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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET  
ON **BEHAR BECHUKOSAI** - 5767

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**Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 11, will be day 39, which is 5 weeks and 4 days of the omer.**

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - The Vovs of Geula "TorahWeb.org" <[torahweb@torahweb.org](mailto:torahweb@torahweb.org)> to weeklydt [http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2007/parsha/rneu\\_bechukosai.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2007/parsha/rneu_bechukosai.html)

**Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**

**The Vovs of Geula**

The downfall and dispersion of our people is painstakingly detailed in the "tochecha" of parshas Bechukosai as the consequence of ignoring Hashem's many messages to us. Nevertheless the parsha leaves us with the uplifting and soothing pasuk (26:42), "I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember, and I will remember the Land."

The medrash points out that upon careful study there is indeed more good news hidden in the nuances of the text. Oddly enough "Yaakov", which is usually written without a vov, appears here with a vov between the kuf and the beis. Rashi points out that the extra vov variant spelling appears no more than five times throughout Tanach. The rabbis correlate this with a variant spelling of "Eliyahu" which is missing its vov five times throughout Tanach.

Chazal interpret this to indicate that Yaakov took a letter from the name of Eliyahu as a security, to be returned to Eliyahu, when Eliyahu announces our geula, our return to Israel and the Beis Hamikdosh. Presumably remembering his own fear of becoming entrenched in Mitzrayim and forever concerned about the welfare of his children, Yaakov asks for this security so that he can be assured of his children's return.

Why five vovs? I would suggest that the five vovs become the metaphor in our parsha for our inflexibility and inability to introspect and reconsider. After all, the tochecha organizes our punishments around five stages, each one marking our callous lack of response to the messages of the previous punishments. Each stage is introduced with a vov: "And if you will not listen to me..."(26:14), "And if during these you will not heed me..."(26:18), "And if you walk with me in a casual manner..."(26:21), "And if despite these you will not be reprimanded..."(26:23), "And if with all this you will not listen to me..."(26:27)

What is the significance of securing Eliyahu's promise? The Potoker Rov explains (Beis Aharon, page 162) that indeed should we merit the geulah

we would not need any assurance of Eliyahu or the security that Yaakov exacted from him. However if chas veshalom we would not merit redemption and we can be found guilty of the vovs of the tochecha, we can still be assured that at a preordained time we will nevertheless be redeemed and returned to our earlier glory (see Sanhedrin 98a).

I believe there is still more communicated through the vov. Grammatically, the vov can be in place of "and", stringing together lists and sequencing events. In the case of the tochecha, the vov shows stubborn stagnancy and obstinate hubris which in and of itself indicates spiritual decline. On the other hand, the same vov can grammatically transform a word from future tense to past tense. This use of vov serves as a metaphor for the realization of dreams and aspirations, and for enabling us to build on those dreams as if they were already in hand.

Yaakov assures us that even if we are entrenched in the obstinate vov of Bechukosai, and do not employ the later vov to transform ourselves and aspire to spiritual greatness, we will still be returned to our earlier glory.

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"RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar-Bechukosai -

**The Redundant Security Guarantee**

Following the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, the Torah writes: "You shall perform My decrees, and observe My ordinances and perform them; and you shall dwell securely on the land. The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satisfaction; and you will dwell securely on it." [Vayikra 25:18-19]

There is a redundancy in these two pasukim [verses]. Both pasukim 18 and 19 end with the exact same idea: "You will dwell securely on the land." Rashi takes note of this. Rashi interprets that the first pasuk states "you shall dwell securely on the land" to teach us that exile is a punishment for the sin of not observing the Shmitah [Sabbatical] year. The second pasuk teaches "you shall dwell securely upon it" to promise us that we will not need to worry about a year of drought. In other words, the first pasuk refers to military / national security while the second pasuk refers to economic / agricultural security.

The Chasam Sofer offers a different interpretation to explain this redundancy:

It is hard for us to imagine, but when one lives in an agrarian economy, without the world wide economy of import and export that exists today, if people do not plant, they will not eat. One hundred years ago, when the first Jews returned to Eretz Yisrael from Europe and the question was raised of what to do during Shmitah — there was literally a threat that the entire community would starve and be wiped out if they did not find a permitted way to farm on the Shmitah year!

The Chasam Sofer interprets that the promise "you will dwell securely on the land" in pasuk 18 addresses just this fear. The Torah promises us in pasuk 18 that if we observe the laws of Shmitah, we will nevertheless miraculously have economic security, as the pasuk then explains: "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years." [25:21].

According to the Chasam Sofer, Pasuk 19 is offering another guarantee.

One of the great "tests" of money is that it goes to our heads. We begin to think: "My might and the power of my hand made me this great wealth." [Devorim 8:17] The great challenge of affluence is that we must never

forget the source of the income. When people begin to earn a lot of money, it often happens that they begin to think: "It is because I'm smarter, I'm better, I know how to invest, I know how to run a business." The challenge of affluence -- what it does to one's ego and what it does to one's life style -- is not an easy one to face.

In pasuk 19, the Torah is teaching as follows: If you realize that this fruit comes miraculously; if you realize that the produce did not come by virtue of your work, but by virtue of your keeping the commandments of the Almighty, then you will dwell in security upon your land. You will then have the blessing that your wealth will never get to your head.

As long as we recognize that everything comes from the Hand of G-d, then we will never be overcome by the corrupting challenges of wealth. This is the second promise of security in the parsha -- "You will be secure that your wealth won't negatively affect you. Why? Because you will realize that it came from the Almighty."

#### The Person Who Does Not Have A Redeemer

Later on in Parshas Behar, the Torah says that if a person becomes poor to the extent that he has to sell off his inheritance in Eretz Yisrael, his relative should step in to redeem the field so that he might retrieve his family inheritance. However, if the person has no such relative who is prepared to bail him out, but he later obtains a windfall that allows him to repurchase his land, then he is entitled to make that redemption himself. [Vayikra 25:25-26]

One might ask on this sequence of events presented by the Torah: Why does the Torah need to tell us that a person who was out of luck and had to sell his land and had no relative to bail him out, may indeed buy back this land if he obtains the money? Would we not have assumed this to be the case on our own? If my brother or my uncle can redeem the land for me, certainly -- if I obtain the money, I should be able to redeem my own land for myself!

The Chasam Sofer explains that the Torah is telling us as follows: "You were down on your luck. You had no money. You sold your property. There was no one to help you out. You were helpless. How, were you suddenly able to obtain money? The answer is that when a person realizes that there is no one to turn to except the Ribbono Shel Olam, then the Ribbono Shel Olam comes to the rescue."

There are some situations in life when a person says, "I'm hopeless. I tried this and I tried that, I went here and I went there. Nothing helps!" When a person gets to that situation and he turns to G-d and says "Ribbono Shel Olam, I am stuck, I have no one else to turn to but You..." then "He will find enough for his redemption." Suddenly, something will happen.

This is the interpretation of pasuk 26. "If a man has no redeemer" (there is no brother or father or uncle to turn to), then suddenly "he acquires enough" because he finally put his faith in the 'person' who he should have put his faith with in the first place -- the Ribbono Shel Olam, and "he will find enough for its redemption."

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[FROM LAST YEAR - ]

From: ravfrand-owner@torah.org on behalf of **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** [ryfrand@torah.org] Sent: Friday, May 19, 2006 12:02 AM To: ravfrand@torah.org Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar-Bechukosai "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar-Bechukosai -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 11, Rationing Medical Care.

Make Peace and Greet Moshiach

Parshas Bechukosai contains words of blessing and words of rebuke. The Parsha begins with the message that the world is set up, such that, if the Jewish people keep G-d's mitzvos, blessings will come automatically. Rains will fall at the most convenient of times, ..., and the Jewish people will be able to rest securely in their land.

The Toras Kohanim on this pasuk [verse] asks, "Does this mean we will only dwell securely in Eretz Yisroel, but not in Chutz L'Aretz [outside the land of Israel]? What does this mean -- we do have food and drink?" The Toras Kohanim answers that if there is no peace, there is nothing. As long as we are living in exile under a foreign government, there is no Shalom. Without Shalom there is nothing. The Toras Kohanim says that Shalom is equivalent to everything, as we say in our prayers, "He Makes Shalom and Creates Everything".

As we all know, without Shalom -- Shalom in a community or Shalom in a family -- Shalom between communities and between nations, nothing has any worth. This is not just a Toras Kohanim, this is a Mishneh -- the last Mishneh in Shas [Uktzin 3:12]. "The Holy One, Blessed be He, found no vessel to hold Blessing for Israel other than (the vessel of) Peace."

The Kesav Sofer explains, that when there is no peace, it is usually because people are jealous of their neighbors. When people are constantly comparing themselves to the Joneses or the Goldbergs or the Cohens, then they will never be happy. People will never be satisfied, no matter how many blessings, and no matter how much food and drink they have. If one is being eaten up by that "cancer" which is called kin'ah [jealousy], then he will never ever have an appreciation for what he possess. Therefore, there is no vessel which can hold the blessings -- other than the vessel of peace.

Today, we have in Klal Yisroel a lack of Shalom, even, unfortunately, among our own people. And if we are lacking Shalom, we cannot appreciate our blessings.

In 1980, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky traveled to the Knessiah Gedolah (of Agudath Israel) in Jerusalem. At that particular time in his life, Rav Yaakov felt extremely weak. Rav Yaakov did not feel that he was physically up to making the trip to Eretz Yisroel. But, Rav Yaakov's arm was twisted, he was prevailed upon, and he made the trip. [He was so concerned about his health, that he felt he would not make it back home. He even left word that if he were to die in Eretz Yisroel, he wanted to be buried there, of course.]

Because of his physical condition, Rav Yaakov did not travel around much, nor did he give shiurim, while in Eretz Yisroel. However, Rav Yaakov said, "I want to go to one Yeshiva -- I want to go to Yeshivas Kol Yaakov." Rav Yaakov was taken to this Yeshiva and he got up to speak. Rav Yaakov was crying as he told the students, "My entire life I wanted to greet Moshiach. I now feel that I won't have this merit; I don't feel that I'll live much longer. But, if I can't greet Moshiach, at least I want to be among a group of people that I know for sure, will be among those who greet Moshiach. I know that this Yeshiva will be among those that will greet him."

What was so special about this Yeshiva? Did they know Shas by heart? In Kol Yaakov, is everyone careful to be on time when davening [daily prayer] starts? Not necessarily. This Yeshiva was so special because they make peace between Ashkenazic and Sephardic bochrim. It was one Yeshiva that had both students of European-Russian descent and of Spanish-Turkish-North African descent and they made Shalom between these two (sometimes at odds) segments of the Jewish people.

We must take this advice from Rav Yaakov. If we want a Segulah [a treasure (used in the context of having special merit)] that we will be from those who greet Moshiach, we must take action to make Shalom -- between husband and wife; between man and his fellow; between Chassidim and Misnagdim. Make Shalom, and, Rav Yaakov says, be among those who greet Moshiach.

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#### **Rabbi Berel Wein**

B'HAR – BECHKUOTAI Date: May 10 2007 Topic: Weekly Parsha

Our reading of the book of Vayikra is completed on this Shabat with the reading of the double parsha mentioned above. It is ironic that the book of Vayikra, which began on such a joyful and positive note with the dedication of the mishkan, should conclude on such a somber and baleful note with the reading of the tochacha in the parsha of Bechukotai. But this seeming turnaround in reality mirrors the reality of human life.

And the Torah is nothing if not reality and practicality. Wrong behavior, no matter how nobly motivated, always brings sad consequences to it. The behavior of the sons of Aharon in bringing a "strange fire" at the dedication of the mishkan not only costs them their lives but it changes the tenor and tone of the remainder of Vayikra. The remainder of the book teaches us laws, responsibilities, values, commandments, discipline and accountability.

Just as the sons of Aharon were accountable for their behavior and hence its tragic results, so too the Jewish people as a whole is held accountable for its behavior to be judged in light of its accountability to its mission and God's commandments. That is certainly the stark and simple message of the tochacha that marks the completion of the book of Vayikra.

The multiplicity of laws and commandments, values and admonitions that characterize the book of Vayikra clearly spell out Jewish responsibility and accountability to its destiny and mission. The tochacha is a stark reminder of the consequences of failing to live up to those standards of Godly life.

Jewish history has verified over and over again the basic narrative and lesson of the book of Vayikra. Mistakes of judgment, no matter how altruistic and holy they may have been in their original formulation inevitably have led to tragedy, loss and sadness. The "strange fires" offered on the altar of Judaism over the past centuries have burned brightly for a moment in history and then flickered into ashes. But before they disappeared from the scene, hundreds of thousands of the "sons of Aharon" were victimized by their original allure.

For reasons that are inexplicable Judaism seems to attract "strange fires" onto its altar. But the results of these "strange fires" unalterably remain the same, somehow activating Jewish assimilation and alienation, in short the coming of a tochacha itself. And though the exactitude and true measure of the tochacha is beyond our ken of human comprehension, there is no

denying that every word mentioned in the tochacha in the parsha of this week has come to pass before our very own eyes.

The book of Vayikra therefore, like the living Torah itself, is not just past history or a book of laws alone. It is current events, the immortal godly perspective of life and people and of the destiny of the Jewish people. But the book of Vayikra, again like all of the other books of the Torah, ends with our proclamation of chazak, chazak v'nitchazek -- let us be strong and strong and strengthen others. That is always the post-tochacha response of the Jewish people and the strength of our survival.

Shbat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

**Sir Jonathan Sacks**

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Behar

"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family" (Lev. 25: 10). The italicized words, taken from this week's sedra, are inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. It was the chiming of this bell from the tower of Independence Hall on 8 July 1776, that summoned citizens to hear the first public reading of the American Declaration of Independence. Biblical freedom inspired American freedom.

They are also the words with which the economist Noreena Hertz begins her recent book, I.O.U. (published in America as The Debt Threat), on international debt relief. The verse inspired one of the major economic initiatives in recent years: Jubilee 2000, an international programme by governments and monetary institutions, to reduce, or in some cases cancel, the burden of debt borne by many developing countries (\$34 billion dollars of debt repayment were cancelled, affecting 22 countries, 18 of them in Africa). Launching the initiative in Britain, the Treasury invited not just economists, but religious leaders also. Jubilee 2000 was explicitly based on the principle of the biblical Jubilee, the fiftieth year, during which slaves were freed, and land returned to its ancestral owners. Seldom has an ancient idea more effectively proved its relevance to the contemporary world. The social programme of Behar with its concern for economic justice, debt relief, welfare and humane working conditions, speaks with undiminished power to the problems of a global economy.

To be sure, there is no direct inference to be made from the Torah to contemporary politics. Jews have identified with all shades of the political spectrum: from Trotsky to Milton Friedman, from socialism and communism to laissez faire capitalism. The Torah is not an economic theory or a party political programme. It is about eternity, whereas politics is about the here-and-now: the mediation of competing claims and the management of change. The Torah - especially Vayikra / Leviticus Ch.25 - sets out the parameters of a society based on equality and liberty. These are eternal values. But they conflict. It is hard to pursue both fully at the same time. Communism favours equality at the cost of liberty. Free market capitalism favours liberty at the cost of equality. How we construct the balance varies from age to age and place to place. The State of Israel, for example, was heavily influenced in its early years by socialism (and in the case of the kibbutz, communism). More recently it has moved closer to Reaganomics and Thatcherism. The conditions are not yet in place for a restoration of the biblical Jubilee. According to some authorities, it requires the presence of all or most of the Jewish people - i.e. the absence of a Diaspora. According to others, it only applies when the original twelve tribes occupy the land allocated to them in the days of Moses and Joshua.

Despite all these limitations, we can infer certain general parameters of a Torah approach to politics and economics.

Property rights are important to the Biblical vision. Psalm 128 says, 'When you eat the fruit of your labour, you shall be happy and you shall prosper.' The prophet Micah foresaw the day when 'Every man will sit under his own vine and his own fig tree and no-one will make them afraid' (Micah 4:4). The classic critique of 'big government' is contained in Samuel's warning against the dangers of corrupt power. Speaking about the risk of appointing a king, he says:

"This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants . . ." (I Samuel 8) And so on. This becomes high drama in the time of King Ahab, the prophet Elijah, and the vineyard of Nevoth. The Queen, Jezebel, arranges for Nevoth to be killed so that his land can be seized.

Governments tend to appropriate property. Sadly, there continue to be too many parts of the world today where corruption disfigures the exercise of power. Hence private property rights are an essential defence of personal liberty. Within limits, free trade and limited government (albeit with due provision for publicly funded education and welfare) are consistent with a biblical vision whose key concerns are freedom, justice and personal independence. In Judaism, the state exists to serve the individual, not the individual the state.

What Vayikra Ch.25 addresses, however, are the long-term inequities of the market. Poverty creates the need for loans, and the burden of debt can become cumulative and crippling. It can lead people to sell their land and even their freedom: in ancient times this meant selling oneself into slavery. Today it means 'sweatshop' labour at less than subsistence wages. Hence the need for periodic redistribution: the cancellation of debts, the liberation of slaves, and the return of ancestral property (other than that within walled cities). That is the logic of the sabbatical and jubilee years.

It was a gloriously humane structure, the proof of which lies in the fact that even today it inspires politicians, economists and religious leaders far beyond the Jewish community. Its key insight is that the governance of society must be based on moral considerations, above all, the dignity of the individual. No one must suffer humiliating poverty. No member of the covenant community must be condemned to perennial slavery, or debt, or the burden of interest repayments. No one must lose his share in the land. Beyond the specific halakhic parameters of these laws is the larger ethical vision of what a decent society should look like. This has not ceased to be compelling in an age of international corporations, instantaneous communications and the global economy.

Underlying the laws is something more fundamental than economics and politics. It is a still-revolutionary concept of property and ownership. Ultimately all things belong to G-d. This is a theological equivalent of the legal concept of 'eminent domain': the superior dominion of the sovereign power over all lands within its jurisdiction. In the case of Israel, eminent domain - both in relation to persons and to land - is vested in G-d. This is stated explicitly in our sedra:

In relation to land: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants." (Lev. 25: 23)

In relation to persons: "Because the Israelites are My servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your G-d." (Lev. 25: 42-43)

Precisely because ownership is vested in G-d, what we possess, we merely hold as G-d's trustees. One of the conditions of that trust is that we do not use wealth or power in ways incompatible with human dignity.

In an age of vast inequalities of income within and between societies - in which a billion people lack adequate food and shelter, clean water and medical facilities, and 30,000 children die each day from preventable diseases, the vision of Behar still challenges us with its ideals. Wealth and power are not privileges but responsibilities, and we are summoned to become G-d's partners in building a world less random and capricious, more equitable and humane.

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Bechukotai

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 Tanakh. 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 G-d. 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 G-d. 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 G-d 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. G-d 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.

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from Daf Hashavua <daf\_hashavua@unitedsynagogue.org.uk> May 9, 2007-05-11 Sidra Summary

Both sidrot are strongly connected with the Land of Israel

BEHAR - Discusses the laws of Shemita (Sabbatical Year) and Yovel (Jubilee) and also presents laws concerning slavery

BECHUKOTAI - Inspires us to use our free will for exalted purposes. If we follow the dictates of Hashem, we will be abundantly rewarded. If we rebel against Hashem, we will, G-d forbid, suffer the horrific consequences of suffering and exile. The Sidra concludes with instructions concerning the redemption of vows and tithes.

"Yet We are Your People"

by the **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

There is a moment in the morning prayers, shortly after the Dawn Blessings that rarely fails to move me. It opens with a passage taken from the liturgy of Neilah on Yom Kippur. It is one of the great statements of human insignificance, almost verging on despair. The inspiration behind the prayer is the book of Ecclesiastes, from which the last sentence is taken: "Master of all worlds, not because of our righteousness do we lay our pleas before You, but because of Your great compassion. What are we? What are our lives? . . . Are not all the mighty like nothing before You, the men of renown as if they had never been. . . For their many works are in vain, and the days of their lives like a fleeting breath before You. The pre-eminence of man over the animals is nothing, for all is but a fleeting breath." (Siddur, Page 22) We are almost infinitesimally small. Each of us is only one of six billion people on the face of the earth. Our lives are microseconds measured against eternity. What are we? A wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea-shore, dust on the surface of infinity. Then comes the great transition, conveyed in a single word, *Aval*, meaning "yet, but, nevertheless" . . . "Yet we are Your people, the children of Your covenant, the children of Abraham, Your beloved, to whom You made a promise on Mount Moriah, the offspring of Isaac . . ." Individually we may be small, but we are not mere individuals. We are part of a people and its story, the strangest, most improbable story ever written: the people who collectively pledged themselves thirtythree centuries ago at Mount Sinai to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation", G-d's ambassadors on earth, who outlived every empire, survived every tragedy, while making contributions to the human heritage out of all proportion to its numbers. We are witnesses in ourselves to something vastly beyond ourselves. Few put it better than the late Milton Himmelfarb, writing shortly after the Six Day War in 1967. "Each of us Jews knows how thoroughly ordinary he is; yet taken together, we seem caught up in things great and inexplicable. . . The number of Jews in the world is smaller than a small statistical error in the Chinese census. Yet we remain bigger than our numbers. Big things seem to happen around us and to us." That is why we do not pray as individuals. Almost every prayer we say aloud is constructed in the first person plural. The siddur is written in the language of "We", not "I". In this one deeply moving prayer we move from a sense of loneliness and insignificance to one of belonging and consequence. We count, not because we are significant in and of ourselves, but because Jewish history is written through the lives of each of us, and we each have a part to play in its unfolding drama. Collectively, we are part of something great. That is the privilege of being a Jew.

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**Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum** - Parshas Behar/Bechukosai Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to Peninim

PARSHAS BEHAR

You shall proclaim freedom throughout the land to all of its inhabitants. (25:10) During the Yovel, Jubilee year, there is a mitzvah to free all slaves. This refers to the Jewish bondsman who had originally been sold as a slave in order to make restitution for a theft which he had committed, as well as the individual who sold himself as a result of his economic difficulties. He is now set free. When we consider it, the number of indentured slaves during the Jubilee year was small. This usually referred to a slave who, instead of leaving at the end of the usual six year period, opted to stay longer. Together with the recent bondsmen, he constituted a small minority of the people. Why does the Torah write that freedom should be proclaimed to "all of its

inhabitants.” It would seem implied that a large number of Jews was involved, when, in fact, this was not true. The vast majority of Jews had always been free.

The Pnei Yehoshua explains this with a profound psychological insight. When a person sells himself as a slave to a master, two people become servants: the slave and the master. Any person who takes another human as a slave has an ego problem. He feels the need to dominate, to control others, to make other people serve him. This lack of self-mastery manifests itself in his need to purchase another Jew who is down and out.

There is clearly something redeeming about the parshah of eved Ivri, the laws dealing with the Jewish bondsman and the tremendous sacrifice the master makes in purchasing a servant and supplying him with the opportunity to better himself. Is there no alternative, however, to avdus, servitude? If the potential master wanted to help, could he not just have given the poor Jew the money, instead of purchasing him? Is it possible that the title of master does something for his ego? Does he feel a need to be in control of another person’s future and destiny? A society that helps its down and out members by purchasing them as bondsmen is certainly better than one that totally ignores them. Is there no alternative, however, to this “positive” form of assistance, other than making a slave out of another Jew? Are we not supposed to be avadim, slaves, only of the Almighty - and no one else?

Yes, he who needs to dominate is himself a slave. Thus, the number of Jewish bondsmen doubles, since the master is also a servant to his ego. Thus, when the Jubilee year occurs, both the master and servant are freed from their respective forms of servitude.

Perhaps it is neither my place nor the appropriate forum, but as we enter into the period of Kabbalas HaTorah, a time that resonated with the concept of k’ish echad b’lev echad, “like one man, with one heart,” when Jewish unity had reached its zenith, it would be derelict of me not to mention the following. There are Jews who are in trouble. There are Jews who are in dire economic straits. There are Jews who function under severe emotional stress. There are also Jews who can help alleviate the pain, misery, the hardship, and they do! There are those, however, who perform this assistance on their own terms - terms that might seem somewhat compelling. When one is up against the wall, however, any form of comfort will help - regardless of the level of interest one is forced to pay. Tzedakah does not mean charging an outrageous amount of money (of course, through a heter iska, halachic dispensation) as an added gift for a loan. How many people have come to us for loans, when they actually need a gift, but are too proud to ask? Is it a need to dominate, to demonstrate our position, that compels us to perform? The bottom line is: When we are asked to help a Jew in need, or, when we know -- or even suspect -- that a Jew is in need (one who is sensitive to others will notice when something is wrong), we should respond in a positive manner and act to preserve his dignity and self-esteem - not our own.

Do not mistreat one another. (25:27)

Rashi quotes from the Sifra that this pasuk does not refer to mistreating a person financially, but, rather, to mistreating him personally, either by insulting him, or by hurting his feelings. This prohibition of onaas devarim is severe and requires extreme caution, because other people are vulnerable and hurt easily. It goes without saying that one is prohibited from knowingly causing another Jew to feel bad. It is equally important, however, to make sure that we do not inadvertently cause pain to another Jew and that we do whatever we can to engender positive feelings among our fellow Jews.

Horav Yosef Chaim Sonenfeld, zl, was an individual who, besides his vast knowledge of Torah and extreme piety, was known as a man of sterling character. He was painstakingly observant in his observance of onaas devarim. A well known Torah scholar once wrote a Torah treatise in which he included the following statement: “In our day, the phenomenon of scorning Torah scholars and their scholarly works exists. In fact, I myself recently approached a wealthy Jew who was something of a scholar, asking him to help defray some of the high cost of printing my sefer, volume of Torah thought. He not only refused, but he went on to heap scorn on the Torah and its disseminators. I left feeling greatly depressed and aggravated.”

When Rav Yosef Chaim saw this story in print, he was most upset and wrote his colleague the following note: “I was surprised that you included your negative encounter with that wealthy man in your book. Indeed, if that man had regretted what he had said and repented - something for which we are supposed to give everyone the benefit of the doubt - then it is forbidden to remind him of his sinful behavior. To remind a repented Jew of his negative past constitutes a violation of onaas devarim. Although you did not mention his name in the book, if he reads the story one day and understands that it is a reference to him, you will have caused him to feel bad. That is onaas devarim.”

Rav Yosef Chaim would make a point of noting that the gematriya, numerical equivalent, of ish, man, is equal to that of re’eihu, to his fellow man. This alludes to the fact that a person is not worthy of being called an ish, human being, unless he focuses his attention on re’eihu, his fellowman. Furthermore, this is the root of all

difficulties in interpersonal relationships. It is when I think that I am better than my fellow man, when the ish does not equal re’eihu, that problems arise among us.

If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him. (25:35)

David HaMelech says in Tehillim 41:23, “Praiseworthy is he who contemplates the needy; on the day of disaster Hashem will deliver him.” The word maskil, contemplate, seems a bit misplaced. How does contemplation relate to the poor man? Apparently, the Psalm is teaching us that it is incumbent upon the would-be benefactor to consider the needs of the man who is standing in front of him. Sometimes the poor man asks for one thing, actually meaning something else, but he is ashamed to ask. It is up to us to contemplate in order to find out what the poor man is lacking. This does not necessarily apply only to a poor man. It means that we should use seichel, common sense, to try to find out what our friend needs before it is too late. We are a compassionate people, but, at times, we forget to think. This thoughtlessness can cause us to misappropriate funds or not give to those who are secretly in dire need.

Achicha, brother, is a generic term that applies across the board. Yaakov Avinu refers to his sons as achim, brothers (Bereishis 31:46). Thus, we find that a child who acts differently, whether he is strange or simply behaving out of character, could be conveying a message. Maskil, contemplate, means to listen, even when there is no sound. Listen with your heart; listen with your eyes; listen with your head.

The Gaon, zl, m’Vilna writes that the joy we cause another Jew catalyzes incredible reward for us. This applies equally to the joy we have for a child, a student, or one who is lost, and we show him the way. Indeed, in the Talmud Taanis 27A Chazal relate that a Talmudic sage once “met” Eliyahu HaNavi in the market place and asked him, “Who is there here that is destined for Olam Habah, the World to Come?” Eliyahu pointed out two brothers. The sage approached and queried them concerning their business. They replied, “We are badchanim, jesters. Our function is to make sad people happy.” This was their business. While some might laugh off such a position in life, these two men were going to “laugh” all the way to Olam Habah.

The story is told that when Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, was studying in the Kollel, for a short period of time he would come to seder about fifteen minutes late. Horav Elya Lopian, zl, was Rosh Kollel and Mashgiach at the yeshivah during this time. Being the consummate mashgiach, he took note of Rav Moshe Aharon’s tardiness and questioned him about it. Rav Moshe Aharon explained that he lived in a cramped basement, which leaked terribly when it rained. This was especially problematic during the winter months, when the cold seeped into the apartment causing his young children to become ill. His wife worked to support the family, and she had to leave for work early every morning. Therefore, he would stay home and attend to his children’s ailments or take them to the doctor.

Rav Elya heard all of this and was shaken. He immediately demanded to see the apartment. They went together to the apartment, and Rav Elya was appalled by the stark poverty of the cold, damp apartment. “How can you live like this?” he asked. “You must move immediately!”

“Rebbe,” Rav Moshe Aharon said, “how can I move? I have no money.”

Rav Elya said, “You have a responsibility to your wife and children. If you have no money, then take a position as mashgiach in a yeshivah. No matter what, you must move!”

Rav Moshe Aharon accepted the position of mashgiach of Yeshivas Kamenitz, and thousands of bnei Torah were the fortunate beneficiaries of his decision. He would note that this only occurred because Rav Elya noticed. He saw a change in his schedule and immediately questioned it. The “why” provoked an immediate reaction. This is similar to a hospital in which the cardiac patients are hooked up to a monitor which is closely watched at the main nurse’s station. As Rav Moshe Aharon points out, however, the monitor is of value only if the nurse is in her station with her watchful eye on the monitor. If the monitor goes off while she is having a cup of coffee elsewhere, by the time she returns, the patient could have suffered irreparable damage.

People convey messages all of the time. At times, it is a little innocuous change in schedule, or it could be a bad mood or a strange activity. If no one is listening, it is to no avail. We must be maskil, contemplate the messages, listen, and act.

Parashas Bechukosai

You shall eat long stored grain, and you shall remove the old because of the new. (26:10)

Rashi explains that the granaries will be so full with the new grain and the storehouses so full of the old grain. This will force us to remove the contents of the storehouses to make room for the new grain. This is an enigmatic blessing. While it is certainly wonderful to have such an abundance of grain, what benefit is there in having so much surplus that we are compelled to get rid of the old grain? Food should be guarded and preserved, not thrown out. In this blessing we are told that we

will have so much excess that we will have to remove the old grain. Is this really a blessing?

In order to understand this issue, let us digress and focus on the concept of simchah, joy. In the Talmud Pesachim 109a, Chazal state that during the time that the Bais Hamikdash was standing, there was no simchah without meat, and now that the Bais Hamikdash is no longer extant, simchah occurs only through the medium of wine. What are Chazal teaching us? The Shem MiShmuel cites his father, the Avnei Nezer, who explains that simchah on YomTov is unique in that it is an inner experience, one that should be savored by the emotions and intellect. It is not simply a time for external expression of joy. Yom Tov is a time for dancing and singing - both external manifestations of joy-- but they should be engendered by an inner sense of simchah. How is this inner sense of joy awakened within the person to the point that he overflows with joy and seeks to express himself outwardly? The sacrificial offerings that were brought in the Bais Hamikdash looked and tasted no different than ordinary meat that was purchased at the butcher store. There was, however, one difference. Butcher store meat was not inherently holy; sacrificial meat was. Thus, the individual who ate from a korban became internally infused with the inherent kedushah, holiness, of the meat. Ingesting holy meat imbues a person with holiness that promotes a feeling of inner joy, which is later expressed externally through song and dance.

Once the Bais Hamikdash was taken from us, wine became the medium for arousing the necessary kedushah. Chazal state, "When wine goes in, secrets come out" (Eiruvin 65a). Simply, this means that inebriation leads to the individual's loss of control and the divulging of his secrets. On a deeper level, it suggests that wine has the power to release one's innermost feelings.

The Shem M'Shmuel explains this further. Because the physical elements of this mundane world are subject to the ravages of time, everything deteriorates as it ages. Wine is one of those physical elements that is unique in that the more it matures, the better it becomes. The finest vintages are often very old. Wine is, thus, the symbol of the spiritual dimension, a world which improves with time. Its character is innate and possesses none of the extrinsic, superficial properties of the physical world. When one drinks wine, it stimulates a feeling which parallels a spiritual tendency, such as an outpouring of one's innermost emotions. Therefore, it has been selected as a suitable alternative for the sacrificial meats of Yom Tov. Now that the Bais Hamikdash is no longer extant, we imbibe wine, so that we are able to catalyze the appropriate feelings of inner joy.

We now return to our original query: Why did Hashem bless Klal Yisrael with excess produce? This is a difficulty only if food ages in the usual manner and spoils. If produce were to improve with age, however, as mentioned above, whereby it provides us with "wine-like" features that bring out the best of our inner spiritual emotions, excess would be a blessing. In this scenario, the food would not lead to the negative - gluttony or gross coarseness - but, rather, to increased sensitivity to matters of the spiritual dimension. The more grain we would produce, the greater would be the opportunity for absorbing spirituality. This would certainly constitute a blessing.

If you consider My decrees loathsome, and if your being rejects My ordinances, so that you annul My covenant. (26:15)

Rashi explains that a seven step chain reaction of sin leads to total apostasy. Interestingly, along the path of digression, the hatred of the sages who expound the ordinances develops, leading to one's preventing others from following the commandments of G-d. We wonder why an individual who does not do should hate one who does. Indeed, we do not find this phenomenon concerning any other religions. Just because their priests lead an ascetic lifestyle, removed from reality, it does not provoke a reaction of animosity from the common person. Yet, in Judaism, the talmid chacham, Torah scholar, the tzadik, righteous and pious Jew, who dedicates himself and his life to Torah study and mitzvah performance, is often the subject of scorn and derision. Why?

Judaism is a religion of action. It makes demands upon a person to act, to do, to perform. Judaism is not only about the heart, as in other religions in which one has to be good in his heart, have good thoughts, and act ethically. Those who live in a lifestyle removed from the people, who devote themselves to their god, neither infringe on the beliefs of the common man nor impugn his devotion. They are priests, and, as such, are meant to be different.

Our religion does not distinguish between the common man and the rabbi. Everyone is obligated to observe all 613 mitzvos to the fullest extent and minutest detail. Thus, when the sage observes and performs, he represents a threat to the common Jew's lack of observance. His insecurity is breached, and the self-loathing that motivates so much of his negative reaction to the observant goes into overdrive. He knows in the deepest recesses of his heart that the observant are wrong, and the sage is living proof of their folly.

I will remember for the covenant of the ancients, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt. (26:45)

Hashem promised the fathers of the twelve tribes that He would not forsake their descendants, and He would redeem them.

The foundation of Klal Yisrael's sense of mutual responsibility, one Jew for another, stems from the fact that we are all family, descendants of the twelve tribes. Yehudah was the first one to express the Jewish concept of areivus, mutual responsibility, when he said to Yaakov Avinu that he would ensure Binyamin's safe return: Anochi aervenu, "I will personally guarantee him" (Beresihis 43:9). In his Tiferes Shlomo, Horav Shlomo zl, m'Radomsk, writes that it was specifically due to Yehudah's sense of achrayos, responsibility, that Yaakov sent him to Egypt to precede the family and establish a yeshivah prior to the arrival of the rest of the family. Yaakov wanted a yeshivah that articulated and manifested a sense of achrayos, a feeling of areivus for all Jews.

This sense of mutual concern is what motivated the shotrim, Jewish officers who were in charge of their brethren in Egypt, to take the lashes for the slaves, rather than compel them to work harder. They ignored Pharaoh's instructions, because they cared about their brothers. These shotrim merited to become the members of the first Sanhedrin, High Court. Only one who is sensitive to the plight and feelings of his Jewish brothers deserves to be selected to adjudicate them.

Sponsored in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum Zeliga Ahuva bas HaRav Daniel a"h 26 Iyar 5755

"tnu la mipri yadeha vehalleluha bashearim maaseha" by her family HoRav Doniel z"l & Shoshana Schur

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The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Special Holiday Shiur

YOM YERUSHALAYIM 5762

**"Again There Shall Be Heard ... in the Streets of Jerusalem"**

**Based on a sicha by Harav Yehuda Amital**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Thus says the Lord: Again there shall be heard in this place, which you say is ruined, without man or beast - in the cities of Judea and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without men, without inhabitants and without beasts - the sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those saying, "Praise the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever," as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God. For I shall bring back the captivity of the land as in the past, says the Lord. (Yirmiyahu 33:10-11) Throughout the Bible, Jerusalem is portrayed as the city of God, the city in which the Temple resides. In the above-quoted prophecy of consolation, too, Yirmiyahu prophesies that the bridegroom and the bride will approach the Temple with sacrifices of thanksgiving in their hands: "... the voice of those saying, 'Praise the Lord of Hosts ...' as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God."

However, the Men of the Great Assembly, who included the rest of the verse in their formulation of the blessings recited at a wedding, chose to omit this concluding phrase in the verse. Instead, they replaced it with an alternate phrase:

...the joyous sounds of bridegrooms from their wedding canopies and young men from their music-filled festivities.

Beyond the problem of the change in wording, Chazal thereby also changed the meaning. Instead of the sound of worship, a sound full of elevated holiness - "the sound of those saying, 'Praise the Lord'" - we have the sound of frivolous and physical enjoyment: the sound of celebration and music. Why did the Men of the Great Assembly make this change?

The Men of the Great Assembly felt that the prophecy, as originally written, could give rise to despair in the future. First, the prophet describes the most forlorn of circumstances - a place that is completely desolate, with no human or animal inhabitants; then he prophesies a far-off ideal: the Temple rebuilt, and the sound of throngs bringing their sacrifices to the House of God. Will the sound of joy and happiness be heard once more in Jerusalem only when the Temple is rebuilt? Is there no intermediate situation between the two extremes of absolute destruction and the full rebuilding?

The Men of the Great Assembly therefore changed the formulation of the blessing in order to arouse hope and to make people realize the significance of such an in-between situation: "The joyous sound of bridegrooms from their wedding canopy and young men from their music-filled festivities." Sounds of joy and celebration will indeed be heard in the holy city even

before the Temple is rebuilt.

In the interpretation of the Men of the Great Assembly there is a great and important message. The expression they inserted, "The joyous sounds of bridegrooms from their wedding canopy and young men from their music-filled festivities," does not appear in the prophecies of redemption. Rather, its source is to be found in the prophecies of destruction:

Old men have ceased to sit at the gate; young men have ceased from their music. (Eikha 5:14)

The normal situation - somewhere between absolute destruction and complete redemption - is that the elders sit at the city gates and function as judges, while young men play music and are happy. This situation, which will be realized prior to the complete redemption, itself represents a hopeful picture, and this is what the Men of the Great Assembly wished to convey in formulating the blessing as they did.

A similar message arises from a teaching of Rav Huna:

Anyone who partakes of the feast of a bridegroom without making an effort to make him happy transgresses five "sounds" - as it is written, "The sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride, the sound of those saying, 'Praise the Lord of Hosts.'" (Berakhot 6b)

Rav Huna is not talking about a bridegroom who brings a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the House of God. He rules that someone who witnesses a bridegroom at his wedding - even before the complete redemption - is obligated to make an effort to gladden him, inter alia because of "the sound of those saying, 'Praise the Lord.'" Joy and happiness have their own independent existence and status even before the House of God is rebuilt.

Today we celebrate our return to Jerusalem. If someone who participates in a wedding celebration and fails to make the bridegroom happy transgresses five commands related to "sounds," then this must certainly be true of someone who fails to celebrate the liberation of our holy city.

In 5727, the I.D.F. unified the Old City of Jerusalem and the modern Jerusalem, and this unification is symbolic of our astonishing victory in the Six-Day War. This miraculous war was preceded by days of fear and anxiety that we tend to forget: there were people who sent their children to the United States, pessimistic forecasts predicted tens of thousands of casualties, Foreign Minister Abba Eban ran from country to country, finding no one that would help us, the President of Egypt threatened to throw all the Jews into the sea and banished the U.N. from his country, and in a live radio broadcast Prime Minister Levi Eshkol could only stammer lamely; the atmosphere was one of terrible despair. The victory with the liberation of the Temple Mount was so great that we forget the despair and fear that preceded it. Today we have merited to see the realization of our ancient prayer, and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms, of young people, are heard again in the capital of the State of Israel.

There are people - including some who are religious, and even Religious Zionists - who remove the Holy One from our historical reality. It is as if God has handed the reigns of power to the politicians, who destroy and build as they wish, leaving Jerusalem bereft of God's guiding hand. We know that the enormous change that has taken place in Jerusalem and its transformation from a tiny settlement into the biggest city in the country, was not achieved solely by the government of Israel, or by Teddy Kollek and Ehud Olmert. The Holy One has never ceased to watch over and guide us, and for this reason we have merited to hear once again the sounds of joy and celebration in the city that was desolate. It is God who has stood by us to this day, and who we pray will realize the original prophecy very soon:

... the voice of those saying, "Praise the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever," as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God.

(This sicha was delivered on Yom Yerushalayim 5760 [2000].)

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