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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 internecine 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 24,000 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: שמיטה, 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.

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### **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 yishuvo 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 emunat 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 yishuvo 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 Chizkiyahu.

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 (Chizkiyahu) 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'Artetz, 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 Engil, 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 hashkofos (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’maasim!

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.

#### Calendarical Conundrum

Although, as mentioned previously, this sort of calendarical 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 Chutznik’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'Atzru,' 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 Shabbosos 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 it 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 golus, exile, nevertheless, 'le'aileh 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'l'simcha 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 Maharit 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 want chas 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 Maharit, 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 calendrical 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.

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לע"נ

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