah forces us to study Torah in the highest, deepest and most accurate way, in order to guide our work in the settlement of the land, according to the mitzvot of Hashem, and to sanctify our lives here in the Holy Land.

This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated from Hebrew.

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### Rabbi Yissocher Frand

#### Parshas Bechukosai

We Toil and They Toil; We Run and They Run – Who Cares How They Toil and Run?

The first Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Bechukosai links the opening pasuk of the parsha, "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit" (Bamidbar 26:3) with the pasuk in Tehillim "I considered my ways and returned my feet to Your testimonies." (Tehillim 119:59).

The Medrash comments: Dovid said, "Master of the Universe, every single day I make a mental calculation and say to myself that I am going to such and such a place." The Medrash, in other words, is concentrating on the expression Im Bechukosai Teleichu (if you will WALK in My statutes). This is a strange expression. We might expect it to say "If you will OBSERVE my statutes." Based on the use of the verb Teleichu (walk), the Medrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim which relates that each morning Dovid HaMelech would wake up and think to himself of all the places where he was going to go that day. But Dovid concluded that despite his thoughts and plans, his feet would always bring him to Houses of Prayer and Study. Regardless of his mental thoughts, his feet would automatically always take him to the Beis Medrash.

That is the Medrash Rabbah as we have it. The Kesav Sofer, however, quotes a different version of this same Medrash. In the version that the Kesav Sofer cites, Dovid HaMelech is saying that every morning he woke up planning to go to the theaters, the circuses, and the stadiums but instead his feet took him to the Houses of Prayer and Study.

We can better understand Dovid waking up in the morning and saying "I need to go shopping, I need to go to Walmart, I need to go here, I need to go there, etc." We can understand some optional errands on his agenda that would take him here and there. But why would Dovid HaMelech want to go into the theaters and circuses and stadiums? This is harder for us to understand. Why would he want to do that?

The Kesav Sofer offers two interpretations. One interpretation is that Chazal say that in future times, all stadiums and theaters are going to be converted into Houses of Study and Prayer. Dovid HaMelech is saying "Ribono shel Olam, I can't wait for that day to happen. I want to be able to go to the CONVERTED theaters and stadiums." The Ribono shel Olam says "No! That will only happen in the distant future. In the meantime, your feet will take you to the real Houses of Study and Prayer."

That is the first interpretation of the Kesav Sofer. But then he gives an incredible second interpretation: Dovid HaMelech wanted to go to the stadium. He wanted to go to the theaters. Why was that? It is because he wanted to see how athletes act and how sports fans act. He wanted to observe the devotion that an athlete puts into his profession.

When we read about people who are superior athletes, it is amazing to see how many hours a day they spend training to perfect their skills. Such swimmers or gymnasts—sometimes young children—who are competing for Olympic medals, spend an incredible amount of time training with intensity before their competition. It is their life! They spend eight or ten hours a day for years at a time!

Those are the athletes themselves. But also consider the sports fans: The obsession people have for sports cannot be fully described. I know a little bit about the Orioles and the Ravens. Okay, I can't say I am such a Tzadik that I am totally aloof from that. Fine. But on the radio, it is incredible what happens on the "sports channels." People can talk about their teams and analyze all the players 24 hours a day, seven days a week! "Draft Day" is like a "three-day-Yom Tov." It is not even a game! They spend three days speculating who a franchise MAY take to play on the team in the future. Then there is all the analysis—did they choose right or did they not choose right! Maybe they should have picked someone else!

Dovid HaMelech wanted to see what constitutes dedication and what constitutes total involvement in an avocation! What does it mean to love something with all your heart? He said, "I want to go to the theaters and to the circuses because I know that there, I will see examples of total dedication to an avocation—and from there I want to learn how to apply such dedication to my own learning and my own Service to Hashem!"

There is a famous vort from the Chofetz Chaim. At a Siyum Masechta we say "We toil and they toil; we toil and receive reward, they toil and do not receive reward, we run and they run..." The Chofetz Chaim asked "Who cares that 'they run'? Who cares how 'they toil'?" He gives the same answer: If someone wants to know what true toil is—look at them! If someone wants to know what true passion is—look at them! This is the type of compassion and commitment we need to bring to our own Avodas HaShem (Divine Service).

That, says the Kesav Sofer, is the interpretation of this Medrash, according to his version of the text.

#### A New Reading of the Final Pasuk of Sefer Vayikra

The very end of the parsha contains the Mitzvah of Temurah. The Mitzvah takes up no more than a single pasuk in the entire Torah – "He shall not distinguish between good and bad and he should not substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then it and its substitute shall be holy, it may not be redeemed." (Vayikra 27:33). The Halacha is that if a person has designated an animal as an offering and he wants to switch it for another animal, he is not allowed to do that. If he attempts to do it anyhow, the switch does not work and both animals wind up becoming holy.

The next pasuk in the Torah, which is the last pasuk in Sefer Vayikra, is, "These are the commandments that Hashem has commanded to Moshe to deliver to the Children of Israel on Mt. Sinai." (Vayikra 27:34). The simple reading is that this final pasuk is a general statement referring back to all the mitzvos appearing in Sefer Vayikra. This would be well

over 200 mitzvos that are referred to by this pasuk! This includes all the mitzvos of the sacrifices, all the forbidden relationships, the dozens of varied mitzvos that appear in Parshas Kedoshim, all the Mitzvos of Kehuna, the Yomim Tovim in Parshas Emor, and so forth. That would be the simple interpretation—that “Elu HaMitzvos...” in this last pasuk of the sefer is referring to all the mitzvos in Sefer VaYikra.

I saw a comment in the sefer Milchamos Yehuda that perhaps there is another message over here. According to the Milchamos Yehuda, perhaps “Elu HaMitzvos...” is not referring to the conglomeration of all the mitzvos in the Book of Vayikra, but rather it is referring specifically to the two mitzvos with which Sefer Vayikra concludes: (1) The Halacha that if a person donates something to Hekdesh and then he wants to redeem it, he needs to add 20% to the value of the thing he wants to redeem (Vayikra 27:31) and (2) The Halacha of Temura, that if a person tries to switch an animal that he has already declared Kodesh, then the result will be that both the original animal and its ‘replacement’ will be Kodesh!

He quotes the Rambam at the end of Hilchos Temurah:

“It appears to me that the rationale behind the Mitzvah of Temurah is similar to the rationale for adding 20% to the value of his house if he redeems it (from belonging to the Bais Hamikdash). The Torah probed into the bottom-line thoughts of a person and a bit of his evil inclination, for the nature of man is to wish to increase his possessions and to be overly protective of his money. And even though he initially vowed and sanctified his property, perhaps he regretted that and now wishes to redeem his property back from Hekdesh for less than it is really worth. Therefore, the Torah says (as if imposing a penalty), that if he wishes to redeem his property, he must add a fifth. Similarly, if someone sanctified an animal (with ‘kedushas haGuf’ (body sanctity), he may want to change his mind. He may try to swap this animal for another animal of lesser value. If the Torah would give him permission to ‘upgrade’ his offering, switching an inferior animal for a superior one, he might come to switch a superior animal for an inferior one saying this new one is better. Therefore, the Torah sealed the path before him by not allowing any exchanges and penalizes him for the attempt to make an exchange (such that both animals become holy). This is all designed to mold his evil inclination and to ameliorate his thought processes. This is what the Torah is all about. The majority of the laws of Torah are nothing more than counsel from the Great Counsellor to improve our values and correct our actions.” (Hilchos Temura 4:13)

The bottom line of Torah is to make us into better people with better hashkafos (values), and better middos (character traits). These two mitzvos – adding 20% to redeem Hekdesh, and the penalty for trying to swap a sacred animal – are all about breaking our bad habits, because the Torah knows that human beings tend to be cheap. They don’t want to part with their money. The Torah therefore says to do this to break those habits. These laws are indicative. They tell us about the purpose of all of Torah in general. This is what Torah is about: L’Saken HaDeyos, u’l’yasher ha’masim!

This, according to the Milchamos Yehuda, gives new meaning to the final pasuk in Sefer VaYikra. “Elu HaMitzvos...” is referring to these two mitzvos at the end of Parshas Bechukosai—about Temura and Hekdesh—that are indicative of the purpose of all the Torah’s mitzvos—to improve our values and to correct our actions!

Chazak Chazak v’NisChazek.

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[CS – I added this piece since this is the week Chutz L’Aretz catches up with the parshiot.]

[https://ohr.edu/this\\_week/insights\\_into\\_halacha/9851](https://ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha/9851)

THE PARSHA DUAL DICHOTOMY 5782/2022 - WHICH WEEK IS WHICH?

For the week ending 14 May 2022 / 13 Iyar 5782  
by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

This time of year is an interesting one. For the next several months or so, already starting right after Pesach, and lasting all the way almost up until Tisha B’Av, the Jewish world will not be aligned. No, I am not referring

to constellations, but rather to the weekly parasha. A simple innocuous question of “What’s this week’s parasha?” will elicit a different response depending on where in the world the question is being asked. This is because the parasha will not be the same regularly scheduled one in Chutz La’aretz as it is in Eretz Yisrael.

Truthfully, this type of dichotomy actually happens not so infrequently, as it essentially occurs whenever the last day of a Yom Tov falls on Shabbos. In Chutz La’aretz where Yom Tov Sheini is halachically mandated,[1] a Yom Tov Kriyas HaTorah is publicly leined, yet, in Eretz Yisrael (unless by specific Chutznik minyanim)[2][3] the Kriyas HaTorah of the next scheduled Parasha is read. This puts Eretz Yisrael a Parasha ahead until the rest of the world soon ‘catches up’, by an upcoming potential double-Parasha, which each would be read separately in Eretz Yisrael.

The reason for this current interesting phenomenon is that this year, 5782/2022, the eighth day of Pesach, observed only outside Eretz Yisrael, fell out on a Shabbos. On this Shabbos / Yom Tov the communities of the Diaspora leined the Yom Tov reading of ‘Asser Te’asser’ (Devarim, Parashas Re’eh, Ch. 14: 22), whereas in Eretz Yisrael, communities read Parashas Acharei Mos, the next parasha in the cycle, as Pesach has already ended for them.

#### Parasha Background

The background for this uncanny occurrence is as follows: It is well known that the Torah is divided into 54 parshiyos, ensuring there are enough parshiyos for every Shabbos of the yearly cycle, which begins and ends on Simchas Torah. Since most (non-leap) years require less than 54 parshiyos, we combine certain parshiyos. This means that two consecutive parshiyos are read on one Shabbos as if they are one long parasha, to make sure that we complete the Torah reading for the year on Simchas Torah.

As detailed by the Abudraham, there are seven potential occurrences when we read “double parshiyos”. These seven are:

Vayakheil / Pekudei, the last two parshiyos of Sefer Shemos.

Tazria / Metzora, in Sefer Vayikra.

Acharei Mos / Kedoshim, in Sefer Vayikra.

Behar / Bechukosai, in Sefer Vayikra.

Chukas / Balak, in Sefer Bamidbar.[4]

Matos / Masei, the last two parshiyos of Sefer Bamidbar.

Netzavim / Vayeileich, towards the end of Sefer Devarim.[5]

However, there are several possible instances in which certain parshiyos are combined in Chutz La’aretz, yet are read on separate weeks in Eretz Yisrael. This is one of them, with those parshiyos being Matos / Masei. Calendrical Conundrum

Although, as mentioned previously, this sort of calendrical conundrum occurs not infrequently, it generally only takes about a month for the rest of the world to “catch-up” to Eretz Yisrael. But this year, 5782/2022, in what is inexplicable to many, instead of soon amalgamating, quite fascinatingly, this odd alignment with Eretz Yisrael being a week ahead continues for quite a while. In fact, the world will not actually synchronize until Mattos/Maasei – only realigning around Rosh Chodosh Av - a divergence of over three months (!) with Eretz Yisrael out of sync with the rest of the world,[6] all the while passing over several potential double-Parasha catch-up points. In Eretz Yisrael, Matos and Masei will be read separately on consecutive weeks, while in Chutz La’aretz they will be combined and read on a single Shabbos. The last several times a Parasha split of this magnitude occurred were back in 1995, 2016, and 2019. The next time will be in 21 years from now in 2043/5803.[7]

Many ask [in fact, this author has personally been asked this literally dozens of times over the last few weeks], why did we not catch up right away by Acharei Mos/Kedoshim or soon with Behar/Bechukosai? Or even Chukas/Balak? Why should three separate double parshiyos be passed over, with the world only amalgamating on the fourth possibility months later? In layman’s terms, why should we wait so long for the whole world to be realigned?

Moreover, this causes all sorts of halachic issues for travelers to and from Israel during this time period – which Parasha should they be

reading? If / how can they catch up? Although technically-speaking, since Kriyas HaTorah is practically considered a Chovas HaTzibbur, a communal obligation, one is not actually mandated to ‘catch-up’, but rather fulfills his Kriyas HaTorah obligation with whichever Kriyah is publicly correctly being read,[8] [9] nevertheless, commonly, special minyanim are set up expressly for this purpose. Many Yeshivos double-up the Parasha when most of the bochurim return from Chutz La’aretz in order to catch them up. In fact, several shuls in Eretz Yisrael, such as the renowned Zichron Moshe ‘Minyan Factory’, as well as the Beis Yisrael Shteiblach in Yerushalayim, offer a solution by hosting weekly “catch-up minyanim,” featuring the Torah reading of each previous week’s Israeli Parasha, which is the Chutzni’s current one, until the calendars re-merge. But those flying back to Chutz La’aretz would presumably not have such a ‘safety-net’ to fall back on, unless one happens to be near the landmark Shomrei Shabbos Shul in Boro Park, which this author has heard offers a Shabbos minyan including the Israeli Parasha.

#### Minhag Yisrael

Although some cite alternate minhagim,[10] nevertheless, it is important to note that nowadays this long Parasha split is indeed Minhag Yisrael, as codified by the Knesses Hagedolah, Magen Avraham, and Mishnah Berurah.[11] [12] We should also realize that back then travel to and from Eretz Yisrael was far less of an issue, as since undertaking the trip would take several months, missing one Parasha would be the least of one’s worries. But to properly understand the ‘whys’ of this fascinating dual dichotomy, one must first gain an understanding of the Parasha rules and setup. In fact, this is not a new question, as several early Acharonim, including the Maharit,[13] Rav Yosef Tirani, addressed this exact issue almost 500 years ago.

#### Managing Mnemonics

While it is true that technically Eretz Yisrael does not, nor should not, have to take Chutz La’aretz into account, to slow down or join parshiyos together due to their independent luachs (or to be grammatically correct, ‘luchos’) and cycles, as Eretz Yisrael’s is indeed deemed the ikar kriyah,[14] nevertheless, there is more to the story.

The Tur, when codifying the halacha, sets four necessary sign-posts in relation to parshiyos, time of year, various Yomim Tovim. He also offers special codes, mnemonics, as to remember the proper order of parshiyos as they relate to. In a regular year, he writes, ‘Pikdu U’Pischu’. This refers to Parashas Tzav being Shabbos Hagadol directly before Pesach.[15] However, in a leap year, like ours - 5782/2022, the mnemonic is ‘Sigru U’Pischu,’ Parashas Metzora is right before Pesach. The other three are: ‘Minu V’Atzu,’ Parashas Bamidbar is directly prior to Shavuos, ‘Tzumu V’Tzalu,’ the fast of Tisha B’Av is directly before Parashas Va’eschanan (also meaning that Parashas Devarim is always Shabbos Chazon and Va’eschanan always Shabbos Nachamu), and ‘Kumu V’Tik’u,’ that Parashas Netzavim is before Rosh Hashanah.[16] These mnemonics, denoting the four specific rules, or more accurately, necessary points of parasha alignment (or realignment) during the year, are accepted lemaaseh as halachah pesukah by all later authorities.[17]

Bamidbar = Buffer Zone

Several of these rules directly affect our split situation. Tosafos, and later seconded by the Levush,[18] states that since Parashas Bechukosai contains tochachah (rebuke), there must be a noticeable “buffer week” [or perhaps “intervening Shabbos”; practically, Parashas Bamidbar] between its reading and Shavuos. This tochacha does not fall out at this time of year simply by chance. The Gemara in Megillah (31b) teaches that Ezra HaSofer made a Takana that the curses of tochacha should be read twice a year – those in Vayikra (Parashas Bechukosai) before Shavuos and those in Devarim (Parashas Ki Savo) prior to Rosh Hashanah.

This is done so because we pray that a year and its curses should end, in order to usher in a new year with its blessings.[19] This is apropos for Shavuos as it is Rosh Hashanah for Peiros Ha’Ilan, tree fruits (see Gemara Rosh Hashanah 16a). Therefore, explains Tosafos, Bamidbar must be the stand-alone “buffer week” before Shavuos, in order to emphasize that we are getting Bechukosai in just before Shavuos. Accordingly, the Maharit, citing Rav Yissachar ben Sussan, one of the

foremost experts on intercalation of the Jewish calendar and its minhagim, in his renowned sefer Tikkun Yissachar (written in 1538/5298), explains that if Chutz La’aretz would catch up to Eretz Yisrael prior to Shavuos, then Parashas Nasso (the Parasha following Bamidbar) would be read on Shabbos Erev Shavuos, as it will be in Eretz Yisrael, and then all of Klal Yisrael will miss the ‘buffer week’ from the tochachah of Bechukosai.

Practically speaking, in Eretz Yisrael, there are no extra Shabbasos available to use as a buffer, so there is no way to fulfill this precept, and Nasso will be leined before Shavuos. But in Chutz La’aretz, where this option is still available, the Tikkun Yissachar and Maharit teach us that it is more important and preferable that at least Chutz La’aretz fulfill this dictate than it is that they catch up to Eretz Yisrael’s parasha cycle.[20] [21]

So it turns out that the issue is not why Eretz Yisrael doesn’t simply slow down for Chutz La’aretz, but rather that Chutz La’aretz will not speed up to catch up to Eretz Yisrael. This ‘Buffer Zone’ preference answers up for Acharei Mos/Kedoshim and Behar/Bechukosai.

However, there is still the subject of not catching up by Chukas/Balak. Pondering the Pearls of Parashas Pinchas

The Maharit, and later the Knesses Hagedolah, explain that since Chukas and Balak are not commonly read together, whereas Matos and Masei are (there is an important reason for this, addressed a bit further on),[22] we do not simply combine the former, as opposed to the latter, just in order to save what amounts to a discrepancy of one week.[23] The Bnei Yisaschar[24] adds an additional reason. He explains that whenever possible, we attempt to ensure the public reading of Chalukas Ha’aretz, the apportioning of Eretz Yisrael, during the period of communal mourning known as Bein Hametzarim,[25] colloquially called ‘The Three Weeks.’ This period commemorates the heralding of the beginning of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both Batei Hamikdash, from the breaching of the walls of ancient Yerushalayim on the 17th of Tamuz, until the actual destruction of the Beis Hamikdash on the Tisha B’Av.

The reason for these readings, which are found in the parshiyos of Pinchas, Matos, and Masei, to be leined specifically then, is to remind us of Hashem’s promise, that although we are currently in gulos, exile, nevertheless, ‘le’aleh techalek ha’aretz,’ we will still inherit Eretz Yisrael.

A similar assessment is given by the Minchas Yitzchak,[26] albeit regarding Korbanos, especially the Korban Tamid, which is also detailed in Parashas Pinchas. He explains that the Korban Tamid protected Klal Yisrael from sinning with Avodah Zarah.[27] When the Korban Tamid was no longer offered, it enabled the Yetzer Hara’ah of Avodah Zarah to strengthen; and it was due to this sinning that eventually led to the Beis Hamikdash’s destruction.

As such, and since we no longer have Korbanos, but at least we still have their recital, in the vein of ‘v’neshalmah parim sifoseinu’, that our tefillos are their current replacement,[28] the leining of the Korbanos is specifically read during the Three Weeks, when we are mourning the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. This serves to embolden and enable us to fight the reasons and causes for its destruction, and allow its rebuilding.

Moadim L’Simcha!

An additional point the Bnei Yisaschar raises is that Parashas Pinchas contains the Parashas HaMoadim, the reading detailing all the Yomim Tovim and their observances. He explains that this is also an apropos reading for the Three Weeks, to comfort us in our time of mourning. This is as the Navi Zechariah (Ch. 8:19) prophesized that when the Geulah comes, this period will be turned into one of great rejoicing (‘l’sasson u’lsimcha ul’moadim tovim’).

For all of the above-mentioned reasons, it is simply not worthwhile for Chutz La’aretz to make Chukas and Balak into a double Parasha merely to catch up to Eretz Yisrael, since if it would, then Parashas Pinchas will not fall out in the Three Weeks at all.

Indeed, in Eretz Yisrael this year, Parashas Pinchas falls out directly before the Three Weeks,[29] Therefore, it is proper for Chutz La’aretz to

wait and not catch up to Eretz Yisrael until Matos/Masei, thus ensuring that Parashas Pinchas be leined during Bein Hametzarim, and enabling us to glean and appreciate its veiled significance and promises for the future.

#### The Code for Consolation

The Maharat continues that the reason why Matos and Masei are generally combined is to a similar, yet reverse, reason to Bamidbar. As the Tur wrote, the code for this time of year is 'Tzumu V'Tzalu,' the fast of Tisha B'Av is directly before Va'eschanan. This is not merely by chance.

Parashas Va'eschanan contains the pesukim of 'Ki Soleed Banim U'vnei Vanim V'noshantem Ba'aretz' (Devarim Ch. 4:25), which although not a pleasant reading, as it is a tochachah (rebuke),[30] nevertheless, Chazal[31] glean that there is a hidden message of redemption buried within. V'noshantem in Gematria equals 852, letting us know that after 852 years of living in Eretz Yisrael, the Galus would start. Yet, we find that the Galus actually started two years early, after 850 years. This is because Hashem did not wantchas veshalom to have to destroy us (ad loc. verse 26), and therefore, as a kindness, brought the Exile two years early, to ensure Klal Yisrael's survival.

Therefore, explains the Maharat, we commonly join up Matos and Masei to make certain that Parashas Va'eschanan is always immediately following Tisha B'Av as Shabbos Nachamu, thus offering us a message of consolation even amidst the destruction.

In conclusion, although it may seem complicated and confusing, on the contrary, each calendarical calculation is clearly consistent with the clarion call of our Chazal - Parasha combination and separation, synchronized to showcase hope and consolation when we need it most, as well as serve as a buffer from condemnation.

The author wishes to thank Rabbi Dovid Heber of the Star-K, author of Shaarei Zmanim, for his assistance with this article. See also his recently published fascinating book "The Intriguing World of Jewish Time" (pg. 161-163).

[1] As addressed at length in previous articles titled 'Rosh Hashanah: The Universal Two Day Yom Tov, (and why Yom Kippur is Not)' and 'One Day or Two? What is a Chutznik in Eretz Yisrael to Do?'

[2] Although the famed Chacham Tzvi (Shu't 167), and later the Shulchan Aruch Harav (Orach Chaim 496, 11; although he also cites that 'yesh cholkim', nonetheless, according to the common consensus, this first opinion is ikar - see also vol. 1, Mahadura Tinyana 68) ruled that even one merely visiting Eretz Yisrael over Yom Tov should keep only one day of Yom Tov like the natives (to paraphrase: 'when in Israel, do as the Israelis do'), nevertheless, the vast majority of halachic authorities, including the codifier of the Shulchan Aruch himself (Shu't Avkas Rochel 26) and even the Chacham Tzvi's own son, Rav Yaakov Emden (Shu't Sheilas Yaavetz vol. 1: 168), maintained that visitors' status is dependant on whether or not their intention is to stay and live in Eretz Yisrael, or to return to Chutz La'aretz, known as 'im da'atam lachzor' (see next footnote at length). We do however find that the one-day shittah is defended by the Aderes (Sefer Shevach Haaretz, 35) and Shoel U'Meishiv (Shu't Mahadura Telitai vol. 2: 28), and heavily implied by the Avnei Nezer (Shu't Orach Chaim 242: 27 and 33; 539; Hashmatos to Hilchos Yom Tov, 48 - end; he maintains that 'da'atam lachzor' should not apply even for visitors from Eretz Yisrael who are staying in Chutz La'aretz over Yom Tov) This shittah has also found support in certain Rishonim, including Rabbeinu Chananel's understanding of Rav Safra's opinion (Pesachim 51b - 52a), and the Ra'avan (Pesachim 162: 2; see Even Shlomo's commentary 37). Although, as shown later on, most contemporary authorities do not rule this way, nonetheless, Chabad chassidim generally follow the shittah of their Alter Rebbe, the Shulchan Aruch Harav, and only keep one day in Eretz Yisrael, no matter how long they intend on staying. [However, there are those who cite different minhagim as prevalent in Chabad psak for this inyan. See, for example, Rav Levi Yitzchak Raskin's extensive Kuntress Yom Tov Sheini, printed in his sefer Nesivim B'sdei HaShlichus vol. 1. Thanks are due to R' Nochum Shmaryahu Zajac for pointing this out.] Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky (Ir HaKodesh V'Hamikdash vol. 3, Ch. 19: 8 and 11) reports that his grandfather-in-law, the Av Beis Din of Yerushalayim for the latter part of the nineteenth century, Rav Shmuel Salant, was notteh to this shittah as well. However, since he did not want to argue on his Rabbeim, including the Pe'as Hashulchan (see next footnote), who mandated visitors keeping Yom Tov Sheini, Rav Salant ruled that a Ben Chutz La'aretz should keep Yom Tov Sheini lechumrah, a shittah nowadays commonly referred to as 'A Day and a Half'. This refers to being makpid on not doing any Melachah De'oraysa on the second day, but also not doing the unique Yom Tov Mitzvos, i.e. making Kiddush etc. Rav

Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (Shu't Orach Mishpat, Orach Chaim 125; thanks are due to Dr. Moshe Simon-Shoshan for pointing out this important source) and Rav Yosef Dov (JB) Soloveitchik (as cited in Nefesh HaRav pg. 84) were also known to be proponents of this shittah, reporting that this was also the preferred shittah of the Rav's grandfather, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk.

[However, in this author's opinion, the misnomer for this shittah, 'A Day and a Half' is somewhat troublesome. Anecdotally, years ago, I met an older relative here in Eretz Yisrael on Yom Tov Sheini and noticed that she was performing Melachah. When I asked her about it, she innocently replied that her Rabbi told her to keep 'A Day and a Half'... and it was already after noon...] For more on Rav Shmuel Salant's shittah, see the annual Tukachinsky Luach Eretz Yisrael (Chol Hamoed Sukkos, footnote), Shu't Lehoros Nossen (vol. 11: 26), Toras Rabbeinu Shmuel Salant (pg. 120), and Aderes Shmuel (Piskei Rav Shmuel Salant zt'l; Hilchos Yom Tov 129, and in footnotes at length, pg. 131-135).

[3] Although there are those who want to prove that the Shulchan Aruch meant to rule that a visitor to Eretz Yisrael should only keep one day, as in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 496) he only mentions visitors from Eretz Yisrael in Chutz La'aretz, who need to keep a two-day Yom Tov like the locals [see, for example, Ir HaKodesh V'Hamikdash vol. 3, Ch. 19: 11, in the parenthesis, as an additional sevara of Rav Shmuel Salant's 'libo amar lo efshar'...], nevertheless, he personally put that notion to rest in his Shu't Avkas Rochel (26), where Rav Karo explicitly ruled that the Yom Tov observance of visitors to Eretz Yisrael is dependant on whether they are planning on staying or not. [Indeed, in Ir HaKodesh V'Hamikdash Ch. 19: 8, Rav Tukachinsky himself strongly disavows the aforementioned notion.] Other poskim who rule this way include the Rav Yaakov Emden (Shu't Sheilas Ya'avetz vol. 1: 168), the Pe'as Hashulchan (Hilchos Eretz Yisrael 2: 15, 21), the Chida (Shu't Chaim Sha'al vol. 1: 55, and Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 496: 7), Mahar'i Chagiz (Shu't Halachos Ketanos vol. 1: 4; however, his son argues quite extensively, including psakim from his grandfather, Rav Moshe Galanti, and 'Rabbanei Tzfas', that Bochurim should certainly only keep one day), the Pri Ha'adamah (vol. 3, pg. 17b, and in Mitzbach Adamah, Orach Chaim 468: 4 s.v. ul'inyan; citing 'kol Rabbanai Yerushalayim' regarding a Bochur who plans on returning to Chutz La'aretz), Shaarei Teshuvah (Orach Chaim 496: 3, in the parenthesis, and end 5; he makes a sikum of the shittos), Chayei Adam (vol. 2, 103: 4), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 496: end 5), Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 13), Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 38), and Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky (Ir HaKodesh V'Hamikdash vol. 3, Ch. 19: 8 and 11, and in his annual Luach Eretz Yisrael ibid.; although he does seem to give equal credence to his grandfather-in-law, Rav Shmuel Salant's 'Day and a Half' psak). The vast majority of contemporary poskim rule this way as well. See Shu't Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 3: 73 and 74 and vol. 4: 101), Orchos Rabbeinu (new print - 5775 edition, vol. 2, Ch. 'Yom Tov Sheini'; citing the Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon), Shu't Seridei Aish (new edition; vol. 1, Orach Chaim 51: 1), Shu't Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 4: 1 - 4), Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchoso (pg. 108, footnote 5; citing many Rabbanim including the Tchebiner Rav, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, whose teshuvah is printed in the back of the sefer), Shu't Shevet Halevi (vol. 5: 64), Shu't Mishnah Halachos (vol. 4: 83), Shu't Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 9: 30), Halichos Even Yisrael (Moadim vol. 1, pg. 287 - 288), Shu't Yaskil Avdi (vol. 4, Orach Chaim 26), Shu't B'tzeil Hachochmah (vol. 1: 60), Shu't Yabea Omer (vol. 6, Orach Chaim 40: 1-3), Shu't Ohr L'Tzion (vol. 3: Ch. 23: 5), Shu't Knei Bosem (vol. 1: 28), Chazon Ovadia (Yom Tov, pg. 133: 12), and Yalkut Yosef (Moadim, pg. 460).

[4] As noted out by Rav Yirmiyohu Kaganoff, in a recent "Halacha Talk" article (Yated Neeman, Y Magazine, May 6, 2022, pg. 17), Chukas and Balak are actually never combined into a double parasha in Eretz Yisrael, but rather exclusively in Chutz La'aretz.

[5] Abudraham (Seder HaParshiyos). See also Biur HaGr'a (Orach Chaim 428: 4 s.v. l'olam) and Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. B'midbar Sinai).

[6] As pointed out by R' Yisroel Strauss, the great Eretz Yisrael/Chutz La'aretz Parashah divide notwithstanding, there are three times over this period when the same haftarah will be read by all worldwide: This upcoming Shabbos - 29 Nissan (Machar Chodesh), 24 Tammuz (1st week of Bein Hametzarim), and 2 Av (2nd week of Bein Hametzarim).

[7] Thanks are due to R' Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of Understanding the Jewish Calendar, for pointing this out. This monumental split, from Pesach to Matos-Masei, can only occur in a leap year when the last day of Pesach in Chutz La'aretz is on Shabbos. In his words, "this can only occur in two types of leap years. 1. When Rosh Hashanah is on Monday and the year has 385 days [Marcheshvan and Kislev both have 30 days]. 2. When Rosh Hashanah is on Tuesday and the year [always] has 384 days."

[8] Although whether Kriyas HaTorah is considered a 'Chovas Yachid' or 'Chovas Tzibbur' is a famous "chakirah" of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (cited in Birkas Shmuel, Yevamos 21; see also Eimek Bracha, Kriyas HaTorah 3), as well as a seeming machlokes Ran and Ramban in the beginning of Maseches Megillah (3a in the Rif's pagination; see also Biur Halacha 143:1 citing

the Chaye Adam vol. 1, 31: 11), nonetheless, the consensus of contemporary poskim is that Kriyas HaTorah is indeed a Chovas HaTzibbur. See Peulas Sachir on the Maaseh Rav (175), Shu”t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 1: 28), Shu”t Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 18: 5), Mikraei Kodesh (Purim 7), Orchos Rabbeinu (vol. 1, Hosafos pg. 10), Halichos Shlomo (Moadim vol. 2, Pesach Ch. 10: 22), Shu”t Yabia Omer (vol. 9, Orach Chaim 28), Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 135: 5), and Yom Tov Sheini Kehilchas (Ch. 9:13-17) at length, quoting Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach, and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. Although Tosefes Maaseh Rav (34) relates that when the Vilna Gaon was released from jail, he read all four of the parshiyos he missed at one time, on the other hand, when someone pointed this Maaseh Rav out to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, after telling a questioner that he is not obligated to find a double-parasha-ed minyan as leining is a Chovas HaTzibbur, Rav Shlomo Zalman retorted rhetorically, “do you truly believe that you are on the Vilna Gaon’s level to perform all of the Minhagei HaGr”a?!” (Halichos Shlomo, ad loc. footnote 90). On the other hand, it is important to note that the Rema (Orach Chaim 135: 2; citing the Ohr Zarua, vol. 2, Hilchos Shabbos 45) rules regarding if an entire tzibbur did not lein one week, that they would be required to make it up the next week along with the current Parasha. In a related sheilah, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu”t Yabia Omer, ibid; see also Yalkut Yosef, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 143: 6), who relates a historical precedent (as cited in sefer Birchot Hamayim Orach Chaim 135, and Shu”t Mekor Yisrael 105) from a severe snowstorm in Yerushalayim in 1787, that lasted from Wednesday through Shabbos - when the entire city was blanketed with so much snow that it was impossible for anyone to have possibly attended, except for one shul that managed to open. The psak given was that the tzibbur should lein a double parasha the next week. See also Rav Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky’s authoritative Luach Eretz Yisrael (5775; Minhagei Hashanah, Nissan: footnote 6). Although there is some debate [see Magen Avraham (135:4 citing the Shu”t Maharam Mintz 85) that a tzibbur can only go back one parasha, and the Olas Tamid (Orach Chaim 282) and Knesses Hagedolah (Hagahos HaTur ad loc.) ruling that way as well; however the Elyah Rabba (282:2), citing the Hagahos Minhagim (Shabbos, Shacharis, 41) arguing that a tzibbur should make up as many parshiyos as were missed, and the Magen Gibborim (Elef Hamagen ad loc. 4), Chida (Shu”t Chaim Sha’al vol. 1:71, 5), Maharam Schick (Shu”t Orach Chaim 335; also citing the Chasam Sofer and Rav Nosson Adler), Maher Sham (Daas Torah ad loc.), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 6) explicitly ruling like the Elyah Rabba; the Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 7 and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 5) cite both sides of this debate with no clear-cut hachra’ah, but seem to imply they favor the latter opinion as well] as to how many parshiyos a tzibbur can be expected (or allowed) to ‘make-up’ in one go, nonetheless, recently, many poskim have ruled regarding our quite contemporary case of coronavirus-related shul closures, when the vast majority of the world did not have access to minyanim for several months, when the tzibbur was able to get back together, it was preferable that they lein all the missing parshiyos together. These poskim include Rav Moshe Sternbuch (in his weekly Parasha Sheet Shavuos 5780; he wrote that there is a ‘Maaleh’ to do so), Rav Yitzchak and Rav David Yosef (in Rav Yitzchak Yosef’s teshuva dated 28 Nissan 5780; Rav David cosigned on it, adding ‘Mitzvah rabba lefarsem’), and Rav Moshe Heinemann (in a shiur given soon after Purim 5780; available on the Star-K website). [On the other hand, Rav Asher Weiss (Minchas Asher B’Tekufas HaCorona, Tinyana 34) wrote that in his opinion, it is preferable for the tzibbur not to catch up on all the parshiyos, as aside for the Acharonim who held that a tzibbur shouldn’t make up more than one parasha, there are others who may hold that in this situation the tzibbur may actually be patur. That, along with the extended risk of people not keeping to the medical guidelines during this extensive kriyah, was reason enough for the tzibbur to davka not catch up on all the missing kriyos]. In fact, in my neighborhood, in 2020, on Parshas Bamidbar there was a special minyan leining all of ‘Toras Kohanim’ – the whole Sefer Vayikra and Parshas Bamidbar for the tzibbur that missed all the Kriyos. A related interesting sheilah arises for groups of Israeli vacationers in Chutz La’aretz whether they may keep their kevius of a parasha ahead and read that b’tzibbur as the only kriyah while in Chutz La’aretz, or whether they must keep the minhag hamakom b’tzibbur, even though they may have leined that parasha the previous Shabbos. See this author’s recent maamar in Kovetz Mah Tovu Ohalech Yaakov (vol. 4; Tishrei 5780) titled “B’Inyan Kevius HaParshiyos B’Makom Nofesh B’Chu”l.”

[9] As pointed out by Rav Kaganoff in his aforementioned article, citing Rav Chaim Na’eh (Ketzos Hashulchan Ch. 72, footnote 3), a traveler from Eretz Yisrael to Chutz L’aretz during this period, will not need to read Shnayim Mikra V’echad Targum again (as he already did it the previous week), but a Chutznik travelling to Eretz Yisrael will need to catch up on the skipped/missed parasha, as in Eretz Yisrael they will be a week ahead. For more on the halachos of Shnayim Mikra, see previous article titled ‘Understanding Shnayim Mikra V’echad Targum.’

[10] For example, the Abudraham (Seder HaParshiyos s.v. eilu) mentions Shlach and Korach are combined as regular double-Parshiyos; which to the extent of this

authors’ knowledge is not currently practiced.

[11] Knesses Hagedolah (Orach Chaim 428, Haghos on Tur s.v. kishe’ira), Magen Avraham (ad loc. end 6; citing the precedent and rulings of the Maharat and Tikkun Yissachar; see following footnotes), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. end 10).

[12] In an interesting side point, the Gemara (Megillah 29b) mentions an alternate minhag, that of the Bnei Maaraava (Eretz Yisrael), “D’maski L’Deoraysa B’tlas Shnin,” that they only complete the Torah every three years, as opposed to our common minhag of doing so every year. Lest one thinks that this minhag was only extant during Talmudic times as the Rambam (Hilchos Tefilla Ch. 13: 1) already wrote in the 1100s that it is not the minhag pashut, on the other hand, we find that famed traveler Binyamin of Tudela (Masa’os Rabi Binyamin M’Tudela; Adler / London edition pg. 63) related that in the early 1170s, in Egypt there were two different co-existing Kehillos, that of the mainstream community finishing the Torah annually, and that of the Bnei Eretz Yisrael, splitting each parasha into three and only concluding the Torah every three years. Indeed, we do find differing views of the parshiyos and their kevius in the works of several Rishonim. For example, the Chida, at the end of his Shu”t Chaim Sha’al, quotes Kitzur Teshuvos HaRosh as cited from sefer Chazei Hatenufa (54), that the main point is to ensure that the Torah is completed every year. Hence, it is within the rights of ‘Chacham B’Iro’ to decide where to stop, as in his opinion, our parsha setup is not halacha kavua, but rather minhag. The Ohr Zarua (vol. 2, Hilchos Shabbos 45 s.v. maaseh) seems to concur with this assessment as well, stating that there is no kevius which parasha must specifically be leined on which Shabbos. Yet, it must be stressed that this is not the normative halacha. Thanks are due to Rabbi Moshe Taub for pointing out several of these important sources.

[13] Shu”t Maharat (vol. 2, Orach Chaim 4), also quoting the Tikkun Yissachar (pg. 38 a -b), based on Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. khalos) and the Levush (Orach Chaim 428: 4).

[14] The Tikkun Yissachar (pg. 32b) explains that as Eretz Yisrael observes Pesach for seven days, exactly as prescribed in the Torah, as opposed to Chutz La’aretz, which observes an eight-day Pesach due to Rabbinic decree (as detailed at length in previous articles titled: ‘Rosh Hashanah: The Universal Two-Day Yom Tov (and Why Yom Kippur is Not)’ and ‘One Day or Two? What is a Chutznik in Eretz Yisrael to Do?’), which in turn pushes off the calendar, the Eretz Yisrael Luach is deemed the ikar one and ‘Bnei Ha’Ikari’im’ certainly do not have to be concerned with the calendar of ‘Bnei HaMinhag’. Indeed, regarding a year with similar calendrical structure, but not a leap year [so the ‘split’ occurred with earlier parshiyos and concluded much earlier; this was addressed in a previous article titled ‘Parasha Permutations 5778’], the Tikkun Yissachar (ad loc. s.v. hagahah) relates that the Sefardic Chachamim of Tzfas agreed to separate Tazria and Metzora to be on par with the rest of the world. However, the response of the Rabbanim from the rest of Eretz Yisrael was not long in coming. They utterly rejected the idea, and demanded that they only catch up at Behar / Bechukosai, as that was already the established minhag for generations. The exact quote of the sharply worded rejoinder of the Rabbanim is “Zehu Minhag Avoseinu U’Kadmonieinu B’Yadeinu Mei’Olam V’Shanim Kadmoniyos.”

[15] According to the Abudraham (pg. 372, Seder HaParshiyos), and Tikkun Yissachar (pg. 38a), and cited lemaaseh by the Levush (Orach Chaim 428: 4), Knesses Hagedolah (ibid. s.v. shittah 44), and Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 5), the reason why Parshas Tzav generally falls out on Shabbos Hagadol, the Shabbos immediately preceding Pesach, is that it mentions the halachos of Kasherings Keilim (Vayikra Ch. 6: 21), albeit regarding the Korban Chata’as, as ‘haga’alas keilim chometz lamud m’Korbanos’. Although in a leap year Parshas Metzora is usually read directly before Pesach, it is also in sync, as it mentions ‘kli cheresh yishaver’, which is quite apropos for Pesach as well.

[16] According to the main commentaries on the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, ‘Pikdu’ means ‘commanded’, hence it is referring to Parshas Tzav, which also means ‘command.’ ‘Pischu’ is referring to Pesach. ‘Sigru’ means ‘closing,’ referring to Parshas Metzora, as a Metzora must be closeted for at least a week. ‘Minu,’ ‘count’, refers to Parshas Bamidbar, which deals mainly with the counting of Bnei Yisrael. ‘Atzru,’ ‘stop’, refers to Shavuos, by referring to its name that it is called by in the Torah, ‘Atzeres.’ ‘Tzumu,’ ‘fast’, refers to the fast of Tisha B’Av. ‘Tzulu’, ‘daven’, refers to Parshas Va’eschanan, as it starts with Moshe Rabbeinu’s entreaties to Hashem. ‘Kumu’, ‘stand’, refers to Parshas Nitzavim, literally ‘standing’. And ‘Tik’u’, ‘blow’ refers to Rosh Hashanah, when the Mitzvas Hayom is to blow the Shofar.

[17] These mnemonics are cited and accepted lemaaseh by all later authorities as well, including the Shulchan Aruch, Levush, and Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 428: 4).

[18] Tosafos (Megillah 31b s.v. khalos), and later seconded by the Levush (Orach Chaim 428: 4). The Levush explains that the “buffer week,” with its different parasha, prevents the Satan from using the tochacha to prosecute us on the judgment day.

[19] ‘Tichleh shana u’kloseha, tachel shana u’birchoseha’. See Gemara Megillah

(31b).

[20] However, as pointed out by Rav Dovid Heber in his recent *The Intriguing World of Jewish Time* (pg. 162, footnote 12), “It should be noted that even in Chutz La’aretz there are cases when we lein Parshas Nasso before Shavuos since there is no other option. This happens in leap years when the first day of Rosh Hashanah is on Thursday.”

[21] Interestingly, and on a side point, this setup might cause a world-record for longest Kriyas HaTorah, a potential whopping 335 pesukim, in the following scenario. Some ‘Chutzniks’ go to Eretz Yisrael next year for Shavuos. On Erev Shavuos, in Chutz La’aretz they lein Bamidbar and in Eretz Yisrael they lein Nasso. Anyone who does this will miss Bamidbar, so they might make a special combination minyan for these visitors. The grand total of Bamidbar (159 pesukim) plus Nasso (176 pesukim) equals 335 pesukim – a potential new record! Thanks are due to Rabbi Dovid Heber of the Star-K and author of *Shaarei Zmanim*, for pointing this out.

[22] In the words of Rav Yirmiyahu Kaganoff in his aforementioned article, “Truthfully, we should view Matos and Masei as one long parasha (making the combination the longest parasha in the Torah) that occasionally needs to be divided, rather than viewing it as two parshiyos that are usually combined.”

[23] However, the Mahari mentions that in a year such as ours, the minhag in Syria was to catch up by Chukas/Balak. He bases it on the *Tikkun Yissachar*, who mentions a certain Chacham, Harav Saadya Dayan Tzova (presumably a Dayan in Aram Tzova – Aleppo, Syria), who combined Korach and Chukas, an interesting combination that, as the *Tikkun Yissachar* notes, the rest of the world never combines. However, my esteemed father-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Lieberman, informed me based on his years of learning in Kollel there, that the Chaleb (Syrian) community in Mexico City still follows this unusual combination of Korach and Chukas.

[24] *Bnei Yisaschar* (vol. 1, *Maamarei Chodshei Tamuz - Av*, *Maamar 2: 2*).

[25] This three-week season is referred to as such by the *Midrash Rabbah* (cited by Rashi in his commentary to *Eichah Ch. 1*, verse 3).

[26] *Minchas Yitzchak al HaTorah* (newer edition, vol. 2 pg. 185, *Parashas Pinchas s.v. uvazeh*).

[27] He proves this from different *maamarei Chazal* from *Taanis* (26a), *Yoma* (62b), *Sanhedrin* (56b), as well as the *Kli Yakar* (*Pinchas Ch. 28: 4*). His actual *maamar* was explaining why the fact that *Batlu HaTamid* on *Shiva Asur B’Tamuz* is reason enough for fasting.

[28] *Hoshe’ a* (Ch. 14: 3). See also *Gemara Taanis* (27b), *Megillah* (31b), and *Yoma* (86b).

[29] This does however, create an additional interesting discrepancy. In Eretz Yisrael, *Pinchas* falls out prior to the Three Weeks, thus enabling the leining of its not so commonly-read haftarah “V’yad Hashem” (*Melachim I*, Ch. 18:46), which is only read when *Matos* and *Masei* are read separately. [Indeed, according to Rav Dovid Heber of the Star-K (*The Intriguing World of Jewish Time*, pg. 173), according to most minhagim, “V’yad Hashem” is the third rarest-read haftarah, only leined on average once in ten years.] Otherwise, as usually is, *Pinchas* is part of the The Weeks and hence the first haftarah of the ‘Tlas D’Paranusa’ – “Divrei Yirmiyahu” is its commonly read haftarah. Ergo, in Chutz La’aretz, this haftarah will not be read this year, as there *Pinchas* is read a week later than in Eretz Yisrael, and hence is part and parcel of the Three Weeks. This minhag is based on the *Pesikta*, an early *Midrash* cited by many early authorities including *Tosafos* (*Megillah 31b s.v. rosh*) and the *Abudraham* (*Seder Parshiyos V’Haftaros*), who continues the teachings of *Chazal* as to the proper haftarah readings starting from

the Fast of Shiva Assur B’Tamuz. During the ‘Three Weeks’ from 17 Tamuz until Tisha B’Av, we read ‘T’lasa D’Paranusa’, ‘Three Readings of Misfortune.’ After Tisha B’Av (starting with *Shabbos Nachamu*, dubbed so due to its haftarah, *Nachamu Nachamu Ami*) until Rosh Hashanah, ‘Shiva D’Nechemta’, or ‘Seven Readings of Consolation’ are read. This is followed by a reading of *Teshuva*, during the *Shabbos* between Rosh Hashanah and *Yom Kippur*, aptly named ‘*Shabbos Shuva*,’ for its repentance themed haftarah starting with ‘*Shuva Yisrael*.’ The *Abudraham* as well as *Rabbeinu Tam*, conclude that these special haftarah readings are so important, that they are never pushed off! This topic was discussed at length in a previous article titled ‘Of Haftaros and *Haydalah*: *Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av* 5781.’

[30] In fact, it is also the *Kriyah* for *Shacharis* on Tisha B’Av itself [see *Rema* (*Orach Chaim 559:4*)], thus making it read twice in the same week, perhaps to let its hidden message sink in.

[31] *Gemara Sanhedrin* (38a), cited by *Rashi* on the *pasuk*. See also *Sifsei Chachamim* (ad loc.).

1995-2022 ©. This article was written L’Refuah Sheleimah for my former neighbor Rav Binyomin Povarsky - Refael Binyomin ben Leah, L’Iluy Nishmas Maran Sar HaTorah Harav Shmaryahu Yosef Chaim ben Harav Yaakov Yisrael zt”l (Kanievsky), this author’s beloved grandmother, Chana Rus (Spitz) bas Rav Yissachar Dov a”h and uncle Yeruchem ben Rav Yisroel Mendel (Kaplan) zt”l, and l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad!

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לע”ג

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
ביליא בת (אריה) ליבע ע"ה  
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

## Parashat Be-Hukkotai: "Listen Up . . . Or Else"

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's parasha presents the first of the two major 'tokhaha' sections in the Torah: sections in which we are told in detail what exactly will happen to us if we abandon the mitzvot. The other tokhaha section is much later on, at the end of Sefer Devarim (Deuteronomy), in Parashat Ki Tavo. The phenomenon of a tokhaha section signals a great opportunity to think about many key issues; for example:

- 1) Are reward and punishment for our deeds delivered to us here in this life, as the tokhaha seems to imply, or at some later stage beyond the life of this world (or at both points)? [Since this issue is really a philosophical one, we will stick to more concretely textual concerns. Abravanel discusses this issue at length, presenting 7, count 'em, 7 different perspectives.]
- 2) If Hashem is a truly merciful God, can it be that He will really punish us in the horrible ways depicted in the tokhaha? If so, how does that impact on our understanding of Hashem's nature? [Another issue of philosophy; not exactly our focus in a parasha shiur.]
- 3) Do these recipes for disaster remain in reserve in Hashem's arsenal, or do they echo in history in events that we have actually experienced as a nation? What do they say about our future? [Looks promising as a topic, but may get us sidetracked in trying to identify Biblical predictions with historical events; also, we may run into serious trouble if we try to fit the Sho'a into this framework.]
- 4) What is the function of tokhaha, and what does the tokhaha have to say? Does the Torah expect that we will be more obedient if it threatens us with what will happen if we don't behave, or is there some other purpose to the tokhaha?

This last set of questions is the one with which we will deal this week. What is the Torah saying to us besides "Listen to Me, or else . . . "?

### A LOOK AT THE BOOKENDS:

At the beginning of Parashat beHar, last week's parasha, the Torah says:

25:1 -- Y-HVH spoke to Moshe in Mount Sinai, saying . . .

This introduction is followed by the mitzvot we discussed last week: Shemita and Yovel, which require that:

- 1) We perform no agricultural work in Eretz Yisrael in the last year of every seven years, that we consider all produce which grows (by itself) that year ownerless and allow the poor and the animals to take it;
- 2) We cancel all loans between Jews in this seventh year;
- 3) We treat the last year of every fifty years just like we treat a seventh year, abstaining from agricultural work etc.;
- 4) We free all Jewish slaves in this fiftieth year;
- 5) We return to the original owners all land which has been sold in the past 49 years.

Last week we discussed the effect of these mitzvot on us: they shatter the illusion we might otherwise begin to believe that the 'reality' of earning our bread is the \*real\* reality and that worshipping Hashem is a nice addendum but is not part of the hard-nosed real world. There is perhaps nothing more hard-nosed and 'real' than Shemita and Yovel. Imagine if this were to happen next week -- the government announces that all work is to stop for the next year, all food which grows is deemed ownerless, all debts are canceled, all land returns to the people who owned it half a century ago. Sound like a recipe for economic chaos and disaster? Exactly! By mandating this behavior, the Torah punctures our illusion of reality and shoves it aside before a more 'real' reality: we are forced to recognize that we own what we do only by the generosity of Hashem and that the economy is completely instrumental; it is not at all important in any axiological sense, it is there only to facilitate our service of Hashem.

This lesson is so important that it is followed by a series of warnings about what will happen if we do not keep the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel: the tokhaha. The fact that the tokhaha is aimed primarily at reinforcing our observance of Shemita and Yovel is supported by several features of the text. Most basically, the Torah's placing the tokhaha immediately after the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel intimates that the warnings apply most directly to these mitzvot.

The connection between Shemita/Yovel and the tokhaha is strengthened further by the 'bookends' with which the Torah surrounds the section on Shemita and Yovel and the tokhaha. We noted above that the Torah begins last week's parasha with the news that what we are about to learn was delivered by Hashem to Moshe at Sinai. Then come the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel. Then comes the tokhaha (in the beginning of this week's parasha), and just after the tokhaha, the Torah places another bookend, reporting that what we have just read was what Hashem communicated to Moshe at Sinai. (Another such bookend appears at the end of Parashat BeHukotai, sealing Sefer VaYikra.) What the Torah may be hinting again by placing bookends before Shemita/Yovel and after the tokhaha is that these warnings are aimed at neglect of these mitzvot in particular.

Further and more explicit evidence of the connection between the tokhaha and Shemita/Yovel can be found in the text of the tokhaha itself. As the tokhaha begins, it sounds like a general warning about neglecting any of the mitzvot: (26:14-15) "If you do not listen to Me, and do not do all of these mitzvot; if you despise My laws, and if your souls revile My statutes, by not doing all of My mitzvot, thereby abrogating My covenant . . ." However, as we move toward the end of the tokhaha, it seems clearer that the phrase "all of these mitzvot" refers not to the mitzvot as a whole, but to "these mitzvot" which have just been discussed: Shemita and Yovel. After the Torah describes how the rebellious nation would be driven out of its land:

"\*Then\* the land will enjoy its Sabbaths [=Shemita years], all the days of its abandonment, with your being in the land of your enemies; \*then\* the land will rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths! All the days of its abandonment, it shall rest the rests it did not rest during your Sabbaths [i.e., during the years that were supposed to have been Shemita years], when you lived upon it!" (26:34-35).

"The land shall be abandoned of them, and it shall enjoy its Sabbaths in its abandonment from them, and they [the nation] shall expiate for their sin, since they despised My statutes and their souls reviled My laws" (26:43).

We commit sins, unnamed at the beginning of the tokhaha, but by the end it seems apparent that the abandonment of the land and the consequent cessation of its cultivation through agriculture atones for the sins. The best conclusion: the sins referred to by the tokhaha are the neglect of Shemita and Yovel. Our not ceasing working the land during Shemita requires our exile from the land so that it can rest on the Sabbaths we have denied it; our not canceling loans during Shemita requires that we become impoverished and powerless; our not returning land to its owners during Yovel requires that we be denied ownership over even our own land; our not freeing Jewish slaves during Yovel requires that we ourselves be taken captive and sold as slaves by those whom Hashem sends to conquer us. Mida ke-neged mida, measure for measure.

### **MEETING THE CHALLENGE:**

The Torah knows how difficult it is to keep Shemita and Yovel. It is certainly a tall order to take a forced sabbatical, to resist the urge to try to make the maximum profit by planting during this year, and to trust that Hashem will provide enough food to compensate for this year's lack of harvest. It is a tremendous challenge to forgive all loans to Jews every seven years. It is certainly no simple matter to release one's hold on one's real estate empire and return the parcels of land to their owners, and in a society which accepts slavery, it is almost 'unrealistic' to expect that slaveowners will release their Jewish slaves in response to a Divine command. But this is what Shemita and Yovel demand.

The Torah prepares us for the challenge of Shemita and Yovel in various ways. One way is the tokhaha, a warning of the dire consequences of neglect: disease, destruction, disaster, death. Other indications that the Torah expects these mitzvot to run into resistance, and other ways in which the Torah tries to strengthen us, are amply provided by the text itself. First, the Torah anticipates our fear that if we do not plant in the seventh year, we will starve:

(25:20-21) If you shall say, "What shall we eat in the seventh year? After all, we shall not be planting or gathering our produce!" I shall command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will provide produce for three years.

Next, the Torah anticipates that canceling all loans to Jews will prove a very unpopular mitzvah, and duly warns and encourages us:

(Devarim 15:7-10) If there shall be among you a pauper, from among your brothers, in one of your gates, in your land, which Y-HVH your God is giving to you--do not harden your heart and do not close your hand to your poor brother; instead, completely open your hand to him and lend him enough to provide whatever he lacks. Beware lest there be an evil thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of Shemita [literally, 'cancellation'] is approaching," and your shall look ungenerously upon your poor brother, and you shall not give to him, and he shall call out against you to Y-HVH, and there will be sin in you. You shall surely give to him, and let your heart not be bitter when you when you give him, for because of this thing Y-HVH, your God, shall bless you in all of your works and in all of your efforts.

### **HINTS FROM THE RAMBAM:**

The Rambam's *Hilkhot Shemita ve-Yovel* (Laws of Shemita and Yovel) provides subtle but crucial confirmation that Shemita and Yovel are mitzvot that we accepted as a nation somewhat reluctantly. Instead of warnings and exhortations, these indications are assumptions which are built into the halakhic system:

Chapter 1, Law 12 -- One who plants during the seventh year, whether purposely or accidentally [i.e., with or without the awareness that it is the seventh year and that planting is forbidden], must uproot what he has planted, for \*the\* \*Jews\* \*are\* \*suspected\* \*by\* \*[halakha]\* \*of\* \*violating\* \*the\* \*laws\* \*of\* \*the\* \*seventh\* \*year,\* [!!!] and if we were to permit leaving the plant in the ground if it had been planted accidentally, those who had planted purposely would just claim to have planted accidentally.

Chapter 4, Law 2 -- All plants which grow wild during this year are rabbinically prohibited to be eaten. Why did they [the rabbis] decree that they be forbidden? Because of the sinners: so that one should not go and secretly plant grain and beans and garden vegetables in his field, and then when they sprout he would eat them and claim that they grew wild; therefore they forbade all wild plants which sprout during the seventh year.

[See also 4:27, 8:18]

Chapter 9, Law 16 -- When Hillel the Elder saw that the people were refusing to lend money to each other and were transgressing the verse written in the Torah, "Beware lest there be an evil thought in your heart . . .", he established for them the "pruzbul," [a special contract] which would prevent the cancellation of their debts to each other . . . .

Clearly, Shemita and Yovel are difficult mitzvot, and they require the Torah's encouragement.

### **TWO SIDES OF A COIN:**

We have seen that the tokhaha appears closely connected to the mitzvot of Shemita and Yovel (or, more precisely, the neglect of these mitzvot) and that the Torah and halakha take pains to encourage observance of these mitzvot and prevent abuses of the halakha. But now that we have zeroed in these mitzvot as the focus of the tokhaha, we return to the question with which we began: what is the purpose of the tokhaha? Does the Torah expect us to be frightened by these threats into properly keeping Shemita and Yovel? Perhaps threats work in some cultures (or in all cultures in some centuries), but from our perspective in the 20th century, and considering that most of us are products of Western culture to a significant degree, threats don't usually have much effect. (If this is not obvious to you, take a look around and try to estimate what percentage of the Jewish people remain faithful to the mitzvot of the Torah--despite the many warnings and exhortations the Torah offers.) Since the Torah is an eternal and Divinely authored document, we must be able to find significance in it in all generations and in all cultures. So what does message does the tokhaha communicate to us?

Surprisingly, the tokhaha may teach us the same lesson as Shemita and Yovel themselves attempt to teach us.

In the 'normal' course of life, we go about our business, doing our best to achieve some level of material comfort. The world either rewards our efforts or doesn't, but either way, we are eternally and tragically prone to two enormous errors: 1) we begin to believe that making money and achieving domination over material and people are ultimate goals in their own right, and 2) we begin to believe that credit for our success or failure (but particularly our success) goes entirely to us. Shemita and Yovel come to prevent or correct these errors: completely interrupting the economy with a mitzvah which

arrives every few years has a nasty way of sucking all of the wind out of the pursuit of wealth and reminding us that in any event we are not in control of the system.

But there is another option. Shemita and Yovel are only one way of helping us maintain our awareness of these truths and therefore forcing us to look outside wealth and power to find the goals of our lives. Although Shemita and Yovel are obligatory, in some sense, they are a 'voluntary' way of reminding ourselves of where our ultimate attention should be directed. If we choose to reject Shemita and Yovel and insist that the economy (and our pursuit of wealth and power) will march on no matter what, Hashem has other options for reminding us of these truths. We can either choose to puncture the economic facade every seven years of our own volition, shattering our own mounting illusions and taming our growing greed, or Hashem will do the puncturing for us. Either way, we will remain inescapably aware of what Hashem wants us to know, but we get to choose whether to take the 'bitter pill' ourselves, or have our figurative national limbs amputated by plague, invasion, destruction, exile, and oppression.

That this is one of the deeper meanings of the tokhaha is hinted by the Torah and by the Rambam's interpretation of it. The tokhaha uses the word "keri" several times to describe the unacceptable behavior of the Jews in rejecting Shemita and Yovel; Hashem promises powerful retribution. But, amazingly, we still have the potential to miss the point. Apparently, \*nothing\* can guarantee that someone who refuses to see Hashem's control of the world will suddenly open his eyes. Shemita and Yovel are good options, but we can choose to ignore them. Destruction and punishment are more highly aggressive options, but they too can fail at their task if we do not see our misfortune as Hashem's "plan B" for getting us to look away from the material world and ourselves and toward Him and His goals for us:

Rambam, Laws of Fast Days, Chapter 1:

Law 1 -- It is a positive biblical command to cry out and to blow with trumpets over every crisis which comes upon the community .

...

Law 2 -- This practice is among the paths of repentance, for when a crisis comes and they cry out over it and blow the trumpets, all will know that it is because of their evil deeds that evil has befallen them . . . and this will cause them to [try to] remove the crisis from upon them.

Law 3 -- But if they do not cry out and blow, and instead say, "This disaster which has occurred to us is just the way of the world," "This crisis simply happened by coincidence," this is the way of callousness, and causes them to maintain their evil ways, and then the crisis will grow into further crises, as it says in the Torah [in the tokhaha in our parasha], "You have behaved with Me as if all is 'keri' [happenstance], so I shall behave with you with wrathful keri [happenstance]," meaning, "If I bring upon you a crisis to make you repent, if you then say that it is a meaningless coincidence, I will add fury to that occurrence [and punish you further]."

As the tokhaha begins, Hashem warns that He will punish us for ignoring Shemita and Yovel; according to the interpretation we have been developing, the point is not so much to punish us as to provide a less friendly way of achieving what Shemita and Yovel were supposed to achieve (26:14-17). Our planting will yield nothing (as our voluntary non-planting during Shemita should have done) and our security will be destroyed by diseases which blind and confuse us. Our sense of control and mastery will be shattered by defeat at the hands of our enemies. If we still do not respond, we are punished further (18-20): Hashem will "smash the pride of your power"; He will turn the sky and ground into unyielding metal, and our attempts to violate Shemita will amount to nothing. At this point the Torah introduces the word 'keri': "If you behave with Me with keri" (21), if you ascribe these disasters to global warming or acid rain or ozone depletion or any other cause other natural process unconnected with the theological lesson of Shemita and Yovel, "I will add to your suffering seven times for your sin." Because we refused to make our food available to the animal as commanded during Shemita, the animals will help make us suffer (22) and topple the sense of domination and order we have imposed on the world. Hashem sarcastically asserts that He will respond to our claim of 'keri' with more of that 'keri'; if we believe it is all just part of the natural process, then we will just keep getting more of that 'natural process' until it dawns on us to wonder whether something is amiss. Eventually, we are to be exiled, and then "the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths." Again, Hashem speaks with bitter sarcasm: if we refuse to accept Shemita and Yovel, and if we reject our suffering's meaning, then finally at least the unthinking \*land\* will understand and will celebrate Shemita when there is no one left to pick up a shovel and violate the Sabbath of the land.

In this light, the blessings we find just before the tokhaha, which are promised to us if we keep Shemita and Yovel, also take on new meaning. These blessings are not simply rewards for good behavior and obedience, they are in fact only possible if we keep Shemita and Yovel. We can be allowed to enjoy material success, military victory, personal fertility, and other blessings only if we keep Shemita and Yovel because otherwise these blessings begin to compete with Hashem for our attention. Only if we 'voluntarily' impose Shemita and Yovel on ourselves and remind ourselves of the ultimate goals to which we are to dedicate ourselves can we be trusted to properly interpret the meaning of our success.

The end of the tokhaha promises that no matter how bad things get, Hashem will never abandon us completely. But this is comforting only now that we have seen the tokhaha in empirical historical Technicolor. In our century, now that Hashem has shown us a smile of gracious generosity, may we think creatively and seriously to find personal ways to remind ourselves of our ultimate goals and to prevent ourselves from being blinded by greed and egotism.

Shabbat Shalom

## **PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI**

### **THE CONCLUSION OF SEFER VAYIKRA**

Considering that Sefer Vayikra is primarily a book of laws, it would certainly be appropriate to conclude those laws by explaining their reward - and that is exactly what we find in Parshat Bechukotai! Review Vayikra chapter 26 - better known as the '**tochacha**' - noting how it describes the reward (/or punishment) for keeping (/or defying) God's laws.

Hence, chapter 26 forms a fitting conclusion for the entire book. So why does Sefer Vayikra add one additional chapter (see chapter 27 /the laws of 'erchin') immediately afterward?

In this week's shiur we attempt to explain why.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Let's begin by clarifying our opening question. Recall how Parshat Bechukotai (the last Parshat ha'shavua in Sefer Vayikra) contains two distinct sections:

- (1) the **tochacha** (chapter 26) -  
Bnei Yisrael's reward [and/or punishment] should they obey [/or disobey] God's commandments;
- (2) The laws of '**erchin**' (chapter 27) -  
A set of specific laws pertaining to the monetary evaluation of people or property dedicated to God.

Considering that Sefer Vayikra is a book that contains a collection of mitzvot, a '**tochacha**' would form an appropriate conclusion - for it outlines how God rewards (or punishes) Am Yisrael as a function of how they keep those mitzvot.

The first section of our shiur will explain how (and why) the **tochacha** should indeed be considered the conclusion of Sefer Vayikra. Afterward, we'll attempt to explain why the Torah may have 'added on' chapter 27 to form a significant 'epilogue'.

### **PART ONE - A PERFECT FINALE**

Recall our explanation of how Sefer Vayikra divides into two distinct sections:

- A) **Kedushat mishkan** - chapters 1 -> 17.  
focusing on laws pertaining to the mishkan, such as korbanot, tum'a & tahara, etc.
- B) **Kedushat ha-am ve-haaretz** - chapters 18 -> 25.  
focusing on a wide range of laws of 'kedusha' outside the mishkan, to make Am Yisrael an '**am kadosh**'.

As you review both the 'positive' and 'negative' sides of the **tochacha**, note how the reward and punishment relates to **both** these sections, i.e. the mishkan and the Land:

- \* On the positive side, should Bnei Yisrael **obey** the mitzvot, then:
  - B) "and I will put My **mishkan** in your midst..." (26:11)
  - A) "and the **land** shall give its produce..." (26:4).
- \* On the negative side, should Bnei Yisrael **disobey** these laws, then:
  - A) "I will make your **mikdash** desolate..." (26:31)
  - B) "the **land** will not give its produce..." (26:20,34-35).

This only strengthens our claim that the **tochacha** should have been the last chapter of Sefer Vayikra! However, the best 'proof' is found in its 'final' pasuk.

### **THE FINAL PASUK -**

Let's take a look at the final pasuk of the **tochacha**, to show how it relates to both halves of Sefer Vayikra:

"These are the **chukim & mishpatim**, and the **torot** which

God had given between Him and Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai to Moshe" (26:46).

Clearly, this pasuk forms a summary of more than just the **tochacha** itself. Let's explain why.

Note how this final pasuk mentions two categories of mitzvot that we are already familiar with:

- 1) **chukim & mishpatim**, and
- 2) **torot**.

This implies that whatever **unit** this pasuk does summarize - it includes both 'chukim & mishpatim' **and** 'torot' (that were given to Moshe on Har Sinai). Hence, this pasuk must summarize more than the **tochacha**, for the **tochacha** itself does not contain "chukim & mishpatim", nor "torot".

Aware of this problem, many commentators attempt to identify the wider unit that is summarized in this pasuk. For example:

\* Rashbam suggests that it summarizes both Parshiot Behar & Bechukotai, i.e. chapters 25 & 26. This is quite logical, for the laws of shmitta and yovel could be considered the "chukim & mishpatim". This also makes sense since both these chapters are included in the same 'dibbur' which began in 25:1.

However, Rashbam does not explain which laws in this unit fit under the category of torot.

Furthermore, recall our explanation in Parshat Tzav that a 'torah' implies a procedural type of law, e.g. 'torat ha-chatat' - how the kohen executes the chatat offering, etc. Within chapters 25 & 26, it is difficult to pinpoint any such 'procedural' law.

\* Ibn Ezra claims that this pasuk summarizes not only Parshat Behar (i.e. Vayikra chapters 25 & 26), but also Parshat Mishpatim, i.e. **Sefer Shmot** chapters 21 - 23!

Ibn Ezra's interpretation is based on his understanding that the **tochacha** in Parshat Bechukotai is none other than the 'sefer ha-brit' mentioned in Shmot 24:7 [i.e. in the Torah's description of the ceremony at Ma'amad Har Sinai when Bnei Yisrael proclaimed 'na'aseh ve-nishma']. (See Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 25:1 and Shmot 24:7.)

However, it seems rather strange to find a summary pasuk for Parshat Mishpatim at the end of Sefer Vayikra!

\* Ramban agrees with Ibn Ezra that this pasuk forms a summary of the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim as well. However, he reaches this conclusion from a different angle. Ramban claims that this parshia of the **tochacha** was actually given to Moshe Rabbeinu during his second set of forty days on Har Sinai, and serves as a 'replacement' covenant - to replace the conditions of the original na'aseh ve-nishma covenant (as described in Shmot 24:7). As such, this summary pasuk summarizes the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim as well. [See Ramban on 25:1, towards the end of his lengthy peirush to that pasuk. This complicated (but important) Ramban is based on his approach to the chronological order of Chumash, but it is beyond the scope of this shiur.]

In any case, our above question regarding Ibn Ezra's approach would apply to Ramban's as well.

\* Rashi offers the 'widest' understanding of this summary pasuk. He claims that this finale pasuk summarizes not only the entire 'written law' of the entire Chumash, but also the entire 'oral law' as well!

It is interesting to note that from among all of the commentators, only Rashi deals with the problem of determining the precise meaning of "torot". Rashi solves the problem by quoting the Midrash that it refers to 'Torah she-bikhtav u-ba'al peh'. However, this interpretation is quite difficult for (according to simple pshat) the word 'eileh' [these] at the beginning of 26:46 summarizes what has been **written** thus far, and not what has not been written yet.

\* Seforno follows a direction similar to Rashi, but appears to

be a bit more 'realistic'. He claims that this pasuk summarizes **all** of the mitzvot that were mentioned in Chumash thus far, i.e. **before** Parshat Bechukotai. However, Sefer is not very precise concerning exactly which mitzvot are summarized by this pasuk.

In our shiur, we will follow Sefer's 'lead' and show how this final pasuk may actually form a summary pasuk for all of the mitzvot found in Sefer Vayikra! Our approach will be based on identifying more specifically what the phrases chukim & mishpatim and torot (in 26:46) may be referring to.

## A FITTING FINALE

Recall once again how Sefer Vayikra divides into two sections (see above), and how the second half of the Sefer begins in chapter 18 with a set of five psukim that form an introduction. [See 18:1-5 and our shiur on Parshat Acharei Mot.]

As you review those psukim, note how these psukim actually introduce an entire set of chukim u-mishpatim. For example:

"Observe My **mishpatim** and keep My **chukim** to follow them, I am the Lord your God. Keep My **chukim** & **mishpatim**..." (18:4-5. See also 18:26-30!).

Therefore, the phrase chukim ve-mishpatim in our 'finale pasuk' (26:46) could be understood as the summary of the **second** half of Sefer Vayikra (chapters 18->25), as it refers to the numerous chukim u-mishpatim that are recorded in that section.

Furthermore, note how often we have found this phrase in the second half of Vayikra: see 19:19 & 37, 20:8 & 22, and 25:18!

In a similar manner, the word torot could be considered a summary of the laws found in the **first** half of the Sefer. Recall how the word torah was used numerous times to describe the various procedures regarding korbanot. The most obvious example would be Parshat Tzav where the phrase '**zot torat...**' introduced each category of korbanot (see 6:2, 6:7, 6:18, 7:1, 7:11) and also formed its summary (see 7:37!).

However, this phrase was also found numerous times in Parshat Tazria/Metzora as well (see 12:7, 13:59, 14:2,32,45; and 15:32).

Furthermore, even though this phrase is not mentioned by the other mitzvot in this section, most of its laws are of a procedural nature and could easily fall under this category of torot. Certainly, the seven day 'milu'im' & 'yom ha-shmini' ceremonies (chapters 8 & 9) are procedures and hence could be understood as torot, as is the yearly 'avoda' of the kohen gadol on Yom Kippur (see chapter 16).

Hence, the word torot in 26:46 can be understood as a summary of the procedural laws found in the **first** half of Sefer Vayikra.

Thus, the final pasuk of the tochacha (26:46) becomes an almost 'perfect ending' for the entire sefer:

"These are the **chukim** & **mishpatim** [summarizes the second half - chapters 18 thru 25] and the **torot** [summarizes the first half - chapters 6 thru 17] which God had given between Him and Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai to Moshe" (26:46).

The phrase chukim & mishpatim summarizes Part Two of Sefer Vayikra, while the word torot summarizes Part One!

## THE TOCHACHA & SEFER SHMOT

Even though we have shown how this finale pasuk (26:46) forms a beautiful conclusion for Sefer Vayikra, it contains an additional phrase that explains why it could be considered a conclusion for the laws in **Sefer Shmot** as well. [If so, this would help us appreciate Ibn Ezra & Ramban's peirush as well, and the chiastic structure discussed in our shiur on Parshat Behar.]

Let's take a closer look at this finale pasuk, noting the second half of the pasuk:

"These are the chukim u-mishpatim, and the torot which God had given - **beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael** - between Himself and Bnei Yisrael, on **Har Sinai** through Moshe" (26:46).

This special phrase: 'beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael' may highlight the covenantal nature of the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra. To explain why, we need only quote a pasuk that we are all familiar with from 'shabbos davening' [our sabbath prayers]. Note how the Torah uses an almost identical phrase as it describes how Shabbat should be considered a 'brit':

"Ve-shameru Bnei Yisrael et ha-shabbat... - to keep it as a day of rest for all generations - **brit olam** - an everlasting covenant - **beini u-vein Bnei Yisrael** - an eternal sign..." (see Shmot 31:16-17).

In fact, this very concept of brit is emphasized several times by the **tochacha** itself:

"... ve-hakimoti et **briti** itchem" (26:9)  
 "... lehafrechem et **briti**" (26:15)  
 "ve-zacharti et **briti** Yaakov ve-af et briti Yitzchak..." (26:42)  
 "ve-zacharti lahem **brit** rishonim asher hotzeiti..." (26:45).

If this interpretation is correct, then we have found an additional thematic connection between the laws of kedusha in Sefer Vayikra and the purpose of Matan Torah as described at **brit Har Sinai**. As we have explained, the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra function as a vehicle thru which the goal of **brit Sinai** - "ve-atem tiheyu li mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" - can be achieved. (See Shmot 19:4-6.)

[Once again, note how this thematic connection can also explain the chiastic structure that connected the laws in Sefer Shmot & Sefer Vayikra, as explained in our shiur on Parshat Behar.]

Hence, the phrase 'beino u-vein Bnei Yisrael' in this summary pasuk may emphasize how the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra strengthen the covenant between God and Bnei Yisrael, as forged at Har Sinai, where Am Yisrael took upon themselves to become God's special nation.

## THE TOCHACHA & SEFER BREISHIT

Thus far, we have shown how the **tochacha** forms a fitting conclusion for Sefer Vayikra, and thematically relates back to covenant at Har Sinai as described in Sefer Shmot. One could suggest that it may contain a certain element that thematically returns us to Sefer Breishit as well.

Recall our explanation of how Gan Eden represented an ideal environment in which man was capable of developing a close relationship with God. In that environment, man's reward for obeying God was a prosperous life in Gan Eden; while his punishment for disobeying God's commandment was death - i.e. his banishment from Gan Eden.

The two sides of the **tochacha** describe a similar environment for Am Yisrael living in Eretz Yisrael. Should they keep God's laws, Am Yisrael can enjoy a prosperous and secure existence in their land.

For example, 'im be-chukotai teilechu...', i.e. should you follow God's laws, then 've-achaltem le-sova be-artzechem' - you will enjoy prosperity in your land (see 25:3-6). - This would be in contrast to man's punishment when he was expelled from Gan Eden with the curse of 'be-ze'at apcha tochal lechem' (see Breishit 3:17-19).

Recall as well how God was 'mithalech' in Gan Eden (see Br.3:8). Similarly, He will now 'mithalech' in Eretz Yisrael together with His Nation: 'v'e-ithalachti betochachem, ve-hayiti lachem I-Elokim, ve-atem tihiyu li le-am' (see Vayikra 25:12).

On the other hand, should Bnei Yisrael not follow God's laws ('ve-im lo tishme'u..'), they will be faced with a troubled existence, culminating with their expulsion from the land (26:33), parallel to man's banishment from Gan Eden. (This parallel between Gan Eden and Eretz Yisrael was already introduced at the beginning of the second half of Sefer Vayikra- see 18:24-30).

[In this manner, the Midrashim that identify Gan Eden as Eretz Yisrael relate to more than its geographical location; rather they underscore a major biblical theme.]

## PARSHAT 'ERCHIN' - WHY HERE?

We return now to our original question. If the final pasuk of the **tochacha** forms such an appropriate ending for Sefer Vayikra, why does the Torah place 'parshat erchin' immediately afterward (instead of beforehand in Sefer Vayikra)? After all, the laws of erchin, especially those relating to **yovel** (see 27:16-25), would have fit nicely within Parshat Behar, together with the other laws relating to **yovel**. [See Ramban on 27:1]

Furthermore, the laws relating to the dedication of objects to the Temple treasury could have been included much earlier in Sefer Vayikra, possibly in Parshat Vayikra together with other laws concerning voluntary offerings.

The simplest explanation is that the Torah did not want to conclude the Sefer on a 'sour note', i.e. with the **tochacha**, preferring instead to conclude with something more positive.

[Sort of like adding on a 'happy ending' by selecting a 'parshia' that could have been recorded earlier, and saving it for the conclusion.]

The Ibn Ezra offers an explanation based on 'sod', relating to the deeper meaning of 'bechor' and 'ma'aser' (see last Ibn Ezra in Vayikra).

Seforno differentiates between these mitzvot (in chapter 27) that are voluntary, and the mandatory mitzvot summarized in 26:46. Because those mitzvot constituted the essence of the **brit**, they were summarized separately. Once those mitzvot were completed in chapter 26, chapter 27 records the mitzvot of Har Sinai that were not part of that covenant. (See Seforno 26:46.)

One could suggest an alternative approach, by considering once again the overall structure of Sefer Vayikra.

Recall from our study of Parshat Vayikra that the first five chapters (i.e. the laws of 'korban yachid') were given to Moshe Rabbeinu from the ohel mo'ed (see 1:1), while the next two chapters (the torot of the korbanot in chapter 6-7) were given from Har Sinai (see 7:37-38). Furthermore, since the laws of Parshat Vayikra were given from the ohel mo'ed, they must have been given only **after** the **shechina** had returned to the mishkan on the **yom ha-shmini**, and hence after the story of the seven day 'milu'im' & 'yom ha-shmini' - as recorded in Vayikra chapters 8-10.

Therefore, it appears as though the laws in Parshat Vayikra were placed intentionally at the beginning of Sefer Vayikra, even though they chronologically belong in the middle of the Sefer.

Thus, we conclude that even though both the opening and concluding units of Sefer Vayikra belong within the sefer, the Torah records them as a 'header' and 'footer' instead.

The following chart reviews this structure:

| CHAPTERS | TOPIC                                   |
|----------|-----------------------------------------|
| =====    | =====                                   |
| * HEADER |                                         |
| 1->5     | the laws of korban yachid (mitzvot)     |
| 6->7     | I. TOROT of: [first section]            |
| 8->10    | - how to bring korbanot                 |
| 11->15   | - how the milu'im were offered          |
| 16->17   | - yoledet, metzora, zav, zava           |
|          | - how to enter kodesh kodashim          |
| 18->20   | II. CHUKIM U-MISHPATIM [second section] |
| 21->22   | - kedushat ha-am                        |
| 23->25   | - kedushat kohanim                      |
| 26       | - kedushat zman u-makom                 |
|          | TOCHACHA (& summary pasuk/ 26:46)       |
| * FOOTER |                                         |
| 27       | the laws of erchin (mitzvot)            |

Now we must explain why specifically these two parshiot were chosen to serve as the 'book-ends' of Sefer Vayikra?

## SPECIAL 'BOOKENDS'

Parshat Vayikra and the parshia of erchin share a common

theme. They both deal with an individual dedicating an object to 'hekesh'. Both also begin with cases where a person offers a voluntary gift (nedava): Parshat Vayikra begins with **ola** & **shlamim** while parshat erchin begins with the voluntary offering of the value of a person, animal, or field.

[Vayikra deals with korbanot actually offered on the mizbeiah (kodshei mizbeiah) while **erchin** deals with the value of objects which cannot be offered, their value is given instead to the 'general fund' of the Temple - 'kodshei bedek ha-bayit'.]

One could suggest that the Torah intentionally chose parshiot dealing with the offerings of an individual, primarily the voluntary offerings, to form the 'book-ends' of Sefer Vayikra for the following reason.

As we have seen, Sefer Vayikra focuses on the kedusha of the **mishkan** and of the **nation**. These lofty goals of the **Shchina** dwelling upon an entire nation can easily lead the individual to underestimate his own importance. Furthermore, the rigid detail of the mitzvot of Vayikra may lead one to believe that there is little room for self-initiated expression in his own relationship with God, as our covenantal obligations could be viewed as dry and technical.

To counter these possible misconceptions, the Torah may have placed these two parshiot at the opening and concluding sections of Sefer Vayikra - to stress these two important tenets of 'avodat Hashem'. Despite the centrality of the community, the individual cannot lose sight of the value and importance of his role as an integral part of the communal whole. Secondly, the rigidity of Halacha should not stifle personal expression. Rather, it should form the solid base from which the individual can develop an aspiring, dynamic, and personal relationship with God.

shabbat shalom  
menachem

## ===== FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. It should be noted that Abarbanel does raise this possibility that the final pasuk of the **tochacha** summarizes only chapter 26, and not larger unit. Note how this forces him to explain the phrases **chukim u-mishpatim** & **torot** in a very different manner.

## B. WHEN WERE THE MITZVOT OF SEFER VAYIKRA GIVEN?

In our shiur, we explained that the **torot** mentioned in Parshat Tzav were given on Har Sinai. How about the **torot** in Tazria Metzora, or basically, how about the rest of the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra - were they given from the ohel mo'ed or earlier when Moshe was on Har Sinai? The psukim do not tell us.

Based on the above shiur, we can suggest that most **all** of the mitzvot in Vayikra were actually given on Har Sinai, but are recorded in Sefer Vayikra for simply thematic reasons (i.e. 'torat kohanim'). Surely, Parshat Tzav states explicitly that its **torot** were given to Moshe on Har Sinai (7:37-8).

Therefore one can also assume that all of the **torot** mentioned in the Sefer were given on Har Sinai. In fact, this can explain Shmot 24:12 which states that Moshe went up to Har Sinai to receive the **torah** & **mitzva** - one could suggest that the **mitzva** refers to the laws of the **mishkan** which Moshe is about to receive that are recorded in the remainder of Sefer Shmot (see Shmot 25:1-4!). If so, then **torah** may refer to the **torot** (that relate to the **mishkan**). However, most of these **torot** are recorded in Sefer Vayikra and not in Sefer Shmot.

[**ha-torah** may also refer to the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, but that is a topic for a different shiur. [note Devarim 1:5 and the word **torah** throughout that Sefer.]

In a similar manner one could understand that the **chukim u-mishpatim** recorded in Sefer Vayikra may also have been given to Moshe on Har Sinai. To support this, see Devarim 5:28 and its context, as well as Shmot 24:1-4.

Therefore the mention of Har Sinai in this final pasuk does not limit its interpretation to referring only to Behar/Bechukotai, rather strengthens its interpretation as a summary of the entire Sefer. It is also likely that certain other mitzvot that were given in reaction to events that occurred after 'hakamat ha-mishkan', i.e.

after Nadav and Avihu died etc.) may have been given from the **ohel mo'ed**, but there is no reason why we cannot understand that all the other mitzvot recorded in the sefer were first given to Moshe during his 40 days on Har Sinai. Except of course those mitzvot that were given directly to Aharon, which indicate that they were given from the **ohel mo'ed**, and the mitzvot that were given in response to a question that Moshe did not have the answer for.

#### C. A CHIASTIC STRUCTURE WITHIN SEFER VAYIKRA

In the above shiur, we have noted a connection between the opening and closing parshiot of Sefer Vayikra. This suggests a possibility of a chiastic structure within Sefer Vayikra itself. See if you can find this structure, noting how chapters 18 and 20 'surround' chapter 19, the connection between chapter 21 and chapter 16 in relation to the kohen gadol, chapters 22 and 11-15 in relation to **tum'a & tahara**, chapters 9-10 to chapter 23 in relation to cycles of 7 & 8, chapter 24 and chapter 8 in relation to the keilim of the mishkan, and chapters 6-7 and chapters 25-26 in relations to mitzvot given at **Har Sinai** (see finale psukim of both sections), 've-akmal'!

#### D. THE VALUE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

As we explained above, the "tochacha" in Parsha Bechukotei (chapter 26) would have been a most fitting conclusion for Sefer Vayikra. Nonetheless, Sefer Vayikra adds one additional chapter, detailing the laws of "erchin" - i.e. the 'monetary' assessment of various individuals - should their value be dedicated to God.

Even though these laws seem to be rather technical, from a certain perspective they do reflect the value of every individual. But what does that have to do with the conclusion of Sefer Vayikra? As Ramban points out (see middle of his commentary to 26:11), the "tochacha" describes 'reward and punishment' at the national level. In other words, it promises prosperity in relation to the land's agriculture, political stability, security, and military success (see 26:1-11). On the 'down side' - it describes primarily national calamities should Bnei Yisrael not keep God's laws. On the other hand, God does not promise every individual (in this world) reward for his good deeds, or punishment for his sins.

There may be some thematic logic behind this distinction. As Bnei Yisrael were chosen to be 'nation' that will represent God among the nations of the world, we are judged as a nation; and rewarded as a nation. If we are successful in making a 'Name for God' by keeping His mitzvot properly, God will not only 'dwell in midst' (see 26:11-12), He will also provide us with material reward - that enables the nation to continue 'the good job'. On the other hand, should we embarrass God by our poor behavior as His special nation, God promises to consistently punish us, to various levels, until we finally 'learn our lesson' (see 26:14-- or even without repentance, should our situation becomes too pitiful (see Devarim 32:36).

[To support this point, note the phrase "l'einei ha'goyim" - in the eyes of the nations -in the finale pasuk (see 26:45 in its context), emphasizing the connection between God's covenant with the people of Israel and their influence on the rest of mankind.]

This thematic conclusion, however accurate, can lead to a very dangerous conclusion. If God's primary interest with His people is at the national level, then maybe the fate of each individual may not so be important [ask the early leaders of communism (like Stalin), if you know your history].

One could suggest, that it may be specifically for this reason that Sefer Vayikra chose specifically the laws of "erchin" - reflecting the value of each individual - as its conclusion, to 'balance' this possible misunderstanding of the "tochacha". Surely, the primary focus of the Bible is on the existence of Am Yisrael as a nation, but to truly act as God's special nation - the importance of every individual must not be under-emphasized.

#### E. THE CONCLUSION OF VAYIKRA & SHAVUOT

As many commentators point out, the "tochacha" relates directly to the covenant between God and Bnei Yisrael at Har

Sinai. [Note the tell-tale phrase: "beini u'bein Bnei Yisrael b'Har Sinai" in its concluding pasuk (see 26:46), as well as the parallel pasuk at the conclusion of the "tochacha" in Devarim (see Devarim 28:69 - "milvad ha'brit asher karat item b'chorev"). See also Chizkuni on Shmot 24:7!]

Even though all the mitzvot of the Torah are important, it seems that certain mitzvot, i.e. mitzvot of Parshat Behar in Vayikra chapter 25, were singled out to be part of the 'official covenant.

[Note that all the psukim from 25:1 thru 26:46 form a single unit, as they are introduced by the same dibur.]

One could offer a very 'zionistic' explanation for this, as the laws in chapter 25 deal the "kedusha" of the Land of Israel in regard to keeping the laws of "shemitta" & "yovel" (see 25:1-13). In other words, one of God's primary considerations of how God will (or will not) punish us, depends on how meticulously we keep the laws of the "shemitta" year. [Note as well 26:34.]

On the other hand, chapter 25 contains much more than the 'technical' laws of "shemitta". If you read that chapter carefully, you'll note how its primary topic is the consequences of the laws of "shemitta" - reflecting the Torah's desire that Bnei Yisrael fulfill every aspect of the laws of social justice.

For example, as soon as we mention the laws of Yovel, the Torah immediately reminds us not to use those laws as 'technical loophole' to make a tricky 'real-estate deal' (see 25:14-17)!

Then, the Torah explains why these laws are so important, as God reminds us that our purpose as a nation is to be humble servants of God, rather than a group of wealthy landlords exploiting poor serfs (see 25:23-24).

The clincher of this direction are in the following thirty some psukim (see 25:25-55), which describe our communal obligation to help our neighbors in financial distress, by lending them resources so they won't need to either sell their land or even themselves!

Thus, even though the first thirteen psukim seem to describe the technical laws of "shemitta" & "yovel", the remaining forty some psukim focus primarily on assuring social justice for the poor and needy. In fact, by quoting the Torah's brief reference to the laws of "shemitta" in Parshat Mishpatim, we find that the very purpose of these 'technical laws' is to ensure social justice:

"Six years thou shall sow thy land, and gather its produce, but the seventh year thou shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of thy people may eat..." (Shmot 23:10-11)

[Note as well how social justice was a primary theme in most of the laws of Parshat Mishpatim as well.]

To provide additional support, I'd like to suggest that the Torah's reminder to keep God's "chukim u'mishpatim" in 25:18 may not be referring to the laws of "shemitta" but rather to the laws of Vayikra chapters 18 & 19, for the simple reason that the opening psukim of chapter 18 introduce exactly what God's "chukim u'mishpatim" are all about (see related TSC shiur on Parshat Acharei Mot). For those who don't remember, the intro in Vayikra 18:1-5 leads us to the conclusion that God's "chukim u'mishpatim" are none other than the laws of Parshat "Kedoshim Tihyu" (i.e. Vayikra chapter 19)!

If these observations are correct, then the thrust of God's covenant with His people at Har Sinai, and especially His promise of reward (or punishment) should we keep (or not keep) His mitzvot, relates primarily to the ability of Bnei Yisrael to create a society characterized by acts of social justice ("tzedek u'mishpat" - see Breishit 18:17-19!), thus setting an example for other nations to learn from (see Devarim 4:5-8).

Should we emphasize this direction, as we meticulously keep all of God's mitzvot, may we be worthy of God's promise of:

"And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword... and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you; and will establish My covenant with you!" (see Vayikra 26:6-9)

## **Parshas Behukotai: The Condition of the Blessing**

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

### **I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BLESSING**

The first half of Parashat B'hukotai is made up of the promise of Divine blessing (if the B'nei Yisra'el observes all of God's commandments, 26:3-13) and the threat of Divine disfavor and curse (if they fail to do so – vv. 14-45). Although a complete analysis of both parts of this text is beyond the scope of this forum, we will try to present an analysis of the nature of the blessing:

- \* 3: If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and do them.
- \* 4: I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.
- \* 5: Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land.
- \* 6: And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land.
- \* 7: You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.
- \* 8: Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.
- \* 9: I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain My covenant with you.
- \* 10: You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new.
- \* 11: I will place My dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you.
- \* 12: And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people.
- \* 13: I am Hashem your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk upright.

Let's examine the opening line – the condition of the blessing:

If you walk in My statutes and observe My commandments and do them.

All of the consequent blessings are contingent on our fulfilling this brief directive. What is the meaning of this Divine command, fulfillment of which carries so many wonderful blessings, such as peace, prosperity and national holiness?

Before moving on, there is an anomaly in the structure of the blessing section which calls for our attention. Note the table below:

Verse – Promise

3 – The Condition

4 – Bountiful Crops

5 – Plenty and Security

6 – Peace in the Land

## 7-8 – Military Success

9 – Fertility and Recovenanting (see Rashi and S'foro ad loc.)

10 – Bountiful Crops (again!)

11 – God's Sanctuary in our Midst

12 – God's Presence in our Midst

13 – Concluding Sentence

As can be seen, v. 9 is a natural conclusion; however, there are another four verses in the blessing. So, the second question is what we are to make of these two blessing-sections. If it were not for v. 10, which returns to the theme of agricultural success, it would have been simple to identify the first section as financial, political and military success; the second could be tagged as spiritual excellence. The inclusion of v. 10, *va'Akhaltem Yashan Noshan, v'Yashan miP'nei Hadash Totzi'u* – (you shall eat old grain long stored and you shall have to clear out the old to make room for the new) makes this division untenable. Is there some other way to divide the blessings – or can we reorient our understanding of either v. 10 or v. 9 (the first “conclusion”) that will help our understanding of this section?

Our final question is more fundamental to the nature of the blessing: Aren't we taught that we should perform Mitzvot because we were so commanded – or because they represent the most noble “life-style”? Why does the Torah present this list of agricultural, political, military and spiritual “rewards” for doing that which we are otherwise obligated to do?

In order to address these questions, let's return to the first verse and the seeming redundancy. We will find two approaches among the Rishonim which, if taken together, will be the key to understanding this blessing.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION

### RASHI'S APPROACH: “AMELIM BATORAH”

Rashi, following the *Torat Kohanim*, addresses the seeming redundancy in the first verse: “If you walk in My statutes: I might think that this refers to fulfillment of Mitzvot; but when it says And observe My Mitzvot, observance of Mitzvot is already stated. If so, how do I understand If you walk in My statutes? that you should be laboriously engaged in Torah study. (*sheTih'yu 'Amelim baTorah*”.)

In other words, Rashi understands the condition which we must fulfill as made up of two components: We have to observe the Mitzvot and we must also be ‘Amelim baTorah – laboring in Torah study.

### S'FORNO'S APPROACH: “USH'MARTEM ZU MISHNAH”

R. Ovadia S'foro, bothered by the same redundancy, arrives at a similar conclusion – but from an opposite textual direction. He understands that “walking in My statutes” refers to the performance of Mitzvot – and that “Mitzvotai Tishmoru” refers to study. He bases this on the statement in the *Sifri*: *uSh'martem – zu Mishnah* (“observing” refers to learning). (*Sifri R'eh* #6)

In summary, Rashi and S'foro both understand that the blessings will only be fulfilled when and if the *B'nei Yisra'el* accomplish both performance of Mitzvot and Torah study. What, then, is their bone of contention – what underscores their different textual derivation?

## III. ENGAGED ACTION

Both Rashi and S'foro are addressing the issue of cognitive awareness in the performance of Mitzvot. Rashi sees the mode of performance which will ensure these blessings as “intellectually engaged action”. Although a person may properly fulfill a Mitzvah while only being familiar with the operative details – e.g. how to hold the *Lulav* with the other three species, how much *Tzedakah* to give – someone who is intellectually engaged in the details, concepts and import of a particular Mitzvah will have a greatly enhanced experience when performing that Mitzvah. To that end, Rashi reads the first phrase of

the verse as referring to “laborious Torah study” – the hard work which goes into clarifying Halakhic concepts, analyzing various approaches and formulae etc. With that level of involvement, the performance which follows reflects a total involvement – i.e. loving God with all of the heart.

## INTEGRATED ACTION

S'foro accentuates a different component of the cognitive perspective in Mitzvah-observance. He picks up the process where Rashi left off – with the performance of Mitzvot which is enhanced with intellectual involvement. S'foro raises the bar to a new level – not only must we come to the performance of Mitzvot armed with our own cognitive involvement; we must maintain that level of awareness while we are engaged in the performance. That is why S'foro emphasizes the “guarding = learning” equation – holding onto that which we have learned while performing, avoiding the all-too-common dichotomy of knowledge and action which, although consistent with each other, are often relegated to different times and settings.

Both of these Rishonim understand that in order for us to receive the blessings which follow, we must achieve a level of observance of Mitzvot which includes an investment of learning and attaching that intellection with the action implied therein. In order to understand this demand, let's address the other two questions.

## IV. YASHAN NOSHAN

As mentioned above, we were promised that we would have a bountiful harvest (vv. 4-5); the sequence from there on seems to spiral “upward”, to political security, military success and spiritual fulfillment. Why does the Torah “jump back” to the agricultural theme in v. 10? (You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new.)

If we look at the previous verse (the “first conclusion”, v. 9), we can see a subtle shift in the focus and nature of the blessing. Up until this point, we have been promised many blessings – and now God promises that He will turn to us and fulfill His covenant with us. Which covenant is meant here?

As Ibn Ezra points out, we might posit that the earlier part of the verse, the promise of fertility, is the “covenant” association – a fulfillment of the covenant with Avraham that we would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. There is, however, another critical component of the B'rit Avraham which may be the stress and shift here.

When Avraham was first commanded to go to the Land, God told him that he would be a source of blessing for all people. This promise was repeated at the Akedah – the concluding narrative of Avraham's life. Along with the Land and numerous descendants, God promised that Avraham's “all nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed” (B'resheet 22:18). In other words, all peoples would eventually come to know God and recognize His authority through the progeny of Avraham. This may be the covenant which God promises that He will establish with us in v. 9 – that we will be enabled to realize our goal and role a “Light unto the nations”. The question is then raised: If we are indeed all together in our Land, living a blessed and righteous national life, how will the nations of the world “take notice” of us?

## V. MAKING ROOM FOR THE GRAIN

The answer, counterintuitively, is to be found in the realm of commerce. Let's take a fresh look at v. 10: You shall eat old grain long stored and you shall have to Totzi'u the old to make room for the new. The phrase Totzi'u can alternatively be translated as “clear out”, as above; or as “export”, as S'foro renders it. As he explains, we will have so much grain that we will be able to safely export to other nations. By engaging in commerce with other nations, two things will become readily apparent:

- 1) We have been generously blessed by our Creator – indicating Divine favor; and
- 2) Our behavior, specifically in the realm of interpersonal relations and business ethics, is of the highest standard.

Remember, this entire blessing is contingent on our integrating serious Torah study into our behavior. Certainly someone who studies Hoshen Mishpat (the section of Halakhah dealing with civil and criminal law) before getting involved in the world of commerce (Rashi) and who endeavors to internalize the sensitivities of that law into his business dealings (S'foro) will serve as an ethical beacon for others. Imagine an entire nation behaving like that!

We can now understand the continuum of the blessing. Subsequent to our own development as a strong and secure nation (see below), the Torah promises us that the covenant – of our being a blessing to the nations of the world – will be fulfilled **WITH US**. In other words, instead of this covenant being a *B'rit Avot*, which is operative even if we fail in our tasks, the covenant will be directly with us – in our own merit. That blessing will be enabled first by developing an association with other nations – through the commerce of exporting the goods of the Land.

## **VI. AND ONCE WE HAVE SUCCEEDED...**

From this verse on, where we would reasonably have the concern that once we have drawn the nations of the world to us and they have rallied around the cry “Let us go up to the mountain of the House of God, that He will instruct us of His ways...”

Therefore, the next few verses promise us that our special relationship with God will not only be maintained – but that it will be intensified, hinting at a return to the intimate relationship enjoyed by Man and God in the Garden of Eden (“I will walk among you”; compare with *B'resheet* 3:8.)

This also explains why these “rewards” are necessary. In order for us to make our impression on the nations of the world, giving us the opportunity to teach, we must have our own stable, safe and economically sound nation. It is hard to develop a holy nation when the threat of war or hunger is constantly over our head; God’s blessings insure that we can more easily fulfill our task and lead the world to a full awareness of the Creator and His moral guidance.

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